Holiday or ‘holy’day?

The Effect of Secularisation on Christmas

Student Number: 25284933
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Introduction

Secularisation is the conversion of a society from close identification with religious values and foundations towards a non-religious and secular spectrum. This move away from religious influence is increasing across the world, particularly in the Westernised world, as a result of many factors such as technology, increasing multiculturalism and outdated ideologies, customs and values. It is without a doubt that secularisation is occurring in Australia, affecting many aspects of the general society, but is this secularisation of society affecting Christmas, an annual celebration integrated into our way of life?

Christmas is celebrated around the world. Traditionally, Christmas is celebrated by Christian adherents to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, hence the world ‘Christmas’ deriving from the term ‘mass of Christ’. Although a celebration of Christian faith, many societies and cultures, which do not adhere to the Christian belief, still celebrate Christmas. This raises the question of to what extent Christmas has been affected by the undeniable secularisation of society. Is Christmas still a religious holiday or has secularisation changed the nature of Christmas? Does Christmas still hold its religious value, or has it turned into simply a holiday, rather than a ‘holy’ day?

As a non-Christian, I have no religious tie to Christmas, yet my family still celebrates it every year. This has led to my interest in the impact of secularisation on Christmas. Through this topic I hope to gain an insight into why people celebrate this annual holiday, for religious or other purposes. Through investigating the celebration of Christmas in Australia, I will be able to gain an understanding of how technology, multiculturalism, and continuity and change contribute to increasing secularisation within Australian society, and what affect this has had on Christmas customs and values. Also, through comparing the celebration of Christmas in Australia with the way in which it is celebrated in Europe, specifically Germany, I hope to gain an insight into how customs and traditions regarding the same festive holiday differ among cultures affected differently by secularisation, whilst also observing how they differ across different generations.

Through utilising non-participant observation in my micro world and the macro world during the festive season, I hope to gain primary information on the customs and traditions of Christmas in contemporary Australian society. I would also like to discover whether or not there is a strong sense of Christian religious influence present. My research is also improved
by the data I will be able to obtain through questionnaire, through which I hope to obtain information regarding reasons for the celebration of Christmas, multicultural influence and how Christmas is celebrated. I also hope to obtain in-depth views and observations regarding the impact of secularisation with particular sections of society through conducting interviews with individuals from different backgrounds and generations. These methodologies will provide me with the subsequent information I need, which, when combined with secondary research, will allow me to determine the effects of secularisation upon Christmas. In conducting my research and study on this topic, I also aim to incorporate many society and culture concepts such as westernisation, belief systems, globalisation, consumption, customs, values, socialisation, media and traditions, all concepts inherently valid in my study. These concepts will widen my research outlets and increase my ability to effectively investigate my topic. Overall, I believe that my investigation into the effect of secularisation on Christmas will enhance my understanding of Society and Culture.
Log

My PIP proved itself to be both challenging and tedious; nonetheless throughout the process I was able to not only widen my understanding of secularisation within the Australian society but was also subjected to a captivating social and cultural education. During October, 2013, my class began brainstorming PIP ideas. Due to the year coming to an end and Christmas approaching I decided to focus my topic on how Christmas had undergone different changes in society. Throughout the duration of October and November I had decided upon “What is the true meaning of Christmas?” as a focus question after widely researching how Christmas and the issues that surround it have changed. After discussing the topic with my teacher I decided to base my cross-cultural component on the differences between Christmas in Australia and Christmas in Germany, and to incorporate a cross generational study for my continuity and change component.

In early December, after more in-depth research on Christmas and multiple components surrounding it such as its history, customs, values, criticism and how it is celebrated nationally and globally, I changed my focus question of my study to “Is secularisation impacting Christmas?”, as the religious factor of Christmas intrigued me. During December I was able to begin conducting my primary research through non-participant observation of the Christmas season, recording societal behaviour and appearance in public areas such as shopping centres during the festive season.

Due to my question being refined and having a firm basis of secondary research, I was able to correlate my research and write up a draft questionnaire, which I edited throughout February with the development of my chapters: Technology and Commercialisation, Multiculturalism and, Customs and Values. After a successful pilot, I distributed my questionnaire in March and received a high response rate.

By April my PIP was beginning to gain more structure, as I was able to correlate all my research, primary and secondary, into chapters. From this I was able to develop a set of draft interview questions for three different individuals, each one focusing on a different chapter. During May I wrote up a rough draft of my PIP, which allowed me to synthesise my research as well as identify the areas that needed further work. This resulted in my PIP topic being refined to ‘The Effect of Secularisation on Christmas’.
Throughout June I completed my methodologies, conducting interviews and recording my personal experiences. I was also able to complete a substantial amount of my Central Material which I continued writing into mid-July.

Although I had managed my time quite well throughout the PIP process, I still felt a lot of pressure during July as writing and editing my Central Material had taken much more time than anticipated. When the week came to submit the PIP I felt satisfied with my final result.
Technology and Commercialisation

We live in a modern world, where social change, economic development and technological innovation are continually advancing. Since the Industrial Revolution, the conception and application of new technologies has been ever increasing, to a point where technology has been interwoven into, nearly all aspects of our lives, including our culture, thought patterns and religious connections.

With technological innovations come scientific advances and a broader spectrum of information and knowledge, all available at our fingertips. Both technology and science play a major role in secularisation in society, as they both provide alternate explanations and theories to those presented by religion.

“Scientific research can reduce superstition by encouraging people to think and view things in terms of cause and effect” – Albert Einstein

Basic scientific observations such as the Earth going around the sun (Copernicus) and ideas such as the Big Bang theory, biology and ancient history are just some of the factors contributing to loss in public confidence in the ability of religious explanation to be applicable to factual sciences. In my interview with German migrant and Doctor in Biology, Claudia Tipping (50 years), this was also made apparent, as she explained that it was her interest in science, and furthered investigation and retention of knowledge regarding biology that influenced her disbelief in religion. This resulted in her life becoming secularly orientated as she believed her knowledge disproved religious explanation:

“When you observe factual evidence such as fossils that are thousands of years old and demonstrate the process of evolution, it becomes near to impossible to believe the theories put forward by religions regarding the creation of earth and the organisms

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that inhabit it. It is very rare that you meet someone who has studied science, and has observed and understood the facts of evolution, that isn’t secularly orientated.”

Furthermore, when asked if the extent of secularisation within her immediate society had changed throughout her life Dr Tipping explained:

“Within the scientific community there was not an extensive change, if anything there has been an increase in confidence in secularised ideas and practices.”

Conversely, she also discussed that there has definitely been a decrease of religious influence in her general society. This has not only been due to her migration to a more secular country but also due to an increase in public scientific knowledge and acceptance.

“With undoubtable evidence for major scientific claims such as climate change, I believe that more people are beginning to consider the validity of other scientific claims such as evolution.”

Technological innovations, particularly those revolving around information access such as the internet, have also reduced societal confidence in religious theology. Global access to the internet has allowed opinions, studies and opposing ideas to those of religion to be easily accessed. These often undermine religious claims to truth through the exposure of competing claims.

Secularisation is clearly evident within our society, seen purely through observation of Church gatherings on Sundays, continually dwindling in numbers and participants normally consisting of elderly members of the community. This observation was supported during my interview with the Mayor of Port Stevens Council, Bruce Mackenzie (76 years), who indicated:

“When I was younger almost everyone went to Church, if you had a way to get there, but now the only people I know who go there are older than me!”
Other areas such as schools and government, also display evidence of secularisation, as they generally run under secular guidelines. Results from the most recent census, conducted in 2011, support these observations and verify the evident presence of secularisation in society.

'Religious Affiliations' table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Population '000</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Proportion born overseas(a) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>13 150.6</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>5 439.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>3 680.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>1 065.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian and Reformed</td>
<td>599.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
<td>563.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>352.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>251.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>238.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>960.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>1 546.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>529.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>476.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>275.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-Christian</td>
<td>168.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>4 796.8</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(b)</td>
<td>21 507.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Between 2001 and 2011, the number of people reporting a non-Christian faith increased considerably, from around 0.9 million to 1.5 million, accounting for 7.2% of the total population in 2011 (up from 4.9% in 2001).’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013)

These percentages demonstrate that non-religion and religions other than Christianity are increasing, yet many people throughout Australia still celebrate Christmas. From data obtained via questionnaires distributed across a sample of 50 people, ages ranging from 15 – 50+, this decrease in religious affiliation within my micro world is also evident. The results demonstrated that only 34% of the 50 participants affiliated with Christianity, but when asked ‘Do you celebrated Christmas?’ 100% answered ‘yes’.

From this it is obvious that secularisation is effecting Christmas, lessening the focus of the religious
significance of the holiday. Yet, the exact extent of this impact on Christmas within the individual’s micro world, in comparison to the macro world, is incredibly difficult to determine.

A major technological innovation is that of telecommunication. Throughout the past fifty years all avenues of communication have improved, allowing one to not only message, but talk directly to others across the world. This factor of technology has made it easier for us to communicate with loved ones, even when they are far away, which is particularly useful at times of celebration, such as Christmas. But with this influx of communication options, such as social media, online messaging and e-cards, many traditional customs, such as sending cards, have been replaced by faster methods. Evidence for this was obtained via questionnaire, with 12% percent more people sending electronic messages rather than Christmas cards. From these results, all of those who indicated that they preferred to send Christmas cards where in the 30+ range. From this it can be suggested that technologies influence on Christmas is most evident when observing younger generations, whom are most likely to incorporate technological innovation into their lives.

In my interview with the Priest of a local Christian church (Anon. (2014). Interview with The researcher. 19th July 2014.), I queried on his opinion regarding the increasing decline in giving Christmas cards.

“I fear that the personal factor will become lost with the overwhelming use of technology in our lives. There was a personal touch to a Christmas card, which just cannot be replicated with a text message.”

As a child, it was custom to give your primary school peers cards and candy canes at Christmas time. Although at that age (12 and younger) the content of the card usually contained the name of who that card was for, ‘Merry Christmas’ and your signature down the bottom. Nowadays, the only cards I receive are from my grandparents.

There is a concern that the meaning and values behind Christmas are being lost, evidently due to secularisation seeping into the foundations of Christmas. The commercialisation of Christmas is a confounding concern in par with secularisation. The commercialisation of Christmas refers to a heightened importance regarding spending money on presents and food, with a suggested disregard to the core values of Christmas. Commercialisation is profoundly linked with westernisation, with association to the increase of greed within society. The
increased commercialisation of Christmas was evident in my questionnaire results regarding what younger generation’s favourite aspects of Christmas were, this being the receiving of presents, unlike older generations (30+ years) whom alternately favour family reunions. From this it can be broadly suggested that younger generations lack an understanding of the traditional Christmas values but also that the societal focus of Christmas is largely on profit and revenue. This suggestion coincides with 98% of the collected questionnaires answering ‘yes’ when asked if the Boxing Day Sales were a part of the Christmas tradition. When asked to explain their answer, a male participant in the 50+ age group answered:

“There is greater emphasis on the commercial aspect of Christmas these days, very different to how we celebrated Christmas when I was a child.”

Christmas becoming overly commercialised is a growing concern for many, particularly within the religious community, as shown within my interviewee with the Priest of a local Christian church:

“I fear that Christmas is used as a marketing campaign, the purpose strongly revolving around wanting consumers to spend all of their money.”

Technology, scientific research, telecommunication and commercialisation are all factors contributing to secularisation within the global society, particularly in the western world, and consequently effect Christmas. Although this is undeniable, the extent of the effect of secularisation of Christmas is argued. An example of this comes from an article from The Catholic Herald (UK);

“Christmas has not so much been commercialised as secularised, even paganised” – (Oddie, W. 2012)

The author declares that the commercialisation of Christmas and the incorporation of technology is completely necessary to keep Christmas up to date with the changes of society, as the Church is able to utilise the media to keep Christmas modern, and appeal to the modern adherent. He states that the problem is not commercialisation and technology but secularisation on a general scope as it pushes out the important aspects of religious values that are “needed in society” (Oddie, W. 2012). This presents a clear view of those fighting against an evidential growing secularisation, but also defends commercialisation.
**Multiculturalism**

“Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people... This process has effects on the environment, on culture, on political systems, on economic development and prosperity, and on human physical well-being in societies around the world.”

Globalisation is the primary foundation of multiculturalism, as it has encouraged the mingling of different nations and cultures, causing both cultural diversity within societies and progressive enculturation globally. This is as a result of increased means of communication and influence between different cultures, such as travel, news and the internet.

### TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF BIRTH FOR THE OVERSEAS-BORN POPULATION, SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Persons ('000)</th>
<th>Proportion of all overseas-born (%)</th>
<th>Median age (years)</th>
<th>Sex ratio (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1 101.1</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>101.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>483.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>102.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China(b)</td>
<td>319.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>295.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>125.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>185.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>104.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>185.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>171.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>145.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>116.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born elsewhere overseas</td>
<td>2 183.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total overseas-born</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 294.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>96.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Number of males per 100 females
‘the proportion of the overseas-born population originating from Europe has been in decline in recent years, from 52% in 2001 to 40% in 2011......in recent migration streams a number of Asian countries have made a large contribution...... the proportion of migrants born in Asia increased from 24% of the overseas-born population in 2001 to 33% in 2011. The proportion of the overseas-born population arriving from countries outside Europe and Asia has also increased.’

From this data it is observed that the different cultures in Australia have certainly diversified and increased in numbers, thus creating a multicultural society, and also contributing to Australia as a multifaith society.

Australia is a multicultural nation, consisting of a diverse number of cultures and ethnic groups. There are many reasons for Australia’s multicultural population, the primary reason essentially due to Australia being colonised and populated by European migrants. Throughout Australia’s history migrants from all over the world have added to the population. The combination of diverse ethnicity and culture, including indigenous Australian’s, has created multicultural communities across Australia which have brought with them food, lifestyle and cultural practices that have consequently been absorbed into mainstream Australian culture.

Multiculturalism is a contributing factor to secularisation within society. This is evident by the increasing diversity of faiths other than Christianity within society, and also as a result of religious and cultural groups intermingling. This creates an environment where the dominance of one religion (Christianity) is lessened as the sharing of moral codes becomes a more important characteristic within society rather than an individual’s religious affiliation. Increasing multiculturalism within society also creates a society where there is less prejudice towards those moving away from religion or moving towards another as there are more options available.

This idea is evident when comparing census results across the past decade reporting on religious affiliations. Between 2001 and 2011 non-Christian religions have increased in adherents, Buddhism increasing by 48% to 529,000, Islam increasing by 69% to 476,300 and Hinduism increasing by 189% to 275,500. In relation to these religions increasing,
affiliation to a Christian religion has decreased from 68% in 2001 to 61% in 2011. This comparison also demonstrates the increase of secularisation with the number of people reporting ‘No Religion’ increasing from 15% in 2001 to 22% in 2011. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

Christmas is undoubtedly affected by the increasing secularisation of society, as it is within society that Christmas is celebrated and acknowledged. Multiculturalism contributing to secularisation within society not only affects the extent of the religious significance of Christmas due to its contribution to Australia as a multifaith society, but also resulting in Australia becoming a culturally sensitive society.

Although we have access to many different cultures in our everyday lives it important to avoid enforcing your culture and religion upon others. The result of this is shown in schools and the government being controlled by secular laws and rules, in order to accommodate those whom are from different cultures and affiliate with different religions. A similar trend has occurred in regards to Christmas. Similarly to commercialisation gaining appeal to Christmas celebrants and often dominating the religious significance of the holiday, multiculturalism has taken a similar effect, with the removal of particular religious symbols of Christmas in order to appeal to the broader, multicultural society. This is particularly evident within public primary schools as demonstrated in the article “No schools crusade, kids just prefer a Christ-less Xmas”.

“Christmas without God is essentially how kids understand Christmas these days. And we’re far more comfortable with [our daughter] participating in Christmas activities without religious education.”

(Interview with Fotinopoulos, c. 2012)

This interview explains the stance that many families who claim non-religion or a religion other than Christianity have taken; although they may celebrate Christmas, they choose to leave out the religious element as they do not believe, or prefer to teach their children themselves, rather than have the customs and religious values of others preached to their

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3 Between 2001 and 2011, the number of people reporting a non-Christian faith increased considerably, from around 0.9 million to 1.5 million, accounting for 7.2% of the total population in 2011 (up from 4.9% in 2001). The most common non-Christian religions in 2011 were Buddhism (accounting for 2.5% of the population), Islam (2.2%) and Hinduism (1.3%). Of these, Hinduism had experienced the fastest growth since 2001, increasing by 189% to 275,500, followed by Islam (increased by 69% to 476,300) and Buddhism (increased by 48% to 529,000 people). (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

children. This alludes to the idea of Christmas as simply a holiday that is not restricted by religious faith as to whom can celebrate it.

Due to increasing multiculturalism, particularly in cultures that don’t affiliate with Christianity, aspects of Christmas have been modified to accommodate those whom do not adhere to Christianity, resulting in Christmas becoming also a cultural holiday that can be celebrated across Australia without the need to affiliate and create a strong association between Christmas and Christianity. The shorting of Christmas to ‘Xmas’ or to ‘Chrissy’ is an example of this cultural change, as it is an aspect of Australian culture to create nicknames.

Although this move of Christmas towards a cultural holiday, rather than a religious celebration, allows many cultures to bond and share the values and customs associated with such a popular holiday, it is also criticised;

‘Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Minister Nicholas Kotsiras continued his phoney war by encouraging all Victorians “not to be afraid to celebrate Christmas because it might offend someone”’.

Some within society are concerned by the effect that multiculturalism has on Christmas, suggesting that in Australia we have become overly sensitive to non-Christian believer’s inclusion in a holiday that originates from the Christianity, and thus, robbing ourselves of Christmas’ religious significance.

It is evidential that multiculturalism dramatically influences the extent of secularisation in societies when comparing different countries and their religious affiliations. This is clear through the comparison of Germany to Australia. In an article from Reuters (UK) reporting Germany’s multicultural state, the German Chancellor is reported saying that Germany’s attempt to create a multicultural society has “utterly failed”. As a result of this, Germany is by no means a multifaithed society, with Christianity being the largest adhered religion in Germany, with over 60% of the population associating themselves with Christian adherence (Eurel 2014).

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In my interview with Claudia Tipping, who is currently an Australian permanent resident but still holds her German citizenship, I posed the question of whether she believes that Germany’s lack of multiculturalism has an influence of the retention of religious significance in Christmas celebrations in Germany.

“In Germany we have limited influence from other cultures, other than those within Europe, but even this influence is limited. I can definitely see that as Germany doesn’t have a need to allow other cultures and ethnicities to celebrate Christmas easily within our country we haven’t had to lessen the religious significance. Everyone I know in Germany without fail goes to Church for Christmas every year.”

From this it can be presumed that the minimal effect of multiculturalism in Germany is the reason behind there being less evidence of secularisation in German society and thus a lesser impact of secularisation upon Christmas. This can be deduced through the comparison of Claudia’s comment on church attendance during Christmas time in Germany to the observation made by Bruce Mackenzie in the previous chapter.
Changing Customs and Values

Customs, values and beliefs are what shape a culture and are the foundations of societal behaviour. These are also what characterise Christmas, but over time they adapt, accommodating new environments, cultures and values and popular culture. This is evident when observing the global celebration of Christmas.

The percentage of Christian adherents in China is quite minimal, yet annually large Christmas displays and Christmas trees are present throughout large cities. Although it is not a part of their belief system, in China many people enjoy participating in the festivities; particularly the prosthetic aspects, such as dressing up, decorating and buying. This is similar to how St Patricks Day is celebrated in Australia; seen as more of a time to dress up in green and orange and go out for a beer, rather than celebrating the true meaning of the day and acknowledging its significance.

Secularisation has evidently had an effect on Christmas customs and traditions, especially on a societal scope. As discussed in the last chapter, this is partly due to efforts to diminish the restrictions of religion from individuals and communities celebrating Christmas, but other factors such as technology, personal preference, culture, environment and value systems also influence these changes. One of the most evidential changes within the general society is the decrease and removal of religious symbolism. Through observing public places such as shopping malls and busy main streets in a large town I was able to observe many Christmas related festivities such as decorations, Christmas trees, carols and staffed dressed in reindeer and elf costumes. The commonality amongst these traditions, that I have always familiarised with Christmas, was the lack of religious symbolism; Santa Kolas, tinsel, fairy lights, corals that focused on Santa delivering presents, minimal angels, no symbols of Jesus and an increasing amount of non-traditional decorations such as owls, bugs, car, flowers, etc.

Traditions and customs are also affected by other factors other than multiculturalism and technology, such as environment and economic status. In my interview with Claudia Tipping, I posed the question of whether she is still able to celebrate a traditional ‘German Christmas’ in Australia.

“No, I’m not, it just really isn’t practical. I still hold on to major traditions, like the main Christmas celebration taking place on Christmas Eve rather than Christmas
morning, but other things like a huge roasted dinner and hot deserts just don’t accommodate Australia’s hot weather.”

When discussing how Christmas has changed over the past 60 years with Mayor Bruce Mackenzie, he illustrated how economic status had a large influence on his Christmas customs and traditions.

“As a child we didn’t have much money at all. My parents would save up for weeks to have a roasted meal for Christmas but presents weren’t a part of our tradition..... Now, I couldn’t imagine not giving my children and grand-children presents at Christmas, and food is definitely not a problem, there is usually heaps leftover.”

Both these interviews demonstrated how both external and personal factors affect the customs and traditions of Christmas. Elaborating on Claudia’s point; a traditional European Christmas is generally spent indoors due to cold weather, completely opposite to Australia. Due to Australia’s warm climate in December non-religious and secular activities have been included into the Christmas tradition, reflecting the Australian culture. Examples of these are barbeque lunches and the Boxing Day Test cricket match. Increasingly it has become clear that the religious aspect of Christmas is not a part of the cultural element of Christmas, and influence of religion must generally be acknowledge by the individual or community separately to the general Australian society if they choose to do so.

This disconnection from religious influence on Christmas is suggested by some as negligent of the true celebration of Christmas – which is thought to involve a clear acknowledgement of the values and origins of the Christmas festivities. It is feared that without these the true meaning of Christmas will be lost.

Rituals and traditions are the connecting threads that provide us with a sense of our familial and ancestral history….if rituals become rigid and fail to adjust to altering circumstances, they can lose their power and meaning. This occurs when we go through the motions but do not necessarily engage in the spirit of the occasion”

(Bender, L. 2011)

Here, Bender discusses how without passions and meaning behind customs and traditions they become pointless, also supporting the idea that without religion, Christmas loses its meaning and purpose, making Christmas pointless and bland. This idea is criticised and supported by many, falling under the debate of ‘what is the true meaning of Christmas?’.
Although in my questionnaires there was a clear trend that younger generations favoured the receiving the presents during Christmas, it was unanimous across all results from all age groups that values revolving around giving, charity, coming together with loved ones and appreciating what you have are at the core of the Christmas season. This was evidential in the responses received when asked about their thoughts on the true meaning of Christmas. These values are evidential across the general Australian society, with encouragement to give to charity and to come together at Christmas. An example of this in the annual Carols in the Domain; a free event which is broadcasted on nationally television and advocates donating to charity and coming together as a society during this time of celebration. This are values that can be observed within the religious origins of Christmas, thus it can be suggested that although religious symbolism isn’t largely evident within society’s Christmas customs and traditions, the foundational values are still indirectly appreciated and acknowledge.
Conclusion

“Whatever meaning you happen to ascribe to Christmas (religious, cultural, or none), it is a purely human invention.” (Vogel, D. 2011)

This point, discovered within an online article discussing the commercialisation of Christmas was a turning point in my PIP. Reading this article, combined with my extensive secondary and primary research allowed me to develop a clear understanding of what the ‘true meaning’ of Christmas is; a concept I couldn’t comprehend when beginning my PIP journey. The conclusion I’ve come to is that there is no set in stone definition; the meaning of Christmas will change according to the individual and will be affected by a number of factors: religion, social environment, global position, economic status, etc. My studies into the effect of secularisation have, not only broadened my understanding of Christmas and why it is celebrated, but has also allowed me too fully understand the value of its annual celebration. It is not just a religious celebration of the birth of Christ; Christmas’ value goes far beyond that. It is a time of joy for the sake of by joyous, a time to give in a world where we have forgotten the importance of giving, and a time to be grateful for those we love which we tend to take for granted.

Through effectively utilising methodologies such as interviews, questionnaires and observation, combined with extensive secondary research, I have been able to clearly answer whether Christmas is a ‘holy’ day or simply a holiday. The answer is that there is no set answer, similarly to the definition of Christmas. Although society has become highly secularised, predominantly affected by factors such as technology and multiculturalism, the core values of Christmas still clearly exist. Christmas has adapted with modern times and is now both a ‘holy’ day and a holiday, according to who chooses to celebrate it and what core values or origins they chose to focus on during these celebrations.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the PIP process and journey. I have not only explored areas and ideas within my society I would have not normally experienced but I have also gained a better idea of the importance of a nation’s culture, such as that of Australia. The culture is what defines a nation, and is what millions of people within a country who may never meet can all develop a sense of unity within. Christmas is a very important cultural event which allows us to come together as a nation to celebrate, although our choices of expression may differ as individuals.
My topic was very interesting and stimulating, but if I was to repeat the process I would definitely specify my study to obtain a more specific answer for these changes in celebration. I would also put more effort into how individuals are specifically affected by secularisation.

Undoubtedly I have gained so much from this study that I will be able to utilise not only throughout my Society and Culture studies but also in my life. Undergoing the PIP process, specifically the effect of secularisation on Christmas, has broadened my knowledge on technology, multiculturalism, customs, values and cultures, but more importantly on individuals. This study has truly allowed me to see that you cannot apply generalisations to individuals, because everyone has their own story, opinions and reasons behind their actions that generalisations will never give justice to.
Resource List

Secondary Research

Journals


This document published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics provides data that was obtained in the 2011 census and compares data that has changed since the 2001 census. This document includes percentages of religious afflictions, selected characteristics of ancestry groups and top ten countries of birth for the overseas-born population and selected characteristic. I have been able to use this data within my PIP, such as the percentage of the population that affiliates with Christianity and how these numbers compare to previous census data. I have also been able to use data from this document for my multicultural chapter.


This document provides information in regards to factors that have contributed to the secularisation within society. I have been able to utilise this information in my PIP, applying it directly to my topics as it contains resourced information in regards to technology, modernism and multiculturalism and their influence on secularisation. The document presents theories and examples of how secularisation has occurred in society, which has helped me to formulate an in-depth study of secularisations impact on Christmas and how this secularisation has occurred.
Articles


This article provides a clear perspective of the detrimental effects of a loss of passion and meaning in the celebration of Christmas. This has allowed me to present different perspectives towards the discussion of what the true meaning of Christmas. Although this article contains a slightly biased perspective, it allowed me to develop a broader perspective in my investigation regarding secularisation’s impact upon Christmas and to what extent this concerns and effects individuals and communities.


This article is the source of my cover page image and also provided me with a perspective of how Christmas has changed due to multiculturalism for individuals in New York City, with people from different religions celebrating Christmas or rejecting Christmas. This allowed me to not only develop a more in-depth understanding of how Christmas has changed due to multiculturalism, but also to develop an angle for my multiculturalism chapter.


This article discusses the growing number within the population that have incorporated the Boxing Day Sales into their Christmas tradition, providing the average amounts spent during the Christmas season in each state. This article aided me in developing and expanding my technology chapter, incorporating the factors of consumerism and commercialisation. This article also gave me points to question in both my questionnaires and interviews regarding consumerism’s growing significance during the Christmas season.

This article explores children’s and adolescents’ opinions on Christmas and whether they care if Christmas has a religious influence or not. This article greatly broadened my perspective on Christmas and why the religious aspect of Christmas has been removed within young children. It explores how people, namely parents, have reacted to the move away from religion when it comes to Christmas in public schools in Australia, providing quotes and perspectives from both parents and children, which have been presented in a non-biased form. It suggests that the move away from religious influence on Christmas may just be a natural process of the evolution of society.


The article ‘Secularization of Christmas’ provided me with current examples of secularisation evident during the Christmas season, particularly in America. This gave me an idea of particular details and occurrences to be aware of when making observations. This source is an unbiased source, reporting on evidence of secularization yet also giving examples of strong religious presence during Christmas. It also provides existing theories for the causes of secularization, such as increasing globalisation and multicultural influence. It also examines the continued existence of religious significance and influence on Christmas, such as churches appealing to younger generations and incorporating technology so to evolve with urban society, rather than away from it.


This article explored the increasing use and purchase of technological and smart products, particularly during Christmas for gifts, also making a point of how technology has changed the way we have celebrated Christmas. This has helped me in developing my technology chapter, providing examples of how customs and traditions have been affected by both
technology and consumerism. I was able to further research these ideas through my primary research and through support of other articles.


‘Atheist defence of Xmas’ provided me with several interesting insights into an atheist perspective of Christmas, from both Christmas celebrating and anti-Christmas atheist viewpoints. Although there is an evident bias from the author, the article also presents evidence of secularization and its impact on Christmas and insights into how multiculturalism has affected the impact of secularization. This atheist perspective has laid out a broad range of insightful theories as to why Australian’s choose to either celebrate Christmas or campaign against it, which has been a valuable resource in constructing my questionnaire and interview questions, while also aiding in the analysis of my observations.


This article provided a brief insight into secularisation of society and how this has affected the Church. Although this article provided examples of how the Church and its religious practices have been affected by secularisation, none of these examples were substantially explained. They required further research, to obtain a clear idea of the full effect of secularisation on the Christian religion, at an institutional level.


The article ‘What Exactly Is Wrong With The Commercialisation of Christmas?’ comes from a religious perspective, giving it minor bias, yet this bias has aided me in constructing questionnaire questions and interviews. Furthermore, it provided me with a different perspective to my own, increasing my understanding of the religious significance of
Christmas. This article provides several valid examples of secularisation impacting Christmas, and also supplies evidence of technology and commercialisation impacting on Christmas, both positively and negatively, providing me with information specifically for my chapter focusing on technology.


This article provided me with an observation of the cultural diversity in Germany, contributing to my cross cultural perspective. The information in this article allowed me to formulate an educated theory in regards to multiculturalism being one of the major differing factors of secularisations impact of German society and Christmas compared to Australia, also providing quotes and factual information to back up this theory.


This article discusses modern day Christmas values in Australia, also arguing the question of what the true meaning of Christmas is. It states that often religion created these values yet this does not mean that religion has to be a part of these values in the modern day. Through stating this opinion, it also argues that religion may not have a strong influence over Christmas in many families but it does not mean that they are celebrating Christmas absent of the true meaning of Christmas. The author also argues that Christmas can mean whatever you would like it to be, whether it is religious, cultural or something else. This article demonstrated that although deriving from a religious tradition, Christmas is now not only a religious celebration but also a cultural celebration; that anyone from any religion or belief system can celebrate if they wish too.

This article reports on the extent of secularisation, where children have a limited understanding on the origin of Christmas. This article aided me in providing a situation where secularisation has an extreme impact upon Christmas, yet the reliability of the article can be questioned as the source is a popular British gossip column and there is no author provided. I have been sure to double check the information that has been provided by this article.

Electronic Sources


This website provided me with a clear understanding of the origin of Santa Claus, adding on complementing information collected from other sources. I was able to effectively use this in my PIP when focusing on customs and traditions as well as commercial and consumerist aspects that are incorporated into the general idea of secularisation.


This source enabled me to broaden my knowledge of Christmas and its history, which furthered not only my interest in my topic but also provided me with a firm basis for both my cross cultural component and continuity and change aspects. This information provided me with a developed idea of the origin of Christmas which I was able to compare data collected through observation, interview and questionnaire.

This source provided me with a range of insightful quotes from intellects throughout history, specifically of Albert Einstein who spoke of ideas associating increasing knowledge with secular thought processes. I was able to successfully incorporate this quote into my Technology chapter, as it provided a supporting idea for the theories of increasing secularisation in society due to technology.


This source provided a brief description of the customs and traditions that are practiced during Christmas festivities in Australia. This allowed me to form theories regarding changes in customs and traditions and how they have been affected by secularization. The information from this website was quite reliable, which I determined from cross analysis with other secondary sources as well as corroboration through my primary research.


The source ‘Christmas Traditions in Germany’ is a detailed description of Christmas in Germany and the customs and traditions that take place during the holiday season. It also explains how these customs and traditions originated. This informative webpage, allowed me to extend my knowledge, obtained through personal experience, of the German culture and the religious significance during Christmas celebrations in Germany. ‘Christmas Traditions in Germany’ enabled me to produce well informed questions for my interviews, also providing me with an abundance of information for my cross-cultural component.

‘AKA Santa Claus’ provides information on the history of Santa Claus and how he progressed from a religious figure to Santa in a red suit and the related aspects of commercialisation and religion. This provides factual, unbiased information concerning Santa but also how many European countries traditionally celebrated Christmas and how Christmas was adapted when brought to Australia. This has provided me with basic information for my PIP, and was particularly helpful with my continuity and change aspect and also my cross cultural component.


This electronic source provided detailed and reliable information regarding the history of Santa Claus, supported by extensive referencing and annotations. This website aided me in writing my PIP through developing my understanding of Santa Claus and his purpose and significance during Christmas celebrations which I was able to incorporate into my Customs and Values Chapter. It also provided an area of interest for my cross generation perspective.


This wiki source provided extensive information regarding irreligion in Australia, with both theories, reasons and examples. Although the validity of this source is questionable, I was able to obtain many useful sources from the reference list provided which supported the information within this source. The information obtained from this source proved useful across my entire PIP process; from the interviews and questionnaires, to the direction and content of my Central Material.


This wiki source provided a general description of the Christmas traditions and customs that are practised all over the world. This proved useful in directing sections of my multicultural
chapter, but the validity of this source is questionable and needed conformation from other sources.


This wiki source provided information regarding the annual Carols in the Domain, which was used within my customs and values chapter. This provided me with an insight into Australian Christmas traditions and customs, as well as providing an example and demonstration of the values that are incorporated into the Christmas season.


This Wiki source provided me with some general information regarding the German celebration of Weihnachten, which I was able to incorporate into my multiculturalism chapter, supported by my interviews for my cross cultural comparison of Germany and Australia. I used other sources to support the validity of this wiki source.

Film


Although a fictional film based on the book by author Dr Seuss, the film ‘The Grinch’ provides an insight into how popular culture is used to educate children on Christmas customs and values. The film is also an example of how popular culture has moved away from religious influence, and how traditional customs, values and celebrations have been modified in order to survive in our contemporary world. Through gaining this perspective of how Christmas is being perceived by children I have been able to develop an appropriate angle of observation when comparing information and observations of how different generations celebrate Christmas and their opinions on the religious influence upon Christmas.

Primary Research- Methodologies

Observations

During the 2013 Christmas festive season (mid-November to late December/early January) I recorded observations regarding the celebration of Christmas, looking for evidence of
secularisation affecting Christmas. Through non-participant observation of public places such as shopping malls and busy main streets in a large coastal town, I was able to observe many Christmas related festivities such as decorations, Christmas trees, carols and staffed in reindeer and elf costumes. I observed that many of these elements contained minimal religious significance; for example, Santa koalas (a take on an Australia Christmas), tinsel, fairy lights, carols that exclude religious symbolism and non-traditional decorations such as owls, bugs, cars, flowers, etc. Rarely would symbols of Jesus or even angels be present amongst these public Christmas displays.

When I compared my observations of this large town near the coast to those I obtained from a small town’s shopping mall, a significant difference was clear. The smaller town had many more religious elements present. The main Christmas feature of the mall was, rather than a Christmas tree, a life sized nativity scene, which was surrounded by small angel decorations, sound tracked by religious focused carols such as ‘Holy Night’. Through comparing these observations of the two malls, one can deduce that although secularisation of Christmas is apparent, the extent of this in public festivities changes according to the community.

Questionnaires

Surveying a large group (50) of various ages enabled me to attain a variety of perspective and opinions of the effect of secularisation on Christmas. Through this primary research I have discovered that secularisation has affected Christmas on a general level within society, but the extent of this on a personal level differs according to individual circumstances such as religious adherence, location, technological influence, cultural background and economic status. The results obtained from my questionnaire, containing a combination of both open-ended and closed-ended questions greatly assisted my study into the effect of secularisation, providing me with evidence for my hypothesis within my micro-world. The anonymity of the questionnaire allowed me to gain honest views and insights in the effect of secularisation on Christmas and reasons for this, particularly surrounding questions regarding economic status.

Interviews

After conducting interviews with three individuals from different areas of society, I gained first-hand knowledge and insight into the secularisation of society and how this has affected Christmas; each interview focused on a different area of my PIP. This methodology was
extremely useful as it allowed me to obtain interesting and worthwhile information, aiding the progression of my research and development of my PIP.

1. **Tipping, Claudia (2014). Interview with The researcher. 29th June 2014.**

Permanent resident whom migrated from Germany – offered very interesting and insightful information for my project regarding my cross cultural component, as well as providing a broad perspective regarding secularisation and Christmas in both my micro and macro world. She gave detailed explanation for each question I asked, enabling me to fully understand the process of Christmas in Germany and its differences and similarities to Christmas in Australia, as well as covering other factors regarding secularisation in general. This interview also provided me with some information for my continuity and change component.

2. **Mackenzie, Bruce (2014). Interview with The researcher. 30th June 2014.**

Mayor of Port Stevens Council, aged 76 – presented extensive information for my continuity and change component as well as providing a wide span of knowledge and personal experience of secularisation, changing factors within Christmas, effects of socio-economic status and the decision making processes in places of power and how these are affected by both secularisation and Christmas. He gave detailed explanation to all my questions and enabled me to attain an extensive amount of information for my continuity and change component as well as a knowledgeable perspective of Christmas in both my micro and macro world and the changes Christmas has undergone.

3. **Anon. (2014). Interview with The researcher. 19th July 2014.**

Priest of a local Christian Church – this interviewee provided me with a strong and knowledgeable perspective of secularisation within the general society and how this has affected the Church on both a micro and macro level. He gave detailed responses to my questions asked, and enabled me to gain insight into not only the religious value of Christmas but also how the Christmas season is celebrated by his Church. This interview offered information that I was able to use across all areas of my project, specifically within my customs and values chapter.