

## GLOBALIZATION AND RECENT CHANGES IN THE DEMOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS GROUPS: 1947 to 2001

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*Globalization along with the events of September 11 2001 and the bombings in Bali have focussed attention on religion. In a context where knowing the demography of religious groups has become critical, Australia's five yearly censuses include a question about religious identification providing a moving snap shot of Australia's changing religious profile. Changes from 1947 to 2001 are the product of a decline in identifications with mainline Protestant groups, and the rise of Catholics, the Orthodox, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus. Much of the change can be attributed to various forms of globalization — the migration of religious persons, groups and ideas.*

In the past two decades many societies have become aware that their religious composition has undergone profound change as the global movement of people, ideas and religions re-shapes religious and spiritual life. The events of September 11, 2001, and the recent bombing in Bali have intensified interest in the religious composition of societies and regions. But disputes tend to arise as to the numbers associated with particular groups. Counting religious adherents is a fraught exercise. Is the focus to be on self-identification, or membership, or extent of participation, or intensity of belief, or commitment, or what? The reliability and comparability of official organizational statistics provided by religious groups pose major problems.

In the face of these problems, Australia is fortunate to be one of a few societies to conduct a census including a question about religious identity and to do so every five years. This provides a highly detailed picture of the religious composition of Australia at five yearly intervals.<sup>1</sup> In addition to providing a picture of the religious profile of Australia, the religious composition of smaller geographic units can be compared.<sup>2</sup> While religious identification tells us nothing about a person's religious belief, participation, or practice, religious

identification has been shown to correlate with many other variables.<sup>3</sup>

### RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION SINCE 1947

The relative strength of Australian religious groups has changed substantially since 1947. From 1850 to 1947 the pattern of distribution was quite stable. Throughout this period Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists together comprised 60 per cent of the population, dominating Australian religious life. Through this time Anglicans were largely of 'low' and 'broad' church persuasion with a few country dioceses maintaining an Anglo-Catholic orientation. The general religious tone of Australia was of a profoundly English Protestant establishment, characterized by rational teaching and preaching, and focussed worship laced with occasional revival activities. Catholics were a substantial minority — about 20 per cent — but less respected on account of their Irish origins and according to the dry rationalist English Protestant establishment, their irrational and superstitious nature. This criticism stemmed from their focus on the sacraments and greater use of visual imagery.

Since 1947 the pattern of Australian's religious identification and religious cultures has changed radically. Table One

**Table 1: The size and proportion of selected Australian religious groups in the 1947, 1971, 1996 and 2001 Censuses.**

Religious Identification*	1947		1971		1996		2001	
	'000s	%	'000s	%	'000s	%	'000s	%
<b>CHRISTIAN</b>								
Anglican	2,957	39.0	3,953	31.0	3,903	22.0	3,881	20.7
Baptist	114	1.5	176	1.4	295	1.7	309	1.7
Catholic	1,570	20.7	3,443	27.0	4,799	27.0	5,002	26.7
Lutheran	67	0.9	197	1.5	250	1.4	250	1.3
MPCRU**	1,678	22.1	2,199	17.2	2,011	11.3	1,887	10.1
Orthodox	17	0.2	339	2.7	497	2.8	529	2.8
Pentecostal	--	--	--	--	175	1.0	195	1.0
OCG***	270	3.8	683	5.4	653	4.4	711	3.7
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>6,673</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>10,990</b>	<b>86.2</b>	<b>12,583</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>12,764</b>	<b>68.0</b>
<b>BUDDHISTS</b>	--	--	--	--	200	1.1	358	1.9
<b>HINDUS</b>	--	--	--	--	67	0.4	95	0.5
<b>JEWS</b>	32	0.4	62	0.5	80	0.5	84	0.4
<b>MUSLIMS</b>	--	--	22	0.2	201	1.1	282	1.5
<b>OTHER</b>	4	0.1	14	0.1	69	0.4	92	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>4.8</b>
<b>Inadequate desc</b>	19	0.2	29	0.2	54	0.3	352	1.9
<b>No Religion</b>	26	0.3	856	6.7	2,949	16.5	2,905	15.5
<b>Not Stated</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>1,551</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>1,836</b>	<b>9.8</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>7,579</b>		<b>12,756</b>		<b>17,753</b>		<b>18,769</b>	

\* Only those Christian groups larger than one per cent and other groups 0.4 per cent and larger in 2001 have been included

\*\* MPCRU combines the data for the Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed and Uniting Churches. The Uniting Church was formed in 1977 in a merger of Congregational, Methodist and about half of the Presbyterians.

\*\*\* OCG - Other Christian Groups less than one per cent

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

presents demographic data showing changes in the numbers of selected religious groups in selected censuses from 1947 to 2001. There has been a significant rise in religious diversity reflecting a decline in the hegemonic power of the Protestant establishment to shape Australians' religious culture.

For the first time, it now takes three religious groups to make up 50 per cent of the population. Other indicators of increased diversity and the decline of the English Protestant hegemony are that, as

of the 2001 census (see Table 2), there were more Scientologists (2,032) than Quakers (1,782), more Muslims (281,578 and 1.5 per cent) than Lutherans (250,365 and 1.33 per cent), more Buddhists (1.9 per cent) than Baptists (1.7 per cent), more Hindus (0.51 per cent) than Salvationists (0.38 per cent), and more witches (8,755 and 0.05 per cent) than Humanists (5,041 and 0.03 per cent). Further indicators of increased religious diversity include the facts that there are about the same number of Jehovah's

Witnesses (81,069) as Jews (83,993) and about the same number of Mormons (48,776) as Seventh Day Adventists (53,844). Atheism also grew, with the numbers identifying as such rising from 7,469 in 1996 to 24,464 in 2001.

#### ACCOUNTING FOR THE CHANGES

Four primary factors have changed Australia's religious and spiritual life from the pattern evident in the 1947 census. The first two factors are a global shift from a rational and verbal form of Christianity to a more experiential and feeling oriented form<sup>4</sup> and the global impact of secularization.<sup>5</sup> These lie behind the decline in the Protestant denominations by essentially 50 per cent to where they now constitute only 33 per cent of the Australian population. The mainstream Protestant decline is greater than it first appears because in 2001 Anglicans were much more sacramentally oriented and less 'Protestant' than they were in 1947. Those who have retained a 'Protestant' orientation do not express it in the ways commonly found in 1947, but rather in ways that are often laced with Charismatic influences. Moreover, many Australians who once would have put down Church of England, or some other Protestant group on their census form now say 'no religion'.<sup>6</sup> The result is that this latter category has risen from 0.3 per cent in 1947 to 16.5 per cent in 1996.

From the mid-sixties this decline has been attributed to the rise of secularization, but more on that later. Another element in the decline of the English Protestant hegemony has been the rise of Pentecostal Christian groups from virtual non-existence in 1947 to over one per cent in 2002. They represent in part a backlash against the dry rationality characteristic of mid-20th century English Protestant Christianity

and the growing demand for experiential spiritualities and religious expression. Thus the global rise of secularism on the one hand and of the demand for experiential forms of religious life on the other have undermined the former hegemony and appeal of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Uniting and Anglican churches.

The third factor changing Australia's religious profile has been the global movement of religious groups to Australia through migration. Initial waves of post-war migration fed growth in the English Protestant groups as well as strengthening Catholic representation. However, the growth in the numbers of English Protestants due to migration reached its peak by 1960, from which time the number of English Protestants began to decline both as a proportion of the Australian population and in absolute numbers. The net effect of migration has been to reduce the English hegemony and increase religious diversity among Christian groups.

While English Protestantism has declined, other religious groups have increased in strength, including some new groups which have grown substantially. Immediate post-war migration saw the numbers of Jews increase. In the case of Dutch migrants, some strengthened and diversified Catholic parishes and others founded the Reformed Churches in Australia. In the 1950s and 1960s Greek migrants massively expanded the presence of Orthodox churches. They were followed by Turks, Lebanese and Egyptians who established significant Islamic institutions and communities. From the late 1970s the Vietnamese arrived and established Buddhist Temples. From the 1980s increasing numbers from India and other birthplaces have established a significant Hindu presence.

Moreover, each of these religious groups is also supported by migrants from a wide range of birthplaces. For example, Australian Muslims come from over 60 birthplaces — Lebanon (13.5 per cent), Turkey (11.1 per cent), Indonesia (3.5 per cent), Bosnia (3.3 per cent), Iran (2.6 per cent), and Fiji (2.2 per cent).<sup>7</sup> There are also Russian (18,507), Romanian (1,471), Macedonian (53,244), Serbian (42,404) and Ukrainian (3,136) other national Orthodox Churches in addition to the Greek Orthodox (364,462), to say nothing of Oriental Christians — Coptic Orthodox (17,913), Armenian Apostolic Church (7,849) and Assyrian Church (5,712); and Australian Buddhists represent many birthplaces in addition to Vietnam, including Cambodia, Taiwan, Japan, Tibet and China.

The fourth factor changing Australia's religious and spiritual life has been the global movement of religious ideas and practices represented in the emergence of new religious groups and spiritualities. These have been spread largely through conversion, or the adoption of teachings and practices brought to Australia, not by migration of persons, but through the globalization of religious and spiritual practices. These changes are evident in the data presented in Table Two.

One of the most influential of these conversion-based changes has been the growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Christianity. Not only have Pentecostals risen to just over one per cent of the population, Pentecostal-style religious belief and practice also figure prominently in the rapidly growing category of 'other Christian' which grew by 28 per cent from 1996 to 2001 to attract the identification of 1.72 per cent of Australians. Moreover, no Christian denomination has been untouched by this experiential, enthusiastic and musically

energetic movement. Their style has been adopted whole heartedly by some, resisted by others and is an influence in nearly all.

In addition to the rise of Pentecostal Christianity, the adoption by Australians of other largely imported religious teachings and practices has led to the rise of such groups as 'new age', Earth-based religions like Gaia, Goddess religions, and Witchcraft. Paganism has grown vigorously from 1996 to 2001. The numbers identifying with Wicca/Witchcraft grew from 1,849 to 8,755; Paganism grew from 4,353 to 10,632; and spiritualism increased from 8,141 to 9,279. If the 'nature religions' cluster of religious groups (see Table 2) is added together we get a total of over 39,000 or 0.22 per cent of Australians. These religions also tend to be less formal and not quite so hierarchical or patriarchal, making them more appealing to women. They are also disproportionately female. Spiritualities of choice as opposed to religions of birth are growing substantially in Australia.

This pattern of an increase in religious identifications of choice is further attested by the fact that the rapid expansion in the number of Buddhists cannot be accounted for by migration. Part of this increase can be attributed to the fact that this was the first census in which Buddhists had a 'tick box' along with other religious groups over one per cent. However, this was also true for Muslims who did not show such a dramatic increase. An additional factor influencing the rapid rise of Buddhist identifications may be the fact that the Dalai Lama had made a highly publicized visit to Australia in the months immediately before the census was taken. Moreover, the 'nones' — those declaring that they have 'no religion' — have **decreased** in

**Table Two: Changes in Australia's Religious Profile 1996-2001 —more detail**

Religious Identification	1996 '000s	1996 %	2001 '000s	2001 %	96-01 growth rate
<b>CHRISTIAN*</b>					
Anglican	3,903	22.0	3,881	20.7	-0.6
Baptist	295	1.7	309	1.7	4.8
Brethren	22	0.1	19	0.1	-12.3
Catholic	4,799	27.0	5,002	26.7	4.2
Churches of Christ	75	0.4	61	0.3	-18.3
Jehovah's Witnesses	83	0.5	81	0.4	-2.8
Latter Day Saints	45	0.3	50	0.3	10.7
Lutheran	250	1.4	250	1.3	0.2
Oriental Christian	31	0.2	36	0.2	15.9
Orthodox	497	2.8	529	2.8	6.5
Pentecostal	175	1.0	195	1.0	11.4
Presbyterian/Reformed	676	3.8	638	3.4	-5.6
Salvation Army	74	0.4	71	0.4	-3.7
Seventh Day Adventist	53	0.3	54	0.3	2.3
Uniting	1,335	7.5	1,249	6.7	-6.5
Other Christian	253	1.4	324	1.7	28.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,583</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>12,764</b>	<b>68.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>BUDDHISTS</b>	200	1.1	358	1.9	79.1
<b>HINDUS</b>	67	0.4	95	0.5	41.9
<b>JEWS</b>	80	0.5	84	0.5	5.3
<b>MUSLIMS</b>	201	1.1	282	1.5	40.2
<b>OTHER</b>	69	0.4	92	0.5	33.3
<b>Aboriginal Traditional Rel</b>			5	0.0	
<b>Baha'i</b>			11	0.1	
<b>Chinese religions</b>			4	0.0	
<b>Druse</b>			2	0.0	
<b>Japanese religions</b>			1	0.0	
<b>Nature religions</b>			39	0.2	
<i>Paganism</i>			11	0.1	
<i>Wicca/witchcraft</i>			9	0.1	
<b>Rastafarianism</b>			1	0.0	
<b>Satanism</b>			2	0.0	
<b>Scientology</b>			2	0.0	
<b>Sikhism</b>			17	0.1	
<b>Spiritualism</b>			9	0.1	
<b>Theism</b>			3	0.0	
<b>Zoroastrians</b>			2	0.0	
<b>NO RELIGION</b>	2,949	16.5	2,905	15.5	-1.5
<b>NOT STATED</b>	1,551	8.7	1,836	9.8	18.4
<b>INADEQUATE DESCR</b>	54	0.3	352	1.9	551.9
<b>JEDI</b>			71	0.4	
<b>National Population</b>	<b>17,753</b>		<b>18,769</b>		<b>5.7</b>

\* Groups one per cent and over

\*\* Selected groups

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

both absolute numbers and percentage of the population for the first time since

1947. In addition there has been a rise of responses not readily categorized —

reported in the category 'religious belief inadequately described'. It is possible to see this as evidence that Australia remains a spiritual society, but that Australian spirituality is less likely to find its expression in formally organized Christian groups.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics informs me that the 'line counts' reflect a dramatic increase in people putting down something 'spiritual' but that cannot be coded to a particular group.<sup>8</sup> The appearance of 71,000 Australians indicating that their religious identification is Jedi — from the series of Star Wars movies featuring an epic struggle between good and evil in which 'The Force' sustains the Jedi warriors fighting for good — is another clue. While some will see this as a frivolous response, so large a number requires further analysis. By the way, Jedists were nearly as numerous as were those who identified with the Churches of Christ. These phenomena suggest not so much that people do not take the census seriously as that they are responding in unconventional ways to questions about religious identification.

This pattern of response to a question on religious identity resonates well with the understanding that a secular postmodern society is not anti-religious or even irreligious,<sup>9</sup> but one where the religious and spiritual is less under the control of religious organizations. This reflects the postmodern sentiment, 'I

believe but do not belong'.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that these data were collected in August 2001, that is before both September 11 and the public outcry over the way the churches have handled child sexual abuse by clergy.

## CONCLUSION

Responses to the 'religion' question in the 2001 Australian census provide evidence of continued decline in English Protestant groups and further increases in Australia's religious diversity. This is especially evident in the growth to well over one per cent of the population of Muslims and Buddhists along with significant increases in Hindus. Moreover, the enormous increase in the numbers offering a wide range of responses that indicate some form of spirituality — 'other religions', 'religious belief not further defined' — is precisely in keeping with what would be expected in a postmodern, secular and multicultural society. While this is consistent with current theories on religious identity in secular, postmodern societies, more research is required to establish which explanations are correct.

## NOTE

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