The following represents a selection of research projects currently being undertaken by Centre staff and members.

**Sex and Post-Secularism: A marriage of convenience?**

**Researchers:** Alphia Possamai-Inesedy and Bryan Turner

The increasingly religiously plural societies of Australia and New Zealand are “essentially tolerant of religion, disinterested in religious difference, and prefer[s] religion at a distance” (Bouma, 2004: 335; similarly expressed by Pratt, 2010). Yet, a shift from the vision of a “shy” private religion to a more prominent public role for religion is apparent in both countries through an increased presence of religion in policy debates over social issues.

The aim of this project is to understand how religions in contemporary Australia and New Zealand are becoming more public as various religious traditions find themselves in a confrontational relationship with both the state and the law over issues relating to marriage (especially the definition of marriage), parental control of and responsibility for children, and the defence of traditional notions of heterosexuality. As both of these countries become more diverse in both cultural and religious terms, the scope of shared values contracts and the possibilities for public disputes over basic institutions increase. The state is drawn into religious controversies that tend to undermine the traditional divisions between church and state. This entanglement is most obvious in the struggle over the traditional Christian definition of marriage.

Of direct concern to this project is the expression of religious sentiments in relation to the debate on same-sex marriage. This project will explore the impact of religious institutions (churches and denominations) and religious values and beliefs, on not only the policy debate but also on individuals. This study will facilitate an understanding of the interaction of politics and religion across both Australia and New Zealand. In so doing, it aims to provide knowledge of the influence that religion has on public issue debates and policies through both quantitative and qualitative research in regard to the redefinition of marriage.

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