



The RISE of the PENTECOSTALS

A fascinating new book by a Sydney author dissects one of Christianity's fastest-growing movements

■ Adam Wesselinoff

For Catholics, Pentecostalist Christianity means something different for each generation. It first hit the Australian scene in a big way during the 1959 Billy Graham Bible Crusade, which filled Australia's cricket stadiums with an estimated 3 million people, a third of the country's population at the time.

Through the latter decades of the 20th century Charismatic groups influenced by Pentecostalism became popular in Australia, with practices like "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" and speaking in tongues entering Catholic spirituality.

The Presidency of George W. Bush saw evangelical Pentecostalism become a byword for the US Republican Party, culture war, and American support for war in the Middle East. Bush famously claimed prior to his run for President that, "I feel like God wants me to run for president. I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me."

Young Australian Catholics today may well have a friend in Hillsong or Christian City Church (C3). They're probably singing Hillsong's "Shout to the Lord" or "What a Beau-



Prime Minister Scott Morrison and wife Jenny sing during an Easter Sunday service at his Pentecostal Horizon Church at Sutherland in Sydney.

PHOTO: AAP IMAGE/MICK TSIKAS

tiful Name" instead of "One Bread, One Body" in their youth group. There's a good chance they're slightly jealous of the dynamic Christian lives of their Pentecostal counterparts.

Then, of course, there's

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has come under scrutiny for his statements about having been anointed by God to become PM, and his chummy relationship with Hillsong pastors - including Brian Houston, who stepped

down this week facing charges of concealing his father's abuse of a young man in the 1970s.

According to Elle Hardy, the author of *Beyond Belief: How Pentecostal Christianity is Taking Over the World*, the



Catholicism is seen as quite bureaucratic, Pentecostalism is felt to be local. It's not a priest who has been educated in Spain, or Portugal, and dropped into your little corner on the edge of the Amazon."

Elle Hardy

face of charismatic Christianity in Australia is a working class migrant, not a celebrity pastor with a guitar and a low-cut t-shirt.

"It's the Filipino woman who does domestic work. It's the Pacific Islander player for Penrith that you cheer on every weekend. It's refugees from all over Africa," Hardy told *The Catholic Weekly*.

"It's so diverse and multicultural and often quite young. People don't see it. They think Pentecostalism and any form of evangelical religion is a red-faced, Jerry Falwell type. It's much more like a Tony Robbins seminar."

The Pentecostal phenomenon in Australia today is not just the gargantuan, feel-good Hillsong "concerts" that make headlines. The big ticket events are matched by a sophisticated network of social support micro-tailored to the needs of individual con-

gregants. For working families in Australia, Pentecostal churches might offer childcare, after school activities, and youth groups; refugees and prisoners completing their sentences find themselves swept into the embrace of support groups; social justice-minded Pentecostals have outreach and mission opportunities provided to them.

Established churches might be slow to respond to parishioners' disillusionment with Christian life - especially during the last few years of COVID-19 stress.

But Pentecostals' entrepreneurial mindset and networking skills means there is always someone to keep those fading out, from dropping out. This might be more or less benign - ranging from genuine concern to the threat of ostracism from social groups.

Pentecostal organisational success is partly due to the