The sociology of religion has been a moderately strong theme in Australian sociology. Most Australian sociologists of religion have been trained in Australia with a smattering of those trained in the USA, the UK or elsewhere. While Christian churches once maintained research offices including sociologists and some seminaries once included the sociology of religion in their offerings, this is no longer so. Other religious groups have not yet grown to such strength that the support of their own research sections has been possible, but several have actively funded research—including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Scientologists.

The Christian Research Association, founded in the mid-1980s, is the only independent research organization in Australia devoted to the sociology of religion. While largely funded by church organizations, it also receives government grants and has maintained its independence of religious organizations. The National Church Life Survey group, which also commenced work in the mid-1980s, conducts a nation-wide survey of church attenders every five years at the time of the Australian census (e.g. Kaldor et al. 1994, 1999). Their time-series data on Australian Catholics are excellent, being gathered according to random selection techniques. The NCLS also provides five-yearly reports on Protestants and Anglicans and other studies of congregational life in Australia. There are no systematic data sources on the Orthodox, who comprise three percent of the national population and six percent of the population in Melbourne.

Sociologists of religion participate in multi-discipline research centers in universities, such as The Global Terrorism Research Centre at Monash University, the Religion and Society Research Centre at The University of Western Sydney, Religion and Religious Studies at the University of Newcastle, The Centre for Christianity and Culture at Charles Sturt University, and The Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. Recently The Australian Catholic University has renewed its interest in the sociology of religion through the establishment of a new research center in the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology under the direction of Bryan Turner.

Sociologists of religion have played a prominent role in the Australian Association for the Study of Religion, including editing the Association's Journal for...
the Academic Study of Religion (JASR), formerly the Australian Religion Studies Review. Anna Halafoff and Douglas Ezzy, the JASR’s current editors, also recently established a Sociology of Religion Thematic Group within The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) in 2011. The TASA 2013 directory lists 48 members who declare an interest in the sociology of religion. This group seeks to create a community of Australian scholars to analyze the role of religion in both Australian and global life, share research findings, encourage the development of emerging scholars, strengthen the discipline of sociology of religion in Australia, and contribute to public policy where necessary (http://www.tasa.org.au/thematic-groups/groups/sociology-of-religion/). Moreover, Australian sociologists of religion increasingly participate in international research collaborations and networks and hold leadership positions in international sociology of religion associations. Adam Possamai was recently the President of the International Sociological Associations, RC22 Research Committee on Sociology of Religion, and Gary Bouma is an elected Council member of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion 2007–2015.

The sociology of religion in Australia has gone through three phases roughly comparable to the phases through which sociology in general has progressed: Prior to 1985, 1985–2000 and post-2000. Raewyn Connell (2007) describes these transitions for Antipodean sociology. This history will recount the significant sociology of religion researchers and issues for each phase.

Prior to 1985—Australia through American and European Lenses

The key sociologists of religion in this period include J.J. (Hans) Mol, Mike Mason, John Bodycomb, Norman Blaikie, Rowan Ireland, and Ken Dempsey. For a thorough review of Australian sociology of religion to this point see Mason and Fitzpatrick (1982). Hans Mol set the tone and put the sociology of religion in Australia on the map with his books Religion in Australia (1971) and The Faith of Australians (1985), which were the first authoritative texts on this subject. Born in the Netherlands, trained at Columbia University and Union Seminary, Hans was one of the many theologically trained sociologists of religion. Mol typifies the way that national sociologies were emerging in former colonies at that time: basically applied paradigms usually developed in the United States or the United Kingdom to other countries and especially to colonial and developing post-colonial societies.

Australia is a former British penal colony where the Anglican Church was part of a more general system of social control. With growing Irish migration in the late nineteenth century, there was increasing competition between Angli-