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**Christian Media Project
Qualitative Research**

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Report of research findings

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A program of research was undertaken that incorporated:

- An extensive review of psychological literature surrounding religious beliefs, conversion and advertising effectiveness. (Presented under separate cover)
- A series of 6 focus groups with members of target groups identified at the previous stage.

The research program was supplemented by an initial exploration of implications for communications strategy directed by Angus Kinnaird.

The group discussions confirmed that young adulthood and family formation are two important periods of transition in people's lives in relation to the development of belief systems.

Importantly it was confirmed that these groups are likely to be questioning and therefore potentially ready to receive a message relevant to their current issues.

There was a generally positive response to the core values espoused in Christianity and displayed by Jesus. Essentially people were taking what they believed to be the essence of Christ's core values and messages and reframing them within their own humanist and somewhat secular perspective. This was related to the idea of being a 'good' person.

Any claims made by or on behalf of Christianity which could be equally claimed by another group, particularly those that could be claimed by all religions, were regarded negatively.

Similarly any statement that seemed to imply that Christians or Christianity were somehow 'better' received a strong negative response.

Strong negative responses were also evident in relation to any claim that appeared excessive or hypocritical. Such claims were swiftly judged against perceptions of 'real' Christian values. Many people indicated that they believed Jesus himself would reject the rule-bound, prescriptive, rigid and doctrinaire behaviours and attitudes that they themselves had rejected in their separation from involvement in formalised religion.

In order for a message to be credible it would need to overcome the enormous barrier posed by the strong cognitive and emotional link between Christianity and the Church and to a somewhat lesser extent the Bible.

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Jesus himself, particularly his life and core teachings, were generally somewhat distanced from the negative elements associated with the practise of organised religion. Further the values for which he stood were regarded as important, enduring and aspirational.

A key challenge will be to link the teachings of Christ, which were most often associated with interpersonal behaviour, to the pressing personal needs and desires of research participants which were much more internally and self-focussed.

Some of the key issues identified by research participants that might provide such an opportunity were:

- Concern about tendency for people to be self-absorbed and motivated by greed and their own personal gain at the expense of others.
- The perceived lack of connection between people and associated feelings of separateness and isolation experienced as a loss of neighbourhood and community.
- Concerns about the pace and pressures of modern life, and the concomitant tendency to become easily consumed by the desire to get ahead.
- The difficulties in establishing and maintaining life balance in relation to personal, family, social and work aspects of life; and
- The desire for personal satisfaction and fulfilment, and the needs and stressors of daily life that seemed to limit opportunities for achieving satisfaction and fulfilment.

Regardless of the specific strategy selected it is critical that people such as the participants in this research are not presented with additional iterations of what has been presented in the past. Further it is clear that the line between a message that would be accepted and one that would be rejected is quite fine.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

A substantial briefing paper was provided that encompassed most of the key issues

Key components of that brief included:

- Identification of the key issues relevant to a Christian perspective of faith
- Identification of some of the likely secular issues relevant to consideration of the core Christian propositions
- An over-arching approach to the opportunities to use mass-media, encompassing:
- Identification of relevant need-states based on established psychological theory, including specification of the greatest potential opportunities
- Reinterpretation of an essentially humanistic model to align it with a religious (Christian) perspective
- An approach to conceptualising how behaviour change will occur
- Specification of the core principles required to ensure effective communication

2.2 OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the proposed research was to help determine the most effective way to use mass media to increase the extent of Christianity in Australia by working within existing psychological constructs to identify optimum communications propositions and to suggest ideal delivery contexts (eg. testimonial, parable, slice of life, etc).

2.2.1 Overall objectives

The primary objective of research was to provide input into the development of an effective communications strategy.

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2.2.2 Specific objectives

In order to achieve this overall objective specific information was gathered in relation to:

- Understanding the mind-set of people who have been raised in a Christian environment but who do not actively accept Christian beliefs because of their lack of perceived relevance.
- Gaining an in-depth understanding of the process through which Christian beliefs and faith are challenged in late adolescence, and potentially re-emerge in early family formation.

Some of the specific questions that were addressed included:

- What are the factors that would lead an adolescent to actively reject Christianity or attract them to maintain their basic belief in God (Pros and Cons)?
- What are the factors that would attract or prevent a family (member) to consider a return to Christian faith or at least to interact with Christian networks (Pros and Cons)?
- What are the primary barriers to accepting Christian beliefs (e.g. God as creator) and adopting Christian behaviour (e.g. prayer) for people at the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages of conversion?

It was also important for the research to provide an understanding of how the target market might be encouraged to interact with a Christian individual or group to learn more about Christian beliefs and practices. Specifically, the research explored potential benefits associated with basic human needs, such as:

- The feeling of safety and certainty associated with operating within Christianity's tried and true moral and social framework.
- The feelings of belonging and love associated with being accepted into a Christian community of like-minded people.
- The feelings of reassurance and certainty that come from accepting Christian faith as a way to resolve basic cognitive issues surrounding the meaning of life and personal place in the scheme of life.

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To ensure the delivery of the insights required to develop an effective communications brief it will be necessary to address the following issues:

- What's in it for me? What is the primary selfish reason why a non-Christian should reconsider the relevance of Christianity in their own life and seek to interact with a Christian individual or network?
- The information I need. What factual information do we need to present to non-Christians that will encourage and enable them to objectively re-evaluate their views about Christianity?
- Word of Mouth. What "nuggets" (fact, gossip, etc) can we offer that are likely to be passed on in everyday conversation in a way that will encourage non-Christians to reconsider their views?
- Credibility. What are the boundaries of credibility within which we must remain in order to avoid our propositions being rejected? What evidence can we offer or do we need to demonstrate that the claimed benefits of Christianity are true, or that the ways to surmount barriers are effective?

2.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHOD

2.3.1.1 Overall approach

A qualitative research approach was taken, comprising a series of six focus group discussions. The groups were segmented by age and life stage and by stage in the process of adopting Christian beliefs. These criteria are explained below.

2.3.1.2 Segmentation and selection of participants

The overall requirements for participation in the research included:

- Raised in a Christian household; and
- Not actively rejecting Christianity but not currently engaged in regular religious practice.

Two primary target segments were included in this research:

- Potential Apostates

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- Aged 18-24 who have grown up in a Christian household;
 - Are leaving home / developing an adult self-view; and
 - Experience social pressure to reject Christian beliefs and practices (or at least adopt beliefs and practices inconsistent with a Christian view).
 - The objective with this target group is to minimise the likelihood of apostasy.
- New family creators
 - Aged 25-35 who have grown up in a Christian household;
 - Establishing own family / home; and
 - Newly sensitised to community safety and belonging issues.
 - The objective with this target group is to maximise the experience of intensification.

Participants were also segmented according to their stage in the process of adopting Christian beliefs and practices. Stages were defined according to recent (last 3 months) behaviour and attitudes in relation to Christianity, and categorized as either pre-contemplative, contemplative, or in preparation.

Each group included a mix of men and women.

In summary, the following group discussions were conducted:

- 3 groups with Potential Apostates, Aged 18-24
 - 1 group of pre-contemplators, 1 group of contemplators, 1 group of preparers
- 3 groups with new Family Creators, Aged 25-35, with one or more children.
 - 1 group of pre-contemplators, 1 group of contemplators, 1 group of preparers

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2.3.2 Recruitment, data collection and recording

Matter of Opinon conducted the recruitment of participants. Participants were paid a \$50 incentive according to market rates. Focus group discussions were held within the group rooms at Market Access. Groups were both audio and video recorded for purposes of the research.

2.3.3 Discussion protocols

A discussion protocol was prepared and has been presented as Attachment A.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 PROCESS OF PROGRESSION OF BELIEFS (APOSTASY, FAMILY CREATORS)

The group discussions confirmed that young adulthood and family formation are two important periods of transition in people's lives in relation to the development of belief systems.

Importantly it was confirmed that they are likely to be questioning and therefore potentially ready to receive a message relevant to their current issues.

For young adults, leaving home or moving from secondary education to tertiary education or the workforce constitutes a time when they are forming their own belief systems as opposed to the beliefs that were provided for them by their parents and schooling.

For those who are in the process of starting a family, the question about the kinds of values to pass on to their children is a salient one. This is especially so in the context of their recognition that there were some benefits provided by the Christian structure in which they were raised, which they have subsequently rejected or moved away from. There is a degree of concern amongst this group regarding how to pass on appropriate and desirable values outside this formalised structure. Further, some who had previously rejected or drifted away from Christianity, particularly the organised practice thereof, were reconsidering their position in the context of what may be available for the benefit of their children.

"I think now more than ever, family values and ethics are more important to teach the child. And as a parent you're just hoping that other parents are doing the same things for their kids."

"In terms of passing on values, they're probably not as structured today as they were in the past, you know, with the whole kind of disbanding of formalised religion. So, you know, perhaps things were a bit more black and white."

"I'm starting to think about, like ... something to belong to that would sort of interest me ... I'm actually starting to think about things like that."

"Moving out of home and getting myself set up and everything ... you think about it, you think about your place in the world and that sort of thing and you think about things in the larger picture and then you think, you know, to get to that point would you need religion?"

"You grab a bit from here and a bit from there but, you know, there's no rules to follow."

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“You realise more about what religion is about and why it’s out there and now I feel like I can make a decision if I wanted to go and choose a religion like which one would be the best for me sort of thing. So that’s what I was thinking like you know would a religion help? If I’d been brought up with a Christian background would I be thinking differently to what I am not being brought up with the church at all. You know what I mean? So now I’m thinking, well, do I choose a religion? Is it worth it?”

3.2 VALUES & ISSUES OF CONCERN

Values that were reported as being important to people tended to be those related to interpersonal interactions, that is, values that were experienced in relationship with others, such as:

- Tolerance
- Respect
- Caring and consideration
- Community

These values were being considered in the context of participants’ perceptions of how they should behave and, more importantly, how they wished to be treated by others – both individual and organised groups. In particular there was a strong feeling that tolerance and respect were critical. This meant that participants were uncomfortable about the idea of being associated with a group they felt did not respect and tolerate others (noting that definitions of respect and tolerance were not necessarily consistent or logical) and rejected outright the idea of associating with anyone or anything that did not respect and tolerate them.

Issues of concern to people were of two main kinds, those related to how they saw the world and those around them; and those related to personal needs.

The former issues of concerns included:

- Concerns about safety, security and violence, both at a domestic and at an international level.
- Perceptions of a lack of respect for people, property and authority.

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- Perceptions of a tendency for people to be self-absorbed and motivated by greed and their own personal gain at the expense of others.
- Perceptions of a breakdown in community standards related to issues such as drug use and violence as a means for resolving disputes.
- The perceived lack of connection between people and associated feelings of separateness and isolation experienced as a loss of neighbourhood and community.

The personal issues of concern tended to be:

- Concerns about the pace and pressures of modern life, and the concomitant tendency to become easily consumed by the desire to get ahead.
- The difficulties in establishing and maintaining life balance in relation to personal, family, social and work aspects of life.
- The desire for personal satisfaction and fulfilment, and the needs and stressors of daily life that seemed to limit opportunities for achieving satisfaction and fulfilment.

The younger groups also tended to identify environmental issues as a specific concern although it should be noted that this was regarded as something of a background and ongoing issue rather than a burning immediate concern.

The older groups raised a number of issues relating to concerns about their children, some of which were specific iterations of the issues identified above. However one specific difference related to their responsibility as parents to provide an appropriate and adequate moral framework and some guidelines to make that framework tangible.

Concerns about self-absorption and the emphasis on personal gain were mostly focussed on 'other' and society more broadly. In general participants thought that they were not the greedy or the self-absorbed people whom they identified as a problem.

Most participants thought that there was very limited real international safety threat for Australia. It was acknowledged as an issue but not one that was of high personal relevance. Local and domestic issues were of more immediate concern but were regarded as something that people had to, and generally did, manage.

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Lack of connectedness was also seen to be primarily 'other' focussed and a broad societal problem, however it also had some direct personal relevance and was an issue that affected people on a daily basis.

Finding balance in their lives was a major personal concern for most participants, particularly the parenting groups.

While many people understood, in theory, that a way of reducing the stress and pressure of modern life was to reduce their wants and desires, this did not seem to be a serious consideration. What they were mostly trying to do was find a way of adhering to a secular humanist notion of obtaining more whilst simultaneously reducing their perceived stress. In this sense they were focussed on better management of their pressures rather than seeking opportunities to eliminate the stresses.

The desire for personal satisfaction and fulfilment appeared to be one of the most fundamental drivers of attitudes and behaviour. Most participants seemed to be on a path of some type, in the sense that they had determined what was important and were working towards that. If they had not achieved a level of fulfilment with which they were satisfied they generally did not reassess whether it was their direction that was the problem rather they assumed that they had just not yet reached the point where they would be fulfilled. Interestingly the barriers and pressures that were identified as making participants lives more difficult compounded their presumption that the failure to be satisfied or fulfilled was lack of achievement not an inappropriate direction.

Most of the discussion about issues that were of direct personal relevance seemed to be focused at the Maslowian level of self-esteem or even self actualisation both of which are very self-focussed. There appears to be some possibility that secular humanism and consumerism have *up-sold* people to the idea that satisfaction and fulfilment are achieved through a focus on these dimensions when in fact people have not yet adequately addressed their underlying needs at the lower level for belongingness and love.

"Tolerance and happiness are the two key factors."

"Being caring and considerate to other people."

"Respect."

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"I think a lot of the old fashioned values are still around, but people just don't say it. Like my mum for example, she didn't agree with living together before you were married ... but she just never mentions it ... its not the done thing ... they're still very strong beliefs in my family, but they are just not as outspoken as they were 20 years ago."

"Tolerance."

"Respect of difference."

"Appreciating other people and being tolerant."

"You know, the most precious commodity is time."

"Its too fast."

"All that security and the unknown, you don't know what to do."

"You always have some hope, but, still, there's a lot of awful things, and I think when you have children as well, you notice them more."

"Life's changed a lot since we were kids and it's a bit of a shame in the sense that, I look at the freedom that I had as a child ... I mean, I'd get on my bike and ride three, four, five blocks away and nobody would worry ... but today, you don't do that, your kids are outside your front door and you worry."

"There's less respect today."

"A real bug bear I have, and the [mention of] lack of respect reminds me, around my area I think graffiti is just ... I can't believe that these little shits graffiti on people's houses and ... over trains ... I get so annoyed and I think, how dare you do that to someone's house."

"They haven't got respect ... that's where it starts."

"Sometimes I think we're overwhelmed by all those options."

"I'm frightened of the future because just the way society generally is very lax about drugs."

"I think something terrible would have to happen to make people realise that their families are more important than having an Audi or a BMW or that house down the beach."

"It's only human to want more, but then you've got to try and keep it in check to a degree. I mean, yes, I like to go to the spring racing carnival and what have you, but you've sort of gotta keep things in perspective and keep a reign on yourself because it is so easy I think, to fall into that trap of jealousy."

"I was brought up Catholic, the youngest of seven children ... Catholicism was right back through my ancestry ... none of my brothers and sisters are practicing Catholics ... it will be interesting to see what goes on from here on in because we're the first in the line to stop it in hundreds of years."

"Instead of going on holidays overseas you go camping down the Murray."

"You used to have a sense of your neighbours and your neighbourhood, and now people don't so much."

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3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

While there was much criticism levelled at the way in which Christianity is practiced through the structures of the churches, some felt there was value in the ritual involved in Christian practices in relation to life events such as baptism, marriage, death, etc.

However, by contrast participants also commonly spoke about their personal approaches to Christian beliefs that meant they felt they could be Christian and live a Christian life without being involved in the structures provided by the churches. Indeed some participants were of the view that living a Christian life outside the structures of organised religion was 'more Christian' than participation in the formalised structures.

The essential values of Christianity were thought to be related to various well-known tenets of Christ's messages, including "love one another", "do unto others as you would have them do to you" and "turn the other cheek", which were all considered to be positive and attractive values to live by.

Notably, perceptions of Christianity tended to be most commonly described in relation to interpersonal characteristics. That is, Christianity was thought to provide some guidelines about ways of relating with other people, including those who were close or known as well as the local community and world population. In this sense the perceived focus of Christianity was about the provision of guidelines for being a "good person".

Most participants believed that they were 'good' and that they had taken the best of their Christian values, integrated these into their daily lives and discarded the inappropriate baggage. There was however little indication that people checked or re-evaluated their own attitudes or behaviour to ensure that they remained consistent with the principles on which these values were originally founded.

At the level of good interpersonal values Christianity was not seen to be unique or in any way differentiated from the non-fundamental / extreme iterations of any other religions – that is there was nothing about these positively regarded values that was unique to Christianity.

The most obvious barriers to Christian beliefs and practices were related to perceptions of the church. It was very difficult during the group discussions for participants to separate their thoughts and feelings about Christianity from their thoughts and feelings about the Christian churches.

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This difficulty was in part related to their observation that in recent times there have been many reports of people who are labelled as Christian acting in ways that are considered to be incompatible with Christian beliefs and values. The fact that some of these reported difficulties have been with people who are in positions of power and authority within the churches, and therefore held up as representing the practice of Christianity, exacerbates the barrier to Christian beliefs.

Some of the associations with Christianity that are considered barriers are related to issues of:

- Perceptions of hypocritical behaviours on behalf of church leaders and people who stand for Christian beliefs.
- Involvement of churches in issues of paedophilia
- Perceived intolerance of the churches towards homosexual lifestyles.
- Perceived lack of equality in some of the churches in relation to the role of women
- Perception of Christian leaders as being intolerant, hypocritical and judgemental; characteristics that appear to participants to be the antithesis of Christian values.

In many instances the issue identified was a lack of tolerance on the part of the churches. This was important because it was perceived as a fundamental element of Christian values and it was also somewhat independently a value held in high regard by participants.

"We rarely go to church and all that, but we do have the basic values and we do practice them, I suppose, in day-to-day life as much as you can."

"I like don't consider myself religious. I haven't been to church in a long time, but I consider my faith in a higher being a lot stronger since I haven't been to church and yet my parents find that if they don't go to church that they lose the connection. They need to be around people who think the same way. I don't."

"I believe in Jesus, but I don't believe in the church."

"I think it depends what denomination you are (whether you need to go to Church)"

"No I believe that, yeah (don't need to go to Church) because I'm not very religious so I agree with that, yeah"

"You know, Jesus always helped the poor people ... and you've got to think about people who are less fortunate than you, and I don't think it hurts kids to be reminded of that."

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"Growing up as a kid it sort of offered some sort of structure to hang on to. And you know, this whole thing of you're special and god loves you and all that kind of stuff, for little kids, that's really helpful."

"I went to Sunday School and then church ... I thought I was just doing it to hang out with my friends, but now I sort of think, you know, it does teach you. Even if you're not a good person it shows you what you can do to become a good person. So I would probably send my son to Sunday School."

"I believe in the teachings and being a good person. I think it is more about the type of person you are. Being a Christian person, or a Jesus person ... what would Jesus do rather than what the church said."

"My daughter went to a school holiday Christian program ... they talked to her about [the idea] that there's always someone there for her ... she came home singing Jesus loves me and she had all these letters from people saying 'if you ever need to talk, I'm your friend' ... she just loved it."

"Make a lot of friends. Community support."

"People you can rely on."

"You would probably have a better idea that you can trust those, you would hope. Because everyone knows what Christians should do so therefore if you went to that group you'd hope that they were a little bit better."

"A sense of belonging to a group."

"We all have to make decisions ... it's all there in a book."

"Compassion ... that sort of Good Samaritan view."

"Christians shouldn't rip someone off as well. I mean imagine if everyone was Christian by the book, you wouldn't have all these problems about ripping people off and all these people making exuberant profits and all this and — it changes the whole — everything."

"[Christian values] probably offer as many problems as they do solutions. Like, love one another and, you know, do unto others as you would have done to yourself, turn the other cheek, all that kind of stuff is great but, you know, their stance on homosexuality and, you know, women as ministers and all that kind of stuff!"

"I actually think I'd like to bring my child up as Christian as opposed to going to church because a lot of the church, unless it's changed, is like this is bad and you're bad and you'll go to hell and, you know, it's all very negative. Although, there's a lot of positive things in the bible."

"If it was up to me to teach Jane about Jesus, I don't know if I'd do a very good job."

"Just because people say they have Christian faith doesn't mean they follow it."

"I think more people would be happier if they felt it was ok to ... check out other religions, check out Buddhism, check out Hare Krishna communes."

"I reckon they should, have at the start of the bible like the start of Law and Order. You know they have to tell everyone that this stuff is not for real and it's just stories to illustrate."

"[Church] is just one big fashion parade."

"None of this rah rah rah rah stuff."

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"Perhaps, the whole church side of things, maybe it can be portrayed a different way and there shouldn't have to be a big focus on church. It can be other things. You know getting involved in other ways. I remember a couple of years ago and they had Christian camps at holiday parks and we used to go away and that was... they were still doing their Christian beliefs but because it was a totally different context, everyone who went they just set up a different caravan park and there'd be all kids your age."

"It's the religion thing that turns me off, not the Christian thing."

"I mean an example is, I'm going to put my music tastes out on the table. I'm a huge Pearl Jam fan and I was surfing around and I went to a Christianity.com message board and there was a topic. Um I like Pearl Jam is it OK and the replies were unbelievable. People were saying no their music is evil. You should not listen to it, you should stop or you'll go to hell and I just couldn't I just like open minded people."

3.4 ANALYSIS OF 'CHRISTIANITY' ISSUES

The positive attributes associated with the essence of Christianity have been badly tainted by perceptions and experiences of the formalised practices of Christianity.

A major barrier to reception of any overtly Christian message is the strong link between perceptions of Christianity and perceptions of religious practices and reactions to Christian Churches. As soon as people think of Christianity they think of Christian churches, the practice of religion and the negative associations they have with churches and their hierarchies.

Further, antagonism and intolerance between different systems of religious belief and practice are seen to be major causative factors in the current levels of international violence and terrorism. Christianity is considered to be partly culpable in this regard because of what is seen as the role of those who profess Christian beliefs in these conflicts.

Christian churches were strongly associated with intolerance and lack of acceptance, things seen to be directly contradicting some of Christ's most basic messages. Perceptions of Christian churches have also been strongly affected by a number of recent public debates about the Church. This was perceived to be true of all Christian churches not just those with more fundamental or extreme views.

There was acknowledgement of the possibility of living a 'Christian' life with no association with organised practise, however *being* a 'Christian' was generally associated with church. Further there was limited acceptance of the relevance of the Bible separate to being a 'Christian' and therefore associated with the Church.

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Essentially the Church was an almost insurmountable problem for most people and it was very strongly associated with being a 'Christian' and with the Bible.

Jesus himself was to large degree separated from all of these things and tended not to necessarily evoke these powerfully negative associations. Many people indicated that they believed Jesus himself would reject the rule-bound, prescriptive, rigid and doctrinaire behaviours and attitudes that they themselves had rejected in their separation from involvement in formalised religion.

Essentially people were taking what they believed to be the essence of Christ's core values and messages and reframing them within their own humanist and somewhat secular values. This was related to the idea of being a 'good' person identified earlier. Interestingly it would appear that being 'good' in a secular humanist context is actually relatively simple – adhere to a few basic principles. Further, one can acquire additional goodness with similar ease by giving to a cause, particularly those less well off, which appeases the conscience and demonstrates that they are a good, caring and concerned person.

Another barrier relates to what the Church has to offer and for whom it might be appropriate. For most people the rigid, rule-bound and simplistic offerings of organised Christian practise would only be appropriate for people who had *failed* in their secular humanist search for satisfaction and personal fulfilment – it would be admission of failure. This means it would be seen as appropriate for those incapable of managing and achieving their own destiny or for those who were in desperate situations.

In part these attitudes were related to the idea that to be 'Christian' was to forgo independence, free thought and individual responsibility. These perceptions were compounded because Christianity was seen to be providing *the answer* in an environment where people thought that what they needed was assistance with their search. Secular humanism has encouraged a belief that the answers are all within the individual and consumerism has encouraged the belief that satisfaction and fulfilment are associated with accumulation (more enlightenment, self-awareness, possessions etc.). Organised practise of Christianity was seen to be completely counter to the path people believed was appropriate for them, however Jesus himself and the associated teaching were seen to be potentially relevant as they provided guidance and direction rather than a pre-packaged solution.

A major consequence of these issues is that the Church and to a large extent Christians are not seen as a desirable group with whom to interact. Consequently the options for 'distributing' the

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Christian message and its underlying core values to people such as those involved in this research are somewhat challenging.

3.5 COMMUNICATION ISSUES

A number of propositions were presented to focus group participants. These were included only as a basis for prompting some additional focussed discussion and were never intended to be potential messages.

In general terms the statements highlighted four issues that require consideration. These issues were:

- A generally positive response to the core issues and values contained in the statements that reflected an underlying support for some of the core values espoused in Christianity and displayed by Jesus.
- A degree of negativity associated with any claim by Christianity which could be equally claimed by another group, particularly those that could be claimed by all religions.
- A degree of negativity to any statement that seemed to imply that Christians or Christianity were somehow 'better'. This prompted comments indicating a perceived elitism that was not necessarily true and which was also considered to be counter to fundamental Christian values.
- A strongly negative response to any claim that appeared excessive or hypocritical. Of particular importance was the speed with which any claim seen to be associated with Christianity was judged against perceptions of 'real' Christian values.

Some of the statements and group participant responses to those statements are presented.

“True happiness comes from being part of a community that believes in peace, respect and helping others”

Older people

I think that's something that I'd like to be part of

Probably a start

I don't know, people who have retired and have time on their hands, and they can help each other in the community

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Yeah community work

Yeah I don't know, it looks nice in a form like that, but whether you could live in that community and, I don't know,

Get picked on by the other kids, and have your legs blown off by a land mine, and all sorts of things can make you sad, and I think happiness, true happiness comes from being content with what you've got, not matter what it is.

I think it'd definitely help, a lot of people would be a lot happier, but I don't think it's what brings true happiness

I agree with it you take the word true out.

True happiness is the one that lasts. It's, you know, you can be happy on a high, and then down and get sad, and true happiness is the one that stays.

True happiness is about your choices

And we can't be happy all the time, cos we're only human. We're going to have times when it's hard, and it doesn't matter how much money we've got, we're going have times when we're a bit down about things. Cos we're human, and that's what humans are like, they can't be happy, 100%, like every day of their life, they've got to experience hurt, and depression and sadness, cos it's part of living

Just having a loving family and friends and a partner and being financially secure, and not having to struggle with money.

Yeah that's good.

That's fine.

I think largely (it is true) yeah.

“The kids are more likely to develop sound moral values if they grow up in a Christian household”

Do for a while

Too broad.

It's more like a promotional message for a Christian?

And it's like you don't have any moral values unless you are a Christian

It's a very arrogant assumption

Yeah

Not necessarily

75% of me says yes, but the remaining 25%.....

Well I mean, I hate to sound being egotistical, but I really, I don't know, I just believe in myself a lot.

I think there are some pretty bad parents and I think there are just as many bad Christian parents as there are bad parents who have no religion or bad parents who have other religions.

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Ahm, my dad's, my mum was a Catholic, but my dad was a Christian and he's probably one of the most honest and most giving people I would ever sort of know, so I've sort of, grown up in Christian household, but I consider myself to have less moral values than other people.

No

I don't believe it though

Again it's that superiority thing that

My in-laws are Christians and there is absolutely no way that they would ever look after my kids. They go to church all the time and I just think they're evil. I do.

Agree

I think people are very suspicious, and also nervous of sending their children to the church because of all the bad things that you do hear about.

And there's reasons why people have left in droves you know?

But you don't have to be Christian to have those values I don't think.

I know people who aren't Christian. One of my best friends is Muslim and like the nicest person. Would never harm anyone else so...

“Our world would be a much nastier place if no one believed in God”

I think it would have been better if “Our world would be a much nastier place if no one believed”. Whether it's God or Buddha or anything else

It's just about belief itself and not the God part of it

I think with each, there's an attachment of, like you said before, acceptance, harmony, love, I think it preaches that in their own way, and to just say that, if you didn't believe, it would be a nasty place, well, then, no.

Yep

False

Maybe they're fighting for their God

Justifies so many controversies and things

Extremists they do what they do because they believe in God, they're very religious

Yeah, that's what their God wants them to do and their strong belief in that makes them do these things.

Yeah, well you never know, that could just be like they might be saying oh it's what God wants us to do, but it might just be a cover up,

Whose God? What God?

Not necessarily.

I don't agree.

It's (war) all about money and land and stuff. It's not really about which God you believe in.

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“People who share Christian faith and values can always rely on each other for support”

It is right but I mean it's too full on with the Christian thing you know. I mean it doesn't mean you can't rely on other people

Its sort of separated into us and themish sort of thing?

No

I think ahm, there are some people I know who have really strong Christian values, like priests and things like this, at least I knew when I was younger, and was very much into Christian beliefs and I felt that I could go to a church if I was in a desperate times and ask, for whatever help was reasonable, and I thought I'd get it, but I definitely couldn't ask just anyone, with Christian values

To a certain degree, I don't know, it's pretty valid stuff.

Just because people have the Christian faith doesn't mean that they follow it.

Lots of people go to church and they're racist and hypocritical.

I think that's an absolute statement too. Words like always and you know it's too extreme.

I think it needs to be something directly that makes you think without any of the Christian and this and that. Like that first one made me think without the Christian.

“People who believe in Christianity have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their lives”

That started the war, you know,

So again, it's us and themish, it's saying one group of people are better than another group of people and yeah.

It's an opinion

I think for me it has some, maybe some, again, I wouldn't be saying that out loud, too loud

“People who believe have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their lives”

It sort of gives you a goal

Sort of aiming towards something

I would have to agree with that

Like you need something without Christianity, like you need something, like believing.

What do they believe in.

I like that one

Greater than who

Great not greater..... Yeah, just take that out, there's too many connotations, yeah

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I know lots who don't

I agree with that too, but I don't think all Christians have that meaning and purpose cos I mean we're only human and sometimes that's too hard for us

“Christian beliefs are what underpin Australian ideals like respect, fairness and helping others”

I like that one

That helps but it's not it

Maybe in the old days. I think it's changed.

Everything, respect, fairness and helping others, it's not there any more

I think the helping others still exists

Not as much

Always in times of need

It's sort of saying Christian beliefs are, like Australia's beliefs, and I just feel ahm, yeah, Australian beliefs are all wrong

Ahm I think they were, but I've noticed a big difference. I mean I've been overseas, travelling around the world, and I've noticed a big difference between, especially Europe, some countries in Europe and Australia. I'm wondering whether there's more respect over there

Nah

Half half, I sort of think

The Anglo Saxon community, I agree, but a lot of Asian families, nah, Christian ideals, while it might seemingly be a reflective of Christian ideals but that's not the product of you know, other religious beliefs

Yeah, I don't think that Christian beliefs underpin those ideals, I think those ideals are what any Australian has regardless of their religion and I think they're kind of a, very much a media fostered, we are one, we are many kind of mate-ship ideal, and it's a very Australian thing but it doesn't have anything to do with Christianity.

Well um, I think that's what Christianity wants, they like respect and helping, but it's not necessarily those sort of things that are directly linked to Christianity like those sort of things perhaps can link to um, other faith, for example, other religions and um, those sort of things can also be linked to people that aren't Christian, they're not anything, but they're sort of, maybe just, I don't know, they believe just in other things apart from an actual religion.

You can also change the first two words to Core Values, are what underpin Australian ideals

I think, but what if you're not Christian?

It's seems excluding all

Like we're a multicultural society.

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There's a church on the corner of Warrigal road and Princess Highway and they always have things like this. And they always have funny ones. Some of them are really good and I always look at it.

It just makes me think, but what if you're not Christian? It seems all excluding.

"You don't have to be Christian to have those values."

"Being a Christian is believing that love and respect are the most important things in life"

Don't agree?

No, I don't know.

Like it's just trying to cover a broad thing, you know, being a Christian is like they're trying to be in this sort of circle,

Yeah, it's not the most important, but it's important

I agree

Isn't God meant to be the most important thing in life if you're a Christian?

Yeah, I agree with that

Oh it's just, oh well I don't know about love and respect being the two most important things... there might be other more important things

And family.

It's not only Christians that can believe that love and respect are the most important things in your life.

I just thought oh that's nice.

I think that's a bit of a motherhood sort of a statement, oh that's nice.

What about believing that love respect are the most important things in life. If you took away a Christian, and put Human being....

Because I feel like I — it (Christian) cheapens the whole thing. Um I feel like I'm having something done to me you know rather than it just being

As soon as you feel it's a religious thing then yeah I tune out too.

Love and respect are the most important things in life, if I just suddenly read that and there was nothing else (no Christian branding) it would make me think about it.

"If people have more self esteem. Like you know how Buddhism's really in, well it's because people are looking within themselves rather than to an idol. They're sort of turning within and then it ripples onto the community whereas I find that Christianity sometimes pushes the community first and you always last. Sort of the martyrdom."

"It's not only Christians that can believe love and respect are the most important things in your life."

"As soon as you feel it's a religious thing, you tune out."

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3.6 COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In order for a message to attract people to Christian objectives, it would need to distance itself from any association with church or with the practice of religion. This could be achieved either directly or indirectly.

To indirectly address the barrier presented by the association with Christian churches and religious practices it may be necessary to avoid the term 'Christian' or 'Christianity' and possibly reference to the Bible.

To directly address the barrier presented by the association with Christian churches and religious practices it would be necessary to either change perceptions of the churches or overtly claim that the message is distinct from the church.

Changing people's perceptions of the church is likely to require a clear demonstration of evidence that the churches and their leaders have changed. In the longer term these perceptions could be changed by providing substantial new interaction channels that linked directly to underlying concerns of key groups.

There are a number of issues associated with the focus of secular humanism and the adoption of core Christian values within a secular humanist framework.

One of these is the perception people have that they are 'good' people as defined by the principles espoused by Christ. This belief was typically founded on the Christian principles that people had learned growing up in a Christian household; however this was not something that they continued to re-examine, that is they did not check that the way they now lived was still consistent with those foundation principles. While there was some low-level nagging doubt about whether the way in which they lived was 'good' it was not really questioned. In the longer term it may well be necessary to get people to question this – possibly by directly challenging their belief that they are good.

Another potential issue relates to the inwardly focussed orientation of a secular humanist approach to satisfaction and fulfilment. There is a potential challenge to encourage people to question the idea that an inward focus will deliver the satisfaction and fulfilment that they seek.

At a fundamental level much of the competition faced by Christian faith relates to the attractiveness of very self-centred / self-focussed alternatives – both secular and religious.

Report of research findings

Consumerism and its spiritual partner secular humanism along with some of the emerging popular religious alternatives such as Buddhism and Yoga are very focussed on delivering personal benefits. Further they offer these benefits while supporting a focus on the selfish needs and wants of the individual. Essentially these benefits are the positive feelings experienced by the individual that are associated with satisfaction and fulfilment.

Some of the core values and positive attributes associated with Christianity such as acceptance, tolerance, respect and forgiveness are related to social interactions. The benefit of these values was being accepted, tolerated, respected and forgiven and in this sense they were not seen to be self-focussed – that is the immediate recipient of the benefit was not seen to be the person living by those values.

3.7 POSSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS OPPORTUNITIES

A core challenge is to link the desire for internally focussed sources of satisfaction and fulfilment with the strong positive attributes associated with the teachings of Jesus that are currently primarily seen to be directed towards interactions with others.

Messages to prompt consideration of the relevance of Christianity in people's lives would need to meet the following criteria:

- Focus on the benefits of Christianity in providing for personal growth.
- Show how Christianity can help address the issues of personal concern in people's lives, such as reducing stress, helping to provide balance in life, creating a positive sense of self.

However, at the same time as offering such personal growth opportunities, it would be important to ensure that the messages were not regarded as promoting individualism at the expense of the care and compassion for others that is regarded as central to Christianity.

The information that people would need to become engaged with such a message would be information that linked the messages of Jesus to personal growth and fulfilment.

The credibility of such messages would be enhanced by distancing the message from association with any of the mainstream Christian churches.

Some ideas for possible approaches that have emerged thus far include:

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Problem	Call to Action	Benefit
Too many options	Focus	Happy with choices
Who can I trust	Articulate values	Trust
Lack of neighbourhood	Celebrate shared values	Belonging
Always wanting more	Perfect your relationship	Content with what you have
How to teach respect	Live with / by respect	Knowing you are doing right
Want to feel satisfied / content	Help someone	Know you are a good person / Support idea you are well off

4 ATTACHMENT ONE – DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

Nature of the discussion guide

This guide is meant to be both a record of all the issues to be covered with participants and an aid for the moderator in conducting the research.

The topics fall naturally into a few main areas. It should be remembered that the natural ebb and flow of discussion means that each issue may not be covered in the order in which it appears here. The discussion guide should be considered as an indication of the topic areas to be covered in the research. It is not necessarily our intention that each of the questions will be asked in each group in the order or with the same wording as is used in this document.

Market Access employs a responsive approach to research, where a level of flexibility is employed in the conduct of each interview to allow us to take account of participant reactions and issues. In certain instances issues emerge in the course of an interview that are clearly of greater importance than those predicted and presented herein. In such instances it is both desirable and preferable that these emergent issues are pursued, sometimes at the expense of issues identified in this document.

In this regard, the groups may also differ in the order in which issues are discussed. This “counterbalancing” is used to allow for the fact that presentation of one topic can bias respondents in regard to a subsequent topic.

Report of research findings

Introduce researchers. Explain research parameters: duration, what the group will cover (“we’re here to talk about beliefs and philosophies”). Honest opinions and dissent OK, recording, observation, confidentiality details, refreshment and previous market research.

Introduction

Ask participants to introduce themselves to the group, explaining:

- First name; Family / living situation; what they do (work, social, activities, interests).

Values

- What do you think is good / bad about our world today?
- What is missing? What do you hope changes over the next few years?
- What would you say are the main values you live by? Why those? How did you come to those?
- Who else lives by those values? What would the world be like if we all lived by those values?
- What does “belonging” mean to you? How would it be if you felt you belonged? What would be different?
- Other concepts to prompt: safety, security, certainty, love, self-esteem, morality?
- In the context of (leaving parental nest / starting family) what values are important to you?
- What are you afraid of? What do you hope for? What gives you satisfaction?

Belief background

- What sort of beliefs were you brought up with?
- How active were you / was your family in practising those beliefs?
- What has happened since then?
- Was there a time when your beliefs changed? When? How? Why? Who? Prompt to change?
- What other people, times or events have prompted you to think about your beliefs?

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- How do you describe your current beliefs?
- Can you imagine any times / events in the future that would prompt you to re-think your beliefs?
- Christianity
- What do you think it means to be Christian? What do you have to do / think / feel / believe / behave?
- What would you say are Christian values? Why? Why Christian? Are they different to others? How?
- What do you like / dislike about Christian values? Why?
- If Jesus was around today, what would he be saying / doing?
- What does Christianity say to you in relation to: safety, security, certainty, love, belonging, and self-esteem.?
- What are the things (behaviours / beliefs / values) about involvement in Christianity that are appealing? Why?
- What are the things about involvement in Christianity that you find a bit of a turn off? Why?
- Are there particular aspects of Christian beliefs and practices that discourage you from being involved?

What's in it for me?

- What would you say might be the advantages of being involved in Christianity? Disadvantages?
- What do you think you might get out of it?
- What would be the advantages of being involved in a Christian group? Disadvantages?
- Do you think there might be anything about the group involvement that would be good for you?
- How would being a Christian affect your sense of safety & security?
- How would being a Christian affect your sense of belonging to a community?

Report of research findings

- How would being a Christian affect your sense of self-esteem?
- How would being a Christian affect your experience and expression of love?

The information I need?

- What information would you need to prompt you to think about your involvement in Christianity?
- What could someone tell you that would leave you thinking, 'maybe I should reconsider my beliefs'?

Word of mouth?

- Can you imagine anyone telling you something that would encourage you to consider your views?
- Why would that encourage you?
- Can you imagine anything ever being in the news or in a magazine that would prompt you to consider your views? What would it be? Why would that prompt you?

Credibility?

- What would convince you that the Christian message was true?
- What sort of claims would leave you doubting the message?

Propositions?

- What do you think of each of the following statements? Meaning? Credibility? Feel about?
- Being a Christian means believing that love and respect are the most important things in life.
- You don't have to go to church to live as a Christian.
- Christian beliefs are what underpins Australian ideals like respect, fairness and helping others.
- People who believe in Christianity have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.
- People who share Christian faith and values can always rely on each other for support.

Report of research findings

- Our world would be a much nastier place if no-one believed in God.
- Kids are more likely to develop sound moral values if they grow up in a Christian household.
- True happiness comes from being part of a community that believes in peace, respect and helping others.