

CATHOLICS AND CATHOLICISM IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

Challenges & Achievements

Edited by
Dr Abe W. Ata

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Over the last 60 years, the Catholic community in Australia has undergone dramatic changes. The outcome of these changes in society and the Church is that today's Catholic community looks very different from that of the 1950s. Mass attendance rates have fallen; the number of priests, sisters and brothers is declining and their average age is increasing. The relationship between clergy and people has changed. Old forms of devotion like the Rosary have nearly disappeared but there has been a growth of interest in

alternative forms of prayer borrowed from a variety of cultures and traditions. An array of leadership roles has been filled by lay people, and lay people (by no means all Catholics) comprise virtually the entire staff at Catholic schools and the majority of students at Catholic theological colleges. Researcher Robert Dixon comments:

'Some Catholics see these changes as a tragedy, but most regard them as welcome evidence of a Church prepared to adapt to meet changing circumstances. Yet the changes that have taken place have primarily been changes in rules and practices. The Church's teachings have been re-interpreted in the light of modern understandings of history, sociology, the sciences and other fields of human endeavour, and then re-expressed in language more suitable for the times.'

This project brings together scholarly perspectives from around the country and internationally and across disciplines whereby the authors explore how a stream of spiritualities and identities express themselves. The authors show ways in which they, the Church and others are engaged in efforts to restructure institutions, beliefs and practices to effect social change.

This is a book for all who are interested in the present status and the possible future direction of the Catholic Church in Australia.

The Editor

DR ABE W. ATA was born in Bethlehem of Palestinian-Lebanese Christian parents. He graduated in psychology at the American University and was nominated as a delegate to the United Nations' World Youth Assembly in New York. He immigrated to Australia in 1972 and shortly afterwards was employed at Melbourne University where he completed his doctorate in 1980. Since then he has taught in several Australian, American, Jordanian, West Bank and Danish universities and he was an Honorary Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. His publications span 15 books and 95 refereed articles, including *The West Bank Palestinian Family* (1986), *Bereavement and Health in Australia* (1996), *Australia's Christian-Muslim Inter-marriage* (2003); *Catholic and other Christian Inter-marriages in Australia* (2005) and *Us and Them: Christian Muslim Relations in Australia* (2009).

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