

Globalization, Social Capital and the Challenge to Harmony of Recent Changes in Australia's Religious and Spiritual Demography: 1947–2001

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Religious organizations have been one of the primary engines of social capital in Western societies. Globalization, demographic change, the events of September 11 2001 and the Bali bombing have combined to raise concerns about the role of religion in promoting social harmony in Australia. Changes in Australia's religious profile since 1947, the last census before the effects of post-war migration, and 2002 include a major decline in identifications with mainline protestant groups, 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. The rise and recent decline in those declaring 'no religion', the increased presence of pentecostal Christian groups, and the rise of Pagan and New Age spiritualities is largely attributable to changes in religious identity in response to the globalization of ideas about religion and of new and refreshed religious beliefs and practices. The impact of these changes on the way religion and spirituality contribute to or threaten Australia social capital is explored.

Increases in social, cultural and religious diversity in Australia have led many to wonder about social harmony and the safeguarding of key features of the Australian way of life. Australia has had a long history of well managed religious diversity where religious differences have been respected and the consequences for other aspects of life of religious difference have been minimized (Bouma, 1999). Religious conflict has not been absent, but differences about the provision of schooling, health services and enforcement of moral issues have been hammered out in legislative assemblies and the courts (Hogan, 1987). Today Australian religious conflict centres on the needs of religious and spiritual minorities to practice their faith, to educate followers in their ways of life and to build places of worship. Some groups continue to be the target of vilification and harassment.

In the past two decades Australia and many other 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 in many parts of the world. The events of September 11, 2001 have intensified the world's focus on the management of religious diversity. As religiously motivated acts of terror and incidents of religious conflict have increased, and have struck closer to home, knowing the religious composition of societies and regions has become more important. The growth trajectories of religious groups and orientations provide the basis for some ideas about the future of Australian religion and spirituality.

The rise of religious diversity, the revitalization of religious groups around the world, and the rise of myriad spiritualities, raise serious questions about the relationship of religion and spirituality to the building of social harmony and social capital. For many decades sociologists assumed that religious unity was a precondition for social order and the harmonious operation of societies. Following the Reformation European nations were very much occupied with problems associated with the management of religious diversity and social order (Bouma, 1999). The issue of the relationship between religion and social order was ignored for much of the last third of the 20th century as sociologists awaited the final decline into oblivion of religious organizations as a result of the assumed inexorable onslaught of secularity and rationality.

However, recent events and demographic change have put paid to the notion that we were headed for some global secularity where religion would be of no consequence, simply a private concern for a small minority of any population, and certainly not a threat to global peace and order. The events of September 11, 2001 and the Bali bombings of October 12, 2002 merely crown a sequence of less widely acknowledged events, such as the taking of hostages by Iranian revolutionaries in the late 1970's, the rise of the Taliban, the pentecostalization and protestantization of Latin America, and the rise of Muslim/Christian tensions in Africa. All of this seemed far off to most Australians until Bali.

Not only is religion not disappearing, it is gaining strength and influence. While fundamentalism is still seen as merely a rear-guard action of those passed over by global development (Tacey, 2003:5), it is more usefully respected as a very contemporary movement grounded in fresh religious fervor and very much related to the issues of today. The influence of evangelical protestant and fundamentalist Christian religious rhetoric in the United States in the promotion and conduct of the recent war in Iraq has been striking. We were told that there are nations that cannot be 'redeemed', that are beyond 'saving', that are part of 'an evil axis'. Many recently liberated Iraqis to the dismay of Americans cry out for Islamic government.

Religious and spiritual revitalization is occurring in Australia (Tacey, 2003) and as it does, the management of religious diversity again becomes an issue. Moreover, religious difference is acquiring a harder edge not just in India, or Nigeria, but in Australia. The recently appointed Anglican Dean of Sydney thunders against other religions – 'We cannot all be right'. Ecumenism is now seen

as a quaint mid 20th century phenomenon characteristic of enervated liberal protestant Christianity. While some still seek a universal voice for the religious and spiritual (Tacey, 2003), this flies in the face of increasing religious and spiritual diversity. Diversity might decrease if the interest in religion and spirituality were decreasing as it was in the last half of the 20th century. However, diversity will increase as religious and spiritual forms old and new grow and differentiate. As diversity increases there will be a return to more active competition among religious groups (Stark and Finke, 2000).

In this context a re-examination of current change in the demography of Australia's religious and spiritual life is critical. The Australian census has usually been used to provide a five yearly picture of the relative strength of religious groups in Australia (Bentley and Hughes, 1998; Bouma, 1983, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997 a and b; Hughes, 1993, 1997, 2000). The resulting trajectories of growth, stability or decline for each group provide a basis for assessing religious change in Australia. However, with the 2001 census we also get a glimpse into the rise of different spiritualities as those identifying with them reach higher numbers and as vastly more Australians choose to write in a 'spiritual' rather than an organizational response.

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. Census data simply provide religious identification – what people respond when asked: 'What is your religion?' 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 (Bouma and Dixon, 1986; Bouma, 1992). Religious identification provides an indication of the religio-moral culture of a person.

Changes since 1947

From 1850 to 1947 the pattern of distribution was quite stable with Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists together comprising 60 per cent of the population and, 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 net effect was to make Australia a profoundly English protestant establishment with church life characterized by rational teaching and preaching focused worship laced with occasional revival activities. Catholics were a substantial minority, but were held in less respect, in part because they were predominantly Irish. This disrespect was also grounded in the accusation by the dry rationalist English protestant establishment that Roman Catholics were irrational and superstitious on account of their focus on sacraments and greater use of visual imagery.

The changes revealed by censuses taken since 1947 demonstrate that Australia's religious life has changed culturally as well as demographically. Table One presents data showing changes in the standing of selected groups in selected censuses from 1947 to 2001. The changes show a rise in diversity, reflect a cultural decline in the hegemonic power of English protestant groups and provide evidence for the rise of a wide variety of spiritualities.

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

Religious Identification*	1947 000s	%	1971 000s	%	1996 000s	%	2001 000s	%
CHRISTIAN								
Anglican	2957	39.0	3953	31.0	3903	22.0	3881	20.7
Baptist	114	1.5	176	1.4	295	1.7	309	1.7
Catholic	1570	20.7	3443	27.0	4799	27.0	5002	26.7
Lutheran	67	0.9	197	1.5	250	1.4	250	1.3
MPCRU*	1678	22.1	2199	17.2	2011	11.3	1887	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
Total Christian	6,673	88.0	10,990	86.2	12,583	70.6	12,764	68.0
BUDDHISTS	--	--	--	--	200	1.1	358	1.9
HINDUS	--	--	--	--	67	0.4	95	0.5
JEWS	32	0.4	62	0.5	80	0.5	84	0.4
MUSLIMS	--	--	22	0.2	201	1.1	282	1.5
OTHER**	4	0.1	14	0.1	69	0.4	92	0.5
Total	37	0.5	99	0.8	617	3.5	911	4.8
Inadequate desc	19	0.2	29	0.2	54	0.3	352	1.9
No Religion	26	0.3	856	6.7	2949	16.5	2905	15.5
Not Stated	825	10.9	781	6.1	1551	8.7	1836	9.8
Total Population	7,579		12,756		17,753		18,769	

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

* Only those Christian groups larger than 1% and other groups 0.4% 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. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

*** OCG – Other Christian Groups less than 1%.

Increasing Diversity

Once again there has been an increase in religious diversity in Australia. For the first time, it now takes three religious groups to make up 50% of the population. Other indicators of increased diversity are revealed in the facts that, as of 2001 there are more Scientologists (2,032) than Quakers (1,782), more Muslims (281,578) than Lutherans (250,365), more Buddhists (357,813) than Baptists (309,205), more Hindus (95,473) than Salvationists (71,423), and more pagans (10,632) than Reformed (9,943). 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 (52,844). Atheism also grew, rising from 7,469 in 1996 to 24,464 in 2001 (a growth rate of 228%).

Migration has been the major factor in the radical increase in religious diversity in Australia. The growth of English protestant groups due to migration reached its peak by 1960, from which time following some fluctuation in numbers their proportion of the Australian population declined as their growth rates fell below that of the population and they declined in absolute numbers. The major losses from those who might have been expected to identify with an English protestant group was to those declaring 'no religion' – a group displaying similar ethnic background but a more youthful profile. Immediate post-war migration saw the numbers of Jews increase and the arrival of the Dutch some of whom 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. From the late 1970s Vietnamese arrived bringing Buddhist temples. Moreover, this is only part of the story since each of these religious groups is also supported by a wider range of migrants, for example Australian Muslims come from over 60 birthplaces; there are also Russian, Bulgarian, and other national Orthodox Churches, to say nothing of Oriental Christians from the Middle East; and Australian Buddhists represent many birthplaces in addition to Vietnam – Cambodia, Taiwan, Japan, Tibet and China.

The recent increases among Muslims are explained largely by migration and a higher than average birth rate. However, the recent increase among Buddhists cannot be entirely explained by migration.

Protestant Decline

The Decline of the hegemony of the English protestant Establishment is indicated by several changes the most dramatic of which is the decline of Anglicans from 39% to 20.7% and the rise of Catholics from 20.7% to 27%. Moreover, the English protestant heartland represented by the MPCR group has declined to less than half its 1947 proportion of the population. This decline is part of a global shift from a rational and verbal form of Christianity to a more

experiential and feeling oriented form (Bouma, 2003 a and b) and to the global impact of secularization (Berger, 1967:108). The mainstream protestant decline is greater than it first appears since in 2001 Anglicans were much more sacramentally oriented and less 'protestant' than they were in 1947 and those who have retained a 'protestant' orientation do not express it in the ways commonly found in 1947, but in ways that are often laced with charismatic influences. Another factor contributing to the decline of the English protestant hegemony has been the rise of pentecostal Christian groups from virtually non-existent in 1947 to over one per cent in 2002. The appeal of both pentecostal, or charismatic and sacramental forms of religious life 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 have undermined the former hegemony and appeal of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Uniting and Anglican churches (Bouma, 2003b).

New Religious And Spiritual Life In Australia – Christians

The changing nature of Australia's religious and spiritual life is indicated by a closer examination of who is growing and who is not. Table Two compares the recent growth rates of Christian groups.

Table 2: Changes in Australia's Religious Profile 1996-2001 – more detail about Christian Groups (groups 0.1% and over).

Religious Identification	1996 000s	1996 %	2001 000s	2001 %	96-01 growth rate
CHRISTIAN*					
Anglican	3903	21.99	3881	20.68	-0.57
Baptist	295	1.66	309	1.65	4.75
Brethren	22	0.12	19	0.10	-12.28
Catholic	4799	27.03	5002	26.65	4.22
Churches of Christ	75	0.42	61	0.33	-18.25
Jehovah's Witnesses	83	0.47	81	0.43	-2.81
Latter Day Saints	45	0.25	50	0.27	10.65
Lutheran	250	1.41	250	1.33	0.15
Oriental Christian	31	0.18	36	0.19	15.90
Orthodox	497	2.80	529	2.82	6.52
Pentecostal	175	0.98	195	1.04	11.37
Presbyterian/Reformed	676	3.81	638	3.40	-5.57
Salvation Army	74	0.42	71	0.38	-3.67
Seventh Day Adventist	53	0.30	54	0.29	2.26
Uniting	1335	7.52	1249	6.65	-6.46
Other Christian	253	1.43	324	1.72	27.95
Total Christian	12583	70.55	12,764	68.00	1.44
National Population	17,753		18,769		5.7

Source: Data from Australian Bureau of Statistics reports.

The big winners – those growing more than 10% – include the 'Other Christian' group, 'Pentecostals', Mormons, and 'Oriental Christians'. These groups maintain a high tension between themselves and both the world and other denominations of Christianity. As Stark and Finke (2000) would predict those who demand more of their followers and maintain clear boundaries will grow. Oriental Christians – The Ancient Church of the East, The Armenian Apostolic Church, The Assyrian Church of the East, The Coptic Orthodox Church, and The Syrian (Jacobite) Church – are ethnically distinct, grow by migration, and have a high rate of retention. The 'Other Christian' group represents many non-denominational, often pentecostal, and missionary groups who offer experiential forms of worship, maintain high membership standards and a sectarian orientation to the world and other denominations. Baptists, Catholics, The Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventists have also grown and fit the pattern described above.

A remarkable finding was the stalling of the Anglican decline. However, as one of the world's most diverse religions, Anglicans offer both forms of

experiential worship – charismatic and sacramental, as well as dry rationalist evangelical protestant. The latter are experiencing decline. Those protestants that are growing are not the traditional preaching oriented rational evangelical protestants like Presbyterians, but are charismatic evangelical protestants like the growing edge of Sydney Anglicans.

The major losers – Churches of Christ, Brethren, Uniting, Presbyterian and Salvationists – primarily represent dry rational protestant religious groups who maintain weak boundaries and little tension with their world. Aside from the Brethren, they were major players in the ecumenical movement. The Brethren demand a great deal from members, but have failed to retain members and have declined to a point where sustaining the group will be very difficult.

This census again demonstrates that a primary mover in renewing Australia's Christian religious and spiritual life have been the pentecostal and charismatic movements in Christianity. Not only have pentecostals risen to just over 1 per cent of the population they figure 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 force which has been adopted whole heartedly by some, resisted by others and is an influence in nearly all.

New Religious And Spiritual Life In Australia – Others

Data presented in Table 3 clearly depict a rise in other dimensions of Australia's religious and spiritual life. Aside from No Religion, Satanism, and Traditional Aboriginal Religion which have declined, every other group listed in Table 3 is growing and vigorously. This group of religions and spiritualities has grown from 0.5% of the population in 1947 to 4.8% in 2001, most of that growth occurring in the past decade. Major world religions – Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and Muslims – now account for 4.37% of Australia's population. The bulk of the rise in the presence of these groups is due to migration, although recent Buddhist growth requires additional explanation.

Table 3: Changes in Australia's Religious Profile 1996-2001 –more detail about Other Religious Groups (0.01% and over).

Religious Identification	1996 000s	1996 %	2001 000s	2001 %	96-01 growth rate
BUDDHISTS	200	1.13	358	1.91	79.07
HINDUS	67	0.38	95	0.51	41.91
JEWS	80	0.45	84	0.45	5.25
MUSLIMS	201	1.13	282	1.50	40.17
OTHER	69	0.39	92	0.50	33.33
Aboriginal Traditional Rel	7	0.04	5	0.03	-29.0
Baha'i	9	0.05	11	0.06	23.3
Chinese religions	4	0.02	4	0.02	0.0
Druse	2	0.01	2	0.01	22.2
Japanese religions	1	0.01	1	0.01	0.0
Nature religions	10	0.05	23	0.12	130.0
Paganism	4	0.02	11	0.06	144.2
Wicca/witchcraft	2	0.01	9	0.05	373.5
Rastafariansim	1	0.01	1	0.01	4.2
Satanism	2	0.01	2	0.01	-14.0
Scientology	1	0.01	2	0.01	36.6
Sikhism	12	0.07	17	0.09	44.8
Spiritualism	8	0.05	9	0.05	14.0
Theism	2	0.01	3	0.02	29.7
Zoroastrians	2	0.01	2	0.02	15.2
NO RELIGION	2949	16.48	2905	15.48	-1.5
Agnostics	9	0.05	18	0.09	99.6
Atheists	7	0.04	24	0.13	226.4
Humanists	4	0.02	5	0.03	23.7
Rationalists	1	0.01	2	0.01	17.2
NOT STATED	1551	8.67	1836	9.78	18.4
INADEQUATE DESCR	54	0.31	352	1.88	551.9
JEDI			71	0.4	
National Population	17,753		18,769		5.7

Source: data from Australian Bureau of Statistics reports.

In addition to the rise of pentecostal Christianity and Major World Religions, the adoption by Australians of other largely imported religious teachings and practices has led to the rise of such groups as Earth based religions like Gaia, Goddess religions, and Witchcraft. The numbers identifying with Wicca/Witchcraft grew from 1,849 to 8,755 (a growth rate of 374%); Paganism grew from 4,353 to 10,632 (a growth rate of 144%); and spiritualism increased from 8,141 to 9,279. If the 'spirituality' cluster of religious groups is added together we get a total of over 40,000 or 0.22% of Australians. These religions tend to be less formal, not quite so hierarchical and patriarchal making them more

appealing to women. They are very disproportionately female. Spiritualities of choice as opposed to religions of birth are growing substantially in Australia (Tacey, 2000 and 2003). While some of these groups are disparaged as 'new age' spiritualities, they represent the tip of the iceberg of renewed religiosity and spirituality in Australia (Tacey, 2003). The fact that previously dominant religious organizations have a hard time coping with the rise of spiritualities says more about their rigid stultification than it does about the quality of this emerging religious force in Australia.

That there is a religious and spiritual renewal occurring in Australia is further evidenced by several major changes in the 2001 Census. First, the fact that the rapid rise (79.07%) of Buddhists cannot be accounted for by migration means that some Australians chose to identify themselves as Buddhists for the first time in 2001. This may reflect the fact that Buddhists having risen to more than 1% of the population in the 1996 census, were, along with Muslims, given a tick box in the response categories in the census form. As a result people wanting to identify as Buddhist no longer had to write in their response. It also meant that people looking for a response to the religious question had before them the appealing option of Buddhist. The appeal of this response may well have been enhanced by the well publicized and well attended visit of the Dalai Lama to Australia shortly before the census was taken. Whatever, it indicates that Australians do think about their responses to this item and are prepared to make selections that indicate change and more than mere organizational affiliation. This means that the 'spirituality' sector of Australia's religious life is greater than 0.22%. Precisely, how much is difficult to say.

A second indication of religious and spiritual renewal in Australia is found in the fact that the 'non-religious' – those declaring that they have 'no religion' – have decreased in both absolute numbers and percentage of the population for the first time in Australian history. Rather than select 'no religion' Australians are choosing other responses, responses that indicate something about their religious and spiritual life. I had expected that 2001 might have been the year that Anglican decline which had been running at 2% per census and growth in the 'no religion' which had been running at 4% per census would combine to produce the result of the 'non-religious' exceeding Anglicans. But Anglicans stopped declining, unlike the Uniting Church.

The third indication of religious and spiritual renewal in Australia came as a complete surprise. Until this census no one paid any attention to the category called 'inadequately described', after all in 1996 it accounted for only 0.3% of the population. However, it increased 552% to attract nearly 2% of the Australian population. They are more numerous than Baptists, Buddhists, Lutherans and Muslims. I was able to get from the Australian Bureau of Statistics the 'line counts' on the responses that people had written in which were coded to this category. The written in responses largely reflect spiritualities, things people wanted to write down in response to the question, 'what is your religion', but

which did not indicate a particular religious group. Several hundreds of different entries are found, including – personal beliefs, eclectic, spiritual, universal, the all that is, basic faith, and messianic. The word spiritual was the most frequent choice. Making these selections and taking the effort to write in something about one's spirituality rather than nominating a religious group in response to the question, 'What is your religion' reflects the postmodern sentiment, 'I believe but do not belong' (Davie, 1994). Again, the 'spirituality' sector of Australian religious life rightly includes many of those who were categorized as 'inadequately described', 1.2% of the population – the proportion subcategorized as 'religious belief not further defined' in the census – raising the proportion to 1.5% – roughly the same as Muslims or Lutherans.

Responses that have caused some consternation were Jedi, Jeddist, Jedi Knight and related responses written in by over 70,000 Australians. These responses relate to 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. This suggests not so much that people do not take the census seriously as that they are responding in some way to the category of religious identification. While some disparage this set of responses as meaningless, remember, these people took the time and effort to write something in, rather than just ticking a box. Moreover, Barron (2003) argues that Jediism has all the hallmarks of a myth – stories of origins, definitions of good and evil, references to the transcendent and a blessing – 'May the Force be with you' and should be seen as such. By the way, Jediists were nearly as numerous as were those who identified with the Churches of Christ. Jediists were not included in the 'religious belief not further defined' category and adding them to the 'spirituality' sector increases its proportion to about 1.6%.

The rise of these indicators of renewed religious and spiritual life in Australia resonates with the understanding that a secular postmodern society is not anti-religious or even irreligious (Fenn, 2000), but one where the religious and spiritual is less under the control of religious organizations. The spiteful reaction of those in traditional churches to this 'out of (their) control' spirituality confirms this interpretation.

While some commentators do so, serious researchers do not combine those who declare that they have no religion (15.5%) with those who exercise their freedom to privacy on this issue (9.78%). Doing so gives a false reading of nearly 25% with no religion. Those who do not respond are simply not saying what their religion is. Moreover, to classify a non-response as a response is to read rather more into non-response than I am prepared to do.

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

Religious And Spiritual Diversity And Social Capital

What impact will the changes made evident by the 2001 census have on social harmony in Australia? While Australia has an enviable history of managing religious diversity with a minimum of violence and harmful conflict the capacity to do so will be tested in the next decades. Religion and spirituality are not going away, but becoming increasingly vital. As Tacey (2003) points out spirituality may be personal but it is not private. Secularists had assumed that more personal forms of religious and spiritual life would result in the privatization and marginalization of religion. It is now clear that this is not the case.

With increased vitality will come increased differentiation and competition. Until recently competition has been a dirty word in religious circles. Now those groups unwilling to push their wares with some energy in the religious market place will find their market share dropping. Old ties to empire, power bases in Australia or other elites will not help. Old monopolist religions usually find this very hard to do. At minimum marketing your wares means proudly proclaiming the benefits of your approach. Negatively it may mean undermining the capacity of another group to practice or promote itself, or using the state to declare their activities illegal, or preventing the expression of their faith in other ways. The DIMIA funded project found many instances of negative religious competition. Australia will have to learn to manage religious diversity by requiring honesty in product description, fairness in competition, and be prepared to defend the rights of minority groups against some very substantial players in this market.

That conflict will again become a feature of Australia's religious diversity is enhanced by the fact that those groups that have moved to increase their boundaries have increased. Roman Catholics have moved (back) to a more exclusivist view of themselves, particularly in the orientation of George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney. Meanwhile Sydney Anglicans, who have long held an exclusivist view of their form of Christianity, have become even more outspoken about it threatening to re-consider their ties with the rest of Anglicans. Australian Presbyterians have opted to move into the Conservative Evangelical camp and have begun to turn around their precipitous decline, unlike the Uniting Church which continues both its *laissez-faire* liberalism and its decline. Muslims also, have long maintained a tension with other groups and the larger Australian society and culture.

On the other hand, while competition and conflict may increase, religious groups and spiritualities will continue to build social capital and promote overall social harmony. Appleby (2000) makes absolutely clear the role of religion in building social capital, restoring harmony, healing conflict and contributing to social order. The picture is not uniformly negative although some commentators like painting such pictures. Religious groups socialize their members into dominant values of family life, achievement and cooperation (Bouma, 1994, 1997a; Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). The DIMIA study discovered many religiously based efforts to build bridges between communities, to provide social

services to members and the wider community, to educate to inform and reduce ignorance and to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

Those who view Australia's religious and spiritual life through the lens of irenic ecumenism are as blind to what is happening as those who have viewed it through the lens of secularism. Australia's religious and spiritual life is highly diverse, vital and likely to be characterized by increased competition and conflict. In this context the call for a national body to advise the Commonwealth government on issues of religion and spirituality is timely.

Conclusion

Responses to the 'religion question in the 2001 Australian census provide evidence of continued declines in English protestant groups and further increases in Australia's religious diversity with the growth to well over one per cent 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 – personal orientation to the numinous, the enviroing being, the inner being, or other form of transempirical power – is precisely in keeping with what would be expected in a postmodern, secular and multicultural society. Managing this religious diversity will call for new mechanisms to ensure that religious and spiritual life contribute to social harmony and the building of social capital in Australia.

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