# Introduction

*Timothy Stanley*

In July 2013, I invited a multidisciplinary group of historians, sociologists, philosophers, and cultural and legal theorists to participate in a discussion about religion in secular Australia. This was to be a capstone symposium for a two-year research project I was leading on religion in political life, which was funded by the Faculty of Education and Arts at the University of Newcastle. My own research was focused on Jürgen Habermas's account of the secular public sphere and sought to develop critical debate on its key features, the nature of deliberative politics and alternative democratic practices. However, I was also keen to widen the scope of this debate with particular attention to Australian history, culture, and legal interactions. Just prior to my arrival in Newcastle, I had been affiliated with the Centre for Religion and Political Culture as a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Manchester, England. Although this North Atlantic context shaped my early teaching and research on the persistent and new visibilities of religion, my arrival in Newcastle made me particularly attentive to Australia's unique political culture. I questioned whether it could be neatly linked to European and American processes of secularization,[1] but I struggled to find an up-to-date compendium on the subject.[2] Such was the impetus to invite some of Australia's foremost scholars researching the way religion was changing through processes of secularization in order to propel the debate in new directions and promote urgently needed public understanding.

To begin with, I will briefly summarize each chapter[3] before discussing the book's approach to the study of religion. The chapters have been organized by method of approach: two on history, two on recent cultural developments, two on legal interactions, and four on political philosophy, followed by an epilogue by a scholar whose work is oft-cited throughout.

Stephen A. Chavura and Ian Tregenza begin the volume with their thematic overview of the political history of the secular in Australia in Chapter 1. They track the development of the idea of the secular state in Australia, through early visions of religion–state relations from the nation's beginning as an Anglican

goal, to current questions of human rights and multiculturalism. As well as being an exercise in intellectual history, the issues raised seek to inform current debates over the relationship between religion and the state, as well as the wider academic interest in the concepts of the secular, secularization, and secularism.

In Chapter 2, Hilary Carey concentrates on the historiography at work in one of Australia's most prominent colonial legacies: its convict past. From 1788 to 1868, when the last political prisoners were sent to Fremantle, about 160,000 men, women, and children were transported from Great Britain and Ireland to penal colonies in Australia. The legacy of this colonial past is highly visible in the Australian landscape with hundreds of convict sites, large and small, scattered throughout the eastern states, offshore islands, and Western Australia. Unlike in other Western democracies, where there is shame about ancestors with criminal convictions, many Australians embrace the convict past and berate the officers and Anglican Evangelical clergy who were responsible for the "reformation of the guilty." Carey considers the sectarian and political nature of convict historiography and suggests that representations of convicts and the campaign to end convict transportation in recent Australian history writing continues to act out an older sectarian agenda. By uncovering these interests, she illuminates the way that claiming a convict ancestor now features in contemporary expressions of Australian identity, such as by left-leaning members of the working class and liberal intelligentsia, including Irish Australian Catholics such as the late Robert Hughes

Having set out some of the key historical concerns of the volume, the next two chapters turn to cultural analysis of recent developments. As Marion Maddox notes in Chapter 3, mainline Christian denominations dominated Australia's religious landscape in the twentieth century, and at times, they exerted measurable influence on political processes and outcomes. However, in the late 1990s, a marked shift took place. Protestant megachurches—either nondenominational or with muted affiliation to Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations—have become a major political presence. Lobby groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby, Saltshakers, and the Parliamentary Prayer Network, and movements such as Christian parent-controlled schools, megachurches, and the international networks to which they belong, have transformed Australian political culture to a degree that would surprise many Australians. Informed by Social Movement theory and studies of right-wing mobilization, Maddox analyzes these organizations' institutional achievements since 1996 and assesses their likely lasting impact on Australian political culture.

In Chapter 4, Holly Randell-Moon tackles one of the most difficult topics in contemporary Australia: the intersection between secularism, monarchy, and Indigenous peoples. The image of the Australian nation-state is often presented as liberal and autonomously grounded in secular law. At the same time,

Australia's formation through the imprimatur of the British Crown continues to involve symbolic rituals of exchange and deference to the British monarchy. One of the more common rationales for the continuation of the monarchy is the idea that a democratic state benefits from an enduring and transcendent symbol of British parliamentary and Commonwealth traditions. The monarchy is able to fulfill this role because media and political tropes around celebrity, family, and divinity disassociate the British Royal Family from its specific identity markers as white, Anglican, and diasporic. These Anglo-British religious and cultural values are coextensive with the colonial precepts of Crown law, used to invalidate the status of Indigenous peoples as sovereign custodians of the land. This chapter analyzes the way terms such as *grace*, *transcendence*, and *continuity* are used to displace the colonial and racial origins of the monarchy as well as the colonial foundations of the Australian political system.

While many essays in the volume touch on the topic of law, the next two focus explicitly on the place of religion in Australian legal interactions. In Chapter 5, Paul Babie identifies significant points of intersection between law and religion in Australia today where religion has recently been the subject of legal attention or is likely to be in the near future. There is a great deal of speculation about the role religion plays in personal or individual social interaction structured by secular law in liberal democracies where religion is formally denied a place in the public forum. Some even argue that religion and religious law, such as Islamic or Sharia law, already governs or controls the lives of adherents even in countries that are ostensibly secular, such as the United States. The aim of this chapter is to direct the focus of research to the way in which religion might influence the sociolegal relationships of Australians. Babie also seeks to identify the extent to which religious freedom ought to be afforded legal protection in Australia, the extent to which Australians believe a special space ought to be carved out for religion in anti-discrimination legislation, and the extent to which religious dress is something that ought to be part of that space in Australian society.

In Chapter 6, Kathleen McPhillips considers the relationship between women, religion, and the Australian state via an examination of federal anti-discrimination law. Using two feminist methodologies, she argues that the neoliberal state allows discriminatory practices in employment and service provisions by religious organizations on the basis of protecting religious freedom. However, evidence suggests that women are often subject to discriminatory practices by both religious organizations and the state. The state is in the contradictory position of needing to protect the citizenship from religious influences while simultaneously providing a guarantee of religious freedom. Moreover, the state also promotes the inclusion of women in public life through human rights and anti-discrimination legislation. This results in a quandary and begs the question, whose freedom is being protected?

The last four chapters of the volume take a theoretical turn with critical essays on the political nature of secularization and the public sphere. In the first of these, Chapter 7, Matthew Chrulew investigates Michel Foucault's genealogical approach to secularization. The questions of derivation and discontinuity that accompany the genealogical method are pivotal in the contemporary debate that asks how the secular derives from Christianity, whether in its discursive, governmental, colonial, or economic forms. However, for Foucault, the spread of the modern arts of government is best understood as in-depth Christianization, as the proliferation of techniques for conduct formed in the ecclesiastical pastorate. Chrulew outlines the key features of Foucault's contribution to contemporary secularization theory, its legacy in Talal Asad's genealogy of the colonial dimensions of secular politics and subjectivity, as well as Giorgio Agamben's recent work on the theological genealogy of economy.

In Chapter 8, Roland Boer makes the claim that the time is well overdue to insist once again on the epithet adequate to democracy. Rather than the assumed universal implied by "democracy" (which in our era really means parliamentary or bourgeois democracy), we have at least three forms of democracy that have been tried: Greek democracy, bourgeois democracy, and socialist democracy. This is a study of socialist democracy, which entails a criticism of the subterfuge and limitations of bourgeois democracy and its understanding of the public sphere. In order to explore socialist democracy, Boer turns to none other than Lenin. Further, such a discussion entails the linking of democracy with freedom, for freedom, too, needs constantly to be reclaimed from its thorough besmirching by Western foreign policy. On both counts, democracy and freedom, Lenin provides more theoretical and practical resources than might at first be expected.

In light of the rise and importance of declared states of emergency, in Chapter 9 Michael Hoelzl explores the principles of decisionism in the German jurist Carl Schmitt's work. Who decides? Who will judge? These were the main questions raised by Schmitt after the First World War, when European political systems were in turmoil. It was also the time when a new political theory was born based on theological principles: decisionism. Usually juxtaposed to deliberative politics, Hoelzl investigates decisionism's foundation in the Greek virtue of ἐπιείκεια (*aequitas*/reasonableness) as it was discussed by Thomas Aquinas following Aristotle. In this, Aquinas demonstrates the conflict between actions guided by reason and actions carried out on pragmatic/practical grounds. Today, Hoelzl argues, the balance between reason and pragmatics or practical intentions has been corrupted for the benefit of the person who decides rather than the goal that has to be achieved.

Chapter 10 returns to my own interest: Habermas's account of the secular public sphere. Here the aim is to provide a critical response to Habermas's

account of religious discourse. Although the question of religion did not feature prominently in Habermas's early political theory, his more recent work has continuously addressed the topic, such as in a recent essay in a compendium on *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. This later interest in religion is grounded in what one commentator in that same volume cited as the urgent need to integrate religious voices in the workings of public reason (Calhoun 2011, 127). However, the chapter argues that the hermeneutic procedures Habermas develops for the public sphere cannot bear the weight that his later understanding of religion demands of them. Such an insight validates Paul Ricoeur's earlier argument that Habermas's "depth hermeneutics" were themselves utopic in nature. It is from this vantage point that this chapter aims to advance a more productive understanding of the public potential of religious discourse.

At a number of points, many of the chapters cite one of Australia's most prolific sociologists of religion, Gary Bouma. It is only fitting that he provide an epilogue on his own impressions of the current state of religion after secularization in Australia and reiterate the need for new research attuned to particular social contexts and unique political cultures. It is also with his work in mind that I will provide further comment on the conceptual approach to the subject of religion taken in this book.[4]

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the essays gathered here, no single definition of religion was employed. Rather, the approach taken was akin to that developed in Bouma's *Australian Soul* (2006), which drew on Robert Beckford's social constructivism. In *Social Theory and Religion*, Beckford outlined the need for careful attention to the way the concept of religion is used in particular social and political contexts (2003, 11ff.). Themes could of course emerge across cultures, but a universal definition that applied in all cases would need to be resisted. Such insights respond constructively to the critiques of those like Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), which influentially pointed out the European legacies at work in the concept.[5] Although definitions of religion will continue to be debated and problematized in specialized dictionaries (Taylor 1998), guides (Braun and McCutcheon 2000), and companions (Orsi 2013; Hinnells 2010), the need remains to continue to study particular contexts and develop an evidence base focused on what people say they are doing both individually and collectively and over the course of their histories.

Informed in this way, the very process through which European social theorists came to define religion can become part of a broader understanding of its meaning in that context and inform a more nuanced approach to others. Old debates comparing and contrasting Emile Durkheim's functionalist approach to the sacred in *The Elementary Form of Religious Life* (1976 [1912]) with Max Weber's account of disenchantment in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2003 [1905]), can now be redirected and repurposed. For instance,

Ann Taves's recent work provides an example of how a building-block approach might rehabilitate key features of Durkheim's theory (2009, 16ff.; Cf. 2013). Moreover, this is not to suggest a philosophical nonchalance with regard to the meaning of religion. Rather, it raises the bar for how scholars understand the development and use of terminology as such. In this regard, it seems to me that philosophers of religion can contribute to these methodological debates and definitional concerns. Recent examples include Kevin Schilbrack's recent *Philosophy and the Study of Religions* (2014), which outlines a number of ways to proceed, as does Hent de Vries's recent account of "deep pragmatism" in *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (2008, 66; cf. Frankenberry 2002).

Increasingly, religion is being studied in numerous disciplines across universities today, and the following chapters embrace this diversity with particular attention to processes of secularization. Moreover, the focus on Australian history, culture, and legal sources is intended to broaden international debate on varieties of secularization (Taylor 2007) and new visibilities of religion (Hoelzl and Ward 2008). The result is not a settled set of conclusions concerning the concept of religion, a postsecular age, nor a triumphalist tone regarding religion's end or resurgence. Rather, the essays are intended to note the nuances, trace the developments, and often leave open key themes that require further research. If readers consider these arguments carefully, then patience will be required to understand disciplines that are not one's own, as well as political cultures that we may or may not share. The hope, however, is that such patience will result in not only a better understanding of the current state of religion after secularization but also new research directions for the future.

## Notes

1. This is a common assumption in literature on secularization, usually citing important links between Europe and Australia. However, just as sociologists such as Peter Berger and Rodney Stark have nuanced secularization theory in relation to the US context, so too more work is needed to better understand the nuance and variety in Australia. A recent and very helpful summary of recent secularization theory can be found in Rob Warner's *Secularization and Its Discontents* (2010). See also Gary Bouma's epilogue in this volume for further comment on these matters.

2. Although the literature is growing on secularization theory and the new and persistent visibilities of religion in different parts of the world today, there has been little attention paid to Australian particularities. Much of this literature is summarized in the essays that follow, and I will not rehearse it here. However, I would like to mention a few notable exceptions that provide reflections on aspects of the Australian case different from those provided in this volume. See, for instance, Monsma and Soper's chapter on Australia in their *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies* (2009). For an account of intellectual influences, John Gascoigne's *The Enlightenment and the Origins*

*of European Australia* (2002) is also interesting. I would also add that Gary Bou-
ma's oft-cited work in this volume touches on these themes in a number of ways
in his sociological accounts of religion in Australia, as does Marion Maddox's
work, and both scholars have contributed here. It is also worth noting past pio-
neers of sociology, such as Hans Mol's *Religion in Australia* (1971).

3.  Each individual author contributed to the summaries provided here.

4.  The literature on method and theory in the study of religion is vast and growing
    rapidly today. What I am providing here is a brief summary of concerns and key
    texts in order to help frame the debates and issues discussed in the chapters that
    follow. As well, as might be expected, the question of methodological approach
    and conceptual definitions remain open and generate ongoing debate among the
    authors of this book.

5.  Asad's work has influenced a number of other scholars working on these concerns
    in the study of religion, most notably Russell McCutcheon, whose recent book
    with William Arnal summarizes the literature and recent debate (2013). See also
    Matthew Chrulew's essay in this volume for further discussion of Asad's work.

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