

# Religion essays - diversity of religious cultures



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## **The impact of immigration greatly affected the diversity of religious cultures and traditions in Australia**

The impact of immigration greatly affected the diversity of religious cultures and traditions in Australia. It dramatically increased in some groups and causes a decline in others, because of the introduction of new denominations. Before 1945, Australia was predominantly a Christian based society, lacking diversity. The impact amidst the Second World War led to an increase in the Orthodox churches and several branches of Christianity. The abolishment of the White Australian Policy (1970's) meant that Australia was freely open to various peoples from other countries seeking migration to Australia. As a result of this more Africans, Asians and Middle Easterns were able to migrate, most of which brought new religious denominations such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc.

Prior to 1945, Australia's religious landscape was mostly dominated by Christians- mostly Catholics and Anglicans. Even within Christians, Anglicans dominated more in numbers as they were supported by the government and held some social authority. However, the aftermath of WW2 with the refugees seeking new lives enabled Jews to come to Australia- which contributed in increasing the number of Jewish adherents in Australia. Also, the slogan 'populate or perish' in the 50s- 60s enabled other Europeans to immigrate to Australia, hence increasing the number of Orthodox Christians. Although since 1945, Christianity still outnumbered other religions in Australia, the drop of the White Australian Policy in the early 70s allowed immigration from non- Christian countries such as: Asia, India, Africa and Middle East- bringing religions Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam into Australia.

This not only shapes the current religious landscape of Australia having diverse religions other than Christianity, but also effected the rate of Christianity to drop to 67. 9% out of the whole population of Australia.

Changing patterns of religious adherence - 20 percent of Australians are non religious - From 1996-2001 -> dramatic increase in Islam, Buddhism, Hindu and Judaism - Due to the abolishment of the white Australian policy immigration increased. - After 1976 the Methodist church ceased to exist. - After 1976 the two new Christian denominations arose in Australia -> Pentecostal church & the uniting church in 1981. Christianity as the major religious tradition - Originally migration came from Irland / Britain

Immigration - 14 orthodox denominations in Australia - Abolishment of white Australian policy. Denominational switching - Within protestant or Anglican denominations people are very prepared two switch denominations. - 1991 the church life survey shows that 29% of people had switched in the last 5 years. - Reasons for switching is because; New comers joining or rejoining after a number of years. Rise of new age religions: - New Age teachings became popular during the 1970's - Often use mutually exclusive definitions for some of their terms - A free-flowing spiritual movement

Secularism: the belief that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country. - from 1788 to the present day, regular church attendance has increased from 10% to 20%. - People who associate themselves with no-religion in the census rose from 7% in 1971 to 16% in 2001. - The ANU survey showed 42% of responses believed religion was not important.

## Outline changing patterns of religious adherence from 1945 to the present using census data

- There have been significant declines in the number of Christians regularly attending religious services.
- This decline is most evident in the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Uniting Church.
- The drop in the figures for these three denominations represents both a decrease in the percentage of those who are affiliated with that denomination as well as a decline in actual numbers over the last decade.
- The proportion of Orthodox Christians in Australia grew rapidly after the Second World War and has remained quite constant over the past decade.
- Roman Catholics have continued to increase both numerically and as a percentage of the population, and have overtaken Anglicans as the largest denomination in Australia.
- Pentecostal figures have demonstrated strong growth both numerically and as a percentage of the population since the 1960s.
- In the last ten years however, this steep ascent appears to have slowed down and reached a plateau.
- The significant drop in the numbers of people regularly attending religious services should be read in conjunction with the substantial trend in the increasing numbers of people writing “ No Religion” or “ Religion Not Stated” in the census.

- The figure for religions other than Christianity, on the whole, appears to be steadily increasing from a fairly small base.
- Buddhist figures have grown at a steady rate from 1972 onwards and is now the largest religion other than Christianity in Australia.
- Hinduism has maintained steady growth.
- The numbers of Muslims in Australia have also increased dramatically since 1945.
- In 2001 the proportion of Jews was similar to that recorded in 1947.

#### Christianity as the major religious tradition

- The significant decline in the number of Christians regularly attending religious services, especially in the Anglican, Uniting Church and Presbyterian denominations, can be attributed to the aging population, the lack of migrant intake and the general dissatisfaction impacting on other mainstream Christian groups.
- Roman Catholics are continuing to increase numerically, though not at the rate of the population because of its younger membership and substantial migrant intake.
- The significant increases in the Pentecostal figures can be attributed to factors such as the lively nature of its worship, its emphasis on contemporary music, the strong sense of community and spiritual support it provides, the charismatic leaders which lead the congregation and the clear cut answers it provides for times of uncertainty.

- Pentecostalism is an evangelical (fundamentalist and focused on conversion) and charismatic (a strong emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit) strand of the Christian religion.
- The slow down in the increase of Pentecostal figures in the last 10 years can be attributed to the 'revolving door syndrome' which recognises that large numbers of Pentecostals remain with the Church for a relatively short period of time and because many Pentecostals were encouraged by their leaders to write "Australian Christian Church" rather than "Pentecostal" on the 2001 census.

### Immigration

- Changed Australia from being mono-cultural, mono-faith to multi-cultural, multi-faith.
- Since World War 2 and the lifting of the White Australia policy there has been much more diversity in migration and an accompanying increase in the diversity of religious groupings.
- Migration after World War 2 led to increased number of Catholics from countries such as Italy, Malta etc.
- This also increased numbers of Orthodox Christians from Greece and Eastern Europe.
- After the ending of the White Australian policy in 1972 migration developed from a larger range of countries bringing a wider range of religions.
- Migration has led to significant increases in the numbers of people who are Buddhist, Muslims, Hindus and Jews.

- Buddhists came from Indo-Chinese countries – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia – and in more recent times Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.
- Muslims came from countries such as Indonesia, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq, Bosnia.
- Increases have also occurred in Christian denominations where there is a large non-Anglo population – Orthodox (Eastern Europe) and Catholic churches (from predominantly Irish to include Mediterranean, Eastern European, Asian, South American, African members).
- Increased presence of a variety of religious groups has also led to a greater appreciation of this diversity.

#### Denominational switching

- The vast majority of people affiliated with religious groups in Australia were born into that religion.
- The phenomena of swapping between denominations or groups of the same religious tradition is known as denominational switching.
- Denominational switching is more common in Protestant Churches than in the Catholic Church.
- The majority of Pentecostals have moved from another Protestant denomination to join the Pentecostal group.
- Pentecostal is the term used to describe Christian denominations which have a strong emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy etc).
- They are often relatively small groups which provides for more personal interaction, they also have lively worship.
- Pentecostalism is the fastest growing Christian group.

- Most Pentecostals have switched to the group from another Christian denomination. Many leave again after about 2 years – this is known as the ‘revolving door syndrome’.

#### Rise of New Age religions

- Census figures show a considerable level of dissatisfaction with traditional religious groups.
- Alongside this dissatisfaction is an indication of a strong and growing longing for a spiritual dimension to life.
- “New Age” is an umbrella term which refers to a range of alternative and/or pseudo-religious groups that people are attracted to.
- New Age religions are characterised by their adoption of elements of Eastern religions and their subsequent rejection of traditional Western views, and the fact that it favours creation centred spirituality.
- Some examples of new age religions are feng shui, yoga, tai chi, astrology, tarot cards, numerology etc.
- Many people uphold traditional religious beliefs and practices but supplement them with new age elements.

#### Secularism

- Secularism is the belief that religion should not interfere with or be integrated into the public affairs of a society.
- There are multiple factors which have contributed to the decline of religion’s relevance for the integration and legitimation of modern life.
- The increasing pluralism and materialism of society alongside society’s increasing individualism and dissatisfaction with traditional religions are major reasons for secularisation.



- This trend is most evident in the significant increase in the number of people responding “ No religion” in the census alongside an overall decline in the Christian figures recorded in the census.