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Why is Buddhism the fastest growing religion in Australia?

Darren Nelson 1/6/98

The answer to this inquiry is multi-layered and complex. It is a tantalising issue because it highlights the changing spiritual landscape of Australia and provides an insight into just how multicultural we have really become.

Cultures that were foreign to Anglo-European Australians are now being adopted by some of them - though not without some dissenting resistance. This level of resistance in Australian society can be seen as a litmus test, used to measure future political and religious tolerance in this country.

The story concerning the rise of Buddhism in Australia is a compelling tale of a resilient religion that has survived despite the odds. How is it possible for a 2,500-year-old philosophy, which began five hundred years before Christianity and one thousand years before the Muslim faith, to be relevant to modern life in Australia? Considering all the other ancient religions that have faded from contemporary practice, such as the sun worshippers of Ancient Egypt, the human sacrifices of the South American Mayans and the druids from the Dark Ages of England, Buddhism has outlasted them all.

It does not preach the dogma of a strange cult, nor seek converts with evangelistic fervour. Those Australians who actively convert to Buddhism do so voluntarily, and are usually well-educated middle-aged professionals who are attracted to a sense of inner peace. This documentary therefore, seeks to immerse itself in the substance of this seemingly magnetic Buddhist approach. Perhaps it will be like seeing Australia for the first time, through ancient eyes.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the recent increase in Buddhist numbers across Australia, Buddhism has actually played a part in Australian history for some time. It did not just suddenly arrive in a recent wave of migrants. Some anthropologists, in fact, have suggested that Buddhism was possibly the earliest non-indigenous religion to reach Australia before white settlement.

Between 1405 and 1433 the Chinese Ming emperor, Cheng-Ho, sent sixty-two large ships to explore southern Asia. Although there is evidence that several ships from that armada landed on the Aru Islands to the north of Arnhem Land, it is not known whether they reached the mainland.

One unproved hypothesis of Professor A.P. Elkin is that the belief of some Northern Territory Koorie tribes in reincarnation, psychic phenomena and mental cultivation is evidence of early contact with Buddhists. Despite certain rock paintings that possibly depict Chinese junks weighing anchor or images of the Buddha, actual material evidence remains to be seen(1).

The first documented arrival of Buddhists in Australia was in 1848 during the gold rushes, when Chinese coolie labourers were brought into the country to work on the Victorian gold fields. These workers represented a transient population that usually returned home within five years. It was not until 1876 that the first permanent Buddhist community was established by Sinhalese migrants on Thursday Island. There the ethnic Sri Lankans built the first temple in Australia, while they were employed on the sugar cane plantations of Queensland.

From the late 1870's onwards many Japanese Shinto Buddhists also arrived and were active in the pearling industry across northern Australia, establishing other Buddhist enclaves in Darwin and Broome. Buddhist cemeteries were kept and festivals celebrated. Official government statistics compiled as part of a national census in 1891 indicate that, at the time, there were slightly more Buddhists in Australia (at 1.2%), than there are today (at 1.1%)(2).

Buddhist numbers would have continued to increase if the Immigration

Restriction Act of 1901 had not been introduced to combat the 'yellow peril'. Alfred Deakin, who was destined to be Prime Minister three times, drafted the legislation to pacify a somewhat xenophobic Caucasian electorate(3). This bill later grew to represent the more broadly implemented White Australia Policy.

For the next fifty years the benefits of mind training and meditation, as taught by Buddhism, would be disregarded as some sort of obscure 'eastern mysticism'. Except for some remote surviving pockets of Buddhists (such as Broome and Thursday Island), the religion became virtually extinct in Australia.

A small group of committed western Buddhists formed the earliest known Buddhist organisation in Australia, The Little Circle of the Dharma, in Melbourne in 1925. Progress was slow though, until after World War II when local enthusiasm for the White Australia Policy began to decline. In 1951 the first Buddhist nun visited Australia. Sister Dhammadinna, born in the USA, ordained and with thirty years experience in Sri Lanka, came to propagate the Theravadin School of Buddhist teaching. She received nation-wide media coverage(4).

Inspired by this visit, the next year the Buddhist Society of New South Wales was formed under the presidency of Leo Berkley, a Dutch-born Sydney businessman. This organisation is today the oldest Buddhist group in Australia. Its membership was, and still is, compromised mainly of people from Anglo-European backgrounds(5).

In 1958 the Buddhist Federation of Australia was formed in order to co-ordinate the growing Buddhist groups that had sprung up around the country in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and Victoria.

The Buddhist presence in Australia had depended for the first hundred years on lay people with only the occasional visits by ordained members of the Sangha (the Buddhist clergy). But in the 1970's the growing number of Buddhists created a need for resident monks, and a new phase in Australian Buddhism began.

In 1971 the Buddhist Society of New South Wales established the Sri Lankan monk, Somaloka, in residence at a retreat centre in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. This became the first monastery in Australia. A succession of monasteries representing different aspects of Buddhism slowly became established around Australia; in 1975 at Stanmore in Sydney, in 1978 at Wisemans Ferry in country NSW and in 1984 at Serpentine in Western Australia(6).

The charismatic face of Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, (who was awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 1989 and describes himself as 'a simple monk'), has travelled the world constantly giving lectures and answering questions in 20,000 seat pop concert halls. John Cleese speaks out for him in London, Henri Cartier-Bresson records his teachings around France and Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys pop group has even interviewed him in Rome for Rolling Stone magazine.

In the past few years he has opened eleven Offices of Tibet, everywhere from Canberra to Moscow and last year alone provided prefaces and forewords for roughly thirty books. The 14th Dalai Lama, who holds the titles of Ocean of Wisdom, Holder Of The White Lotus and Protector Of The Land Of Snows, has even served as the guest editor of French Vogue magazine(7).

The three visits of the Dalai Lama to Australia in 1982, 1992 and 1996 were joyful occasions for Buddhists of all traditions, and huge crowds of Buddhists and the general public gathered to hear him speak. On the

third visit, and despite virulent Chinese protests, the Dalai Lama met with and was photographed with the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard. It was now clearly evident at this stage, that Buddhism had become a significant minority religion in Australia.

During this visit local celebrities contributed generously to fundraising activities. For example, Kate Ceberano, Rachel Berger and Frente were just some of the 'star-studded cast' to perform at the Dalai Lama Lounge Room. They helped to raise \$14,000 over three nights. Mushroom Records released a benefit album called The Mantra Mix CD, featuring Jenny Morris, Jimmy Barnes and Johnny Diesel. One local advertising agency, providing their services for nothing, came up with the slogan "You missed Jesus. You missed the Buddha. Do not miss the Dalai Lama"(8). When was the last time such hype accompanied the visit of a religious leader?

But Australians are not alone in their sympathy towards his cause. The issue of Tibetan oppression has come to the attention of Hollywood and with two new films about his life in the cinematic pipeline, the Dalai Lamas' profile has not only moved into the mainstream, but has (much to the horror of the Chinese Government) gone global.

The first to be released, *Seven Years In Tibet*, tells the story of Heinrich Harrer, a mountain climber and nazi party member who encounters his own sense of enlightenment after becoming the tutor to the young Dalai Lama in Tibet in the 1940's. The film has attracted healthy attention because it stars Brad Pitt.

The other film is *Kundun*, directed by Martin Scorsese. This epic tells the remarkable tale of the Dalai Lama from his point of view, from his recognition as the reincarnated Buddha of compassion at age two until his escape to India at twenty-four. Recently released here in Australia, it was reviewed by Channel Nines' Sunday program on June 14th and described as 'the most beautiful and important film released this year'.

Hollywood's fascination for Buddhism extends beyond these two screenplays, with many stars expressing interest in the religion itself. In February 1997, the karate-kicking action star Steven Seagall was recognised by the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism as the reincarnation of a 15th century lama. Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys pop group has organised two huge benefit concerts to publicise the plight of Tibet.

Actor Richard Gere, together with Uma Thurman's father, Richard Thurman, has opened Tibet House in New York, published books on the subject, and meditates daily. Other practitioners that have come to attention include Tina Turner, Harrison Ford (whose wife Melissa Mathison wrote *Kundun's* script), Oliver Stone, Herbie Hancock, Courtney Love, composer Philip Glass (who also worked on *Kundun*) and REM's lead singer Michael Stipe.

The momentum of Buddhism's' profile is driven by other, more subtle reminders as well. A new makeup is being advertised as Zen Blush, a new sitcom is called *Dharma and Greg*, a designer fruit juice container has on its' label "Please recycle this bottle. It deserves to be reincarnated too", and monks star in television commercials and news items(9).

Such recent exposure does not take away the fact that Australians have been quietly turning to Buddhism for some time. The statistics compiled in the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Commonwealth Government Census support the view that Buddhist numbers have been steadily increasing. Between 1986

and 1991 the numbers of practitioners rose from 80,387 to 139,847, a growth of 74%. Due largely to the decrease in immigration numbers in recent years the percentage growth for Buddhists slowed between 1991 and 1996 to 43%, from 139,847 to 199,812. This rate of increase is still higher than that of any other religion(10).

The three census surveys also indicate that of the eight Christian denominations listed in the analysis for New South Wales only three show an increase (Baptist, Catholic and Orthodox), while five (Anglican, Church Of Christ, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting Church) have decreased in numbers.

Does the fluctuating demographic between Buddhism and Christianity point towards dissatisfaction with traditional Australian religious beliefs? Is Buddhism more competitive than Christianity or is one spiritual experience simply more meaningful than the other?

Of the 199,812 Buddhists across Australia today, approximately thirty thousand are Anglo-European's who have 'crossed over', by choice, to this alternative philosophy. They have turned from 'Christian sinner' to 'Eastern Mystic'. The slump in immigration figures from Buddhist countries is apparently not enough to stall the continued growth in Australian Buddhism, especially now that local support has been established. Back in 1938 a Japanese Shinto monk, noting that it took China three centuries to adopt Buddhism from India, said introducing it in the West would be like holding a lotus to a rock and waiting for it to take root.

When the Age of Aquarius spread across the world in the form of the 60's alternative hippie counter-culture, there appeared to be no shortage of poets, artists, actors, writers and musicians interested in a voyage of inner peace through Buddhist philosophy and meditative practices. John Lennon used Buddhist mantras' in the lyrics of his music such as Across the Universe. Allen Ginsberg used a mantra (Buddhist blessing) to bless the ground at Woodstock before the first fans arrived. Zen meditation too, first embraced by the Beat poets in the 1950's flourished across first world nations as a healthy alternative to LSD-induced enlightenment.

More importantly the drug-fuelled 1960's, when the Vietnam War was at its height, feminist protestors burnt their bras and man landed on the moon, saw a relaxation of traditional middle class values that allowed a greater versatility in public consciousness. During this time, people had greater access and freedom to experiment with new schools of thought (feminism, civil rights, the peace movement, alternative lifestyles etc) without suffering as many social ramifications as in the past.

According to the Reverend Phillip Hughes, a Melbourne-based religious researcher, "many people thought in the 1960's that science itself was not sufficient to really explain existence, but then they were not keen to go back to the Judeo-Christian tradition with its holy books, miracles and so forth. Also the need for a sense of peace has become more apparent"(11).

Potential Buddhists are attracted to the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) not only to take refuge from a world of chaos and confusion, but also to re-invent their own personal sense of a meaningful spirituality in a society of high-tech consumerism, commercialism, violence and apathy. Compared to the Christian beliefs many Anglo-European Australians grew up with, Buddhism does not require its adherents to remain faithful to a specific dogma.

It is not a faith. It is not technically a religion either, though when discussing systems of worship it is easier to work with that label. It is more a psychology and a philosophy wrapped around a moral code of mind training.

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama (born in 563 B.C.), turned his back on the royal family he had been born into, to live life as a simple ascetic monk. At the age of thirty-five he became enlightened and 'saw things as they really are', having achieved a mental state of absolute egolessness, where he no longer felt any sense of narcissism or craving.

He became the first Buddha and was quick to teach his disciples that he was not a god, should not be revered and no rituals should be developed around his teachings. Heaven and hell, he taught, are not external places that we travel to after we die; they do not in fact exist. Rather, both places dwell only in the hearts of people. People are either good or bad, pious or evil. Paradise exists within our spirit, it is here and now, and not some destination in the after-life.

Meditation, he believed, is the process required for all adherents to achieve Buddhahood. This is one of the main differences between Buddhism and other religions. Practitioners are offered an ultimate goal, enlightenment itself, which is equivalent to the level attained by the Buddha himself. He taught that everyone is capable of achieving this, providing equality to all his followers(12).

This is a radical departure for born-Christians to realise when they first start studying the principles of Buddhism. The best a faithful Christian could hope to achieve with his devotion was entry to heaven as an angel where he is still subject to the will of a greater being who could smite him anytime at will. The Buddha teaches his disciples too become the same as he, which is why he is not a god. In Buddhism there is no pecking order in the after life, because that would require the presence of an ego, which is the Buddhists life work to gradually eliminate.

Buddhism dispenses with the notion of a Supreme Being, as does science, and explains the origins and workings of the universe in terms of natural law. All of this certainly exhibits a scientific spirit. The Buddha advised that we should not blindly believe him but rather question, examine, inquire and rely on our own experience. This scientific approach of cause and effect was not overlooked by Albert Einstein in the 1930's:

"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion", he said, "it should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, and a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism"(13).

While the antipodean blossoming of Buddhism seems to have gone from strength to strength since the 1980's, this has not always been the case. It is in the Buddhist principle of godlessness that the journalist can find opposing and dissenting voices to the Buddhist cause. This theological bone of contention is the main source of friction with other religions.

On Wednesday, the 18th of January 1995, Pope John Paul II arrived in Sydney and attended an Interfaith Gathering in the Sydney Domain. Representatives from major religions, including Protestant, Orthodox



and Coptic Christians, Jewish and Muslim were invited to share the platform with him. Notable by its absence was Australia's' third largest religion, Buddhism.

The organisers told SBS Radio that they were unaware that Buddhism was Australia's' third largest religion and besides that there was no national leader of Buddhism, so who were they to invite? The Sydney Morning Herald reported that "somebody in the State Government had forgotten to invite the Buddhists". This is unlikely, as the New South Wales Government is very aware of the presence of Buddhists in this state and often invites Buddhist representatives to State functions. A more likely explanation is that the Vicar of Rome holds Buddhism in very low esteem as is evident from the following extract from his book, Crossing The Threshold Of Hope:

"Buddhism is in large measure an 'atheistic' system. We do not free ourselves from evil through the good which comes from God; we liberate ourselves only through detachment from the world, which is bad. The fullness of such a detachment is not union with God, but what is called nirvana, a state of perfect indifference with regard to the world. To save oneself means, above all, to free oneself from evil by becoming indifferent to the world, which is the source of evil. This is the culmination of the spiritual process. Christian mysticism is born of the Revelation of the living God. This God opens Himself to union with man, arousing in him the capacity to be united with Him, especially by means of the theological virtues - faith, hope and above all, love"(14).

Graeme Lyall, Chairman of the Buddhist Council of New South Wales, strongly refutes the Catholic position. "The Oxford Dictionary defines 'atheism' as 'disbelief in the existence of God' ", he said, "the Buddha is described as the teacher of 'gods and men', so how can Buddhism be an atheistic system? Religious arguments often come down to the use of religious language. We must ascertain to what we are referring to when we use the term 'God'.

What is a 'living God'? Anything that is living is subject to death and decay, so why should we place ourselves in the hands of something, which, like ourselves, is impermanent? If he is referring to the old man with a white beard who sits in the sky taking notes in his little black book ready for the day of judgement, then he is out of step with modern theological thinking and most other theologians.

Modern theologians, such as Paul Tillich, suggest that the term 'God' refers to the 'ground of being' - the very fact of existence. No Buddhist would argue with this, but they may be reluctant to use the term 'God' to describe it"(15).

Lay's implication that the Pope is out of touch appears to be more than just a knee-jerk defence, when you consider that the ranks of Catholics themselves are split on the issue. Irish-born Father William Johnston, a Jesuit priest, spoke of his sympathy to Buddhism when he visited Sydney in early January 1997. Here to attend the Religion, Literature and Arts Conference at the Australian Catholic University, Father Johnston spoke of the Christian churches need to introduce aspects of Eastern Mysticism - such as meditation, yoga and Zen - if they want to increase numbers attending weekly services.

"Some Catholics are very nervous about meditation but there is a lot to learn from it and yoga and Zen", he said. "The Catholic Church has always kept meditation very strongly in its religious orders; our problem is that we didn't teach it to the laity, who are now looking for it".

Father Johnston, director of the Institute of Oriental Religions at Tokyos' Sophia University, has lived in Japan since 1951 and believes Christianity has become 'too legalistic', with 'too many do's and don'ts and not enough vision and enlightenment'(16).

Besides the Catholic Church's potentially bilateral reaction to Buddhism, local opposition to the arrival of Eastern Mysticism has also occurred in the steel manufacturing town of Wollongong, an hours drive south of Sydney. There the Anglican Bishop of Wollongong, the Reverend Reg Piper has weighed into the debate expressing his annoyance not only at the presence of Buddhism, but the presence of a philosophy he sees as evil.

The contest began when a Taiwan-based Buddhist sect, Fokuangshan, opened a huge fifty million-dollar temple just south of the steel city in Berkley. The monks there planned to promote their style of 'humanistic' Buddhism, which emphasises the 'oneness and co-existence of the global village'.

The Fokuangshan sect was founded in the mid-1960's and has more than one hundred branches world-wide (including Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth) with 1.5 million members and its own university, several schools, an organ donor bank, a retirement home, even a cemetery. This growth is due to its' charismatic founding father, the Venerable Hsing Yun. The size of the Wollongong temple, called Nan Tien, is second only to their headquarters in Taipei.

Bishop Piper's concerns are not shared by other Christian churches such as the local Uniting Church, which has adopted a user-friendly approach to the temple. On Tuesday, the 18th of June 1996, Bishop Piper appeared on the ABCs' 7.30 Report to voice his opposition.

Bishop Piper: See when you have the bible view of humankind, generally, if it is outside the framework of the truth - the bible terms it as evil.

Reporter: Is it a deception?.

Bishop Piper: In that respect, yes. While ever it is not based in the truth of Christ, it would be a deception. Because Buddhism is basically an atheistic religion. There is no god.

Reporter: Why is that a problem?.

Bishop Piper: Because God has revealed himself through Christ. Christ has been raised from the dead. He said he is God. There is no other way to the truth and no other way to really live except through Christ.

The growing curiosity about Buddhism has so worried Bishop Piper that he has made a video called In Search Of Paradise - A Biblical Response To Buddhism. It is to warn all Christians of the evil deception of Buddhism, that has arrived to convert them.

Reverend Shin of the Nan Tien temple remains perplexed with Bishop Pipers attitude. "We don't convert people to Buddhism or change their religion", he said. " As long as they feel comfortable with any of the practices or any of the beliefs and it is good for the society, good for them and good for the family, that is the most important thing. Whether they decide to become Buddhists or not - that is not our concern"(17).

Local opposition to Buddhism also extends beyond the Christian clergy.



A survey by the Federal Office Of Multicultural Affairs, conducted in 1988, found that 41% of the general population did not wish to have a Buddhist as a workmate. Only Muslims fared worse(18).

Despite this, on Sunday 8th February this year Australian Buddhists were delighted to learn they had a friend in a high place when the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, expressed his support at the opening of the Rahula Community Lodge in Canberra(19).

"A report from the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research a couple of years ago, showed that over the ten years to 1991 Buddhism was by far the largest growing religion in our country: an increase in the order of some 300%" he said. "To a significant extent, of course, the figures reflect the substantial increase in migration from south-east Asia over that period.

But the second largest national group were Australian-born Buddhists - many from non-Asian cultures attracted by both the philosophy and the practice of Buddhism, with its emphasis upon the search for inner peace and understanding. I offer my very best wishes for the success of all that you hope to achieve in the years ahead as future stages of the centre are completed. May all your endeavours prosper and bring joy to those whom they are intended to help".

Buddhism continues to maintain a steady trickle of recruitment at the grass roots level. According to the Venerable Pannyavaro, a monk based in Surry Hills in Sydney, young people are still attracted to Buddhism because they are looking for an alternative to established Christian churches and they can explore Buddhism without feeling obliged to join.

"A lot of young people in the twenty to mid-thirty age group are coming because they don't feel imposed upon", he said, " and there are deeper meditative techniques they can draw upon". The Buddhist website he operates (<http://www.buddhanet.net>) gets an average 9,000 'hits' a day. Venerable Pannyavaro offers cyber-nirvana at this site in the form of online meditation sessions where people can log on, meditate and contemplate the infinite(20).

There are now more than ninety Buddhist temples and organisations in New South Wales, sixty-five of them in Sydney. The bulk of the two hundred people who each week visit the Buddhist Library, Meditation and Information Centre in Camperdown in Sydney are in the thirty to fifty age group. About eighty-percent are from a non-Asian background(21).

Much to the horror of the Christian clergy (if they ever find out), Buddhism is even being taught in one New South Wales primary school during religious scripture classes. In early 1995 at Blackheath Primary School a group of parents approached the principal, Kate Allan, asking the school to provide Buddhist instruction as well as the traditional Catholic and Protestant options. Now, forty-five of the schools three hundred and fifty students attend classes in Buddhism.

"The move came from the community", Allan says. "In the mountains we have quite a diverse community and it was the choice of the parents to have these classes - it was not something imposed on the whole school"(22).

Answering the question of Buddhism's growing popularity in is clearly going to be a rich and involved conclusion. This religion seems to have, at first glance, a vigorous influence on the world stage. Just when you think you have examined the issues thoroughly, you suddenly discover that you are still only looking at the tip of the iceberg.

- 1 A History Of Buddhism In Australia 1848-1988, by Paul Croucher, University of New South Wales Press, 1989, Chapter 1, page 1.
- 2 The Buddhists in Australia, by Enid Adam and Phillip J. Hughes for the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, Australian Government Publishing Office, 1996, Chapter 2.
- 3 A History Of Buddhism In Australia 1848-1988, by Paul Croucher, University of New South Wales Press, 1989, Chapter 1, page 11.
- 4 The Buddhists in Australia, by Enid Adam and Phillip J. Hughes for the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, Australian Government Publishing Office, 1996, Chapter 2.
- 5 Ethnic Buddhists in New South Wales, by Graeme Lyall, a part of Religion and Ethnic Identity - An Australian Study, Volume 3, 1990, Richmond Victoria, Spectrum Press.
- 6 The Buddhists in Australia, by Enid Adam and Phillip J. Hughes for the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, Australian Government Publishing Office, 1996, Chapter 2.
- 7 Sourced from The God In Exile, a feature story in American Time magazine, by Pico Iyer, December 22nd 1997, Volume 150.
- 8 Sourced from Dalai Inc, by John Huxley, an article in the Spectrum section of The Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 31st August, 1996.
- 9 Sourced from The Mood Molecule, an article in American Time magazine, September 29th 1997, Volume 150, No. 13.
- 10 Census surveys originally sourced from the Australian Bureau Of Statistics, also found at the web site for The Buddhist Council Of New South Wales (at <http://www.zip.com.au/~lyallg/index.htm>).
- 11 Sourced from Taking Australia by Om, an article in the Agenda section of The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday, 27th May 1996.
- 12 Sourced from Great Religions Of The World, by Sr Loretta Pastva SND, Chapter 5, 1986, Saint Mary's Press.
- 13 This quote is found at a Buddhist net site run by the Venerable Pannyavaro, at <http://impulse.hawkesbury.uws.edu.au/BuddhaNet/ans13.htm>
- 14 This incident is described in an essay written by Graeme Lyall, found at the web site for The Buddhist Council Of New South Wales (at <http://www.zip.com.au/~lyallg/index.htm>).
- 15 This incident is described in an essay written by Graeme Lyall, found at the web site for The Buddhist Council Of New South Wales (at <http://www.zip.com.au/~lyallg/index.htm>).
- 16 Sourced from Zap up the faith with some Zen, says priest , an article by Helen Pitt in the News and Features section of The Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 3rd January 1997.
- 17 Sourced from a story shown on the ABC's 7.30 Report on 18th June, 1996. A broadcast quality copy has been provided, as well as written permission by Senior Producer Phil Kwok, for its use in the radio documentary.
- 18 The Buddhists in Australia, by Enid Adam and Phillip J. Hughes for

the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research,  
Australian Government Publishing Office, 1996, Chapter 5,  
page 55.

19 A copy of this speech, and their kind permission for its use in the  
documentary, was obtained from the Vietnamese Program of SBS-Radio,  
Sydney.

20 This information was provided when the Venerable Pannyavaro was  
interviewed for the documentary at the Buddhist Vesak celebrations held  
at the University of New South Wales, May 23rd, 1998.

21 This information was provided by staff at the Buddhist Library,  
Meditation and Information Centre at 90-92 Church St, Camperdown, NSW,  
2050, Sydney. Ph: 9519-8329.

22 Sourced from the article Without A Prayer by Helen Pitt, in the  
Education section of The Sydney Morning Herald, Monday 4th November  
1996.

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After Australia abolished the White Australia Policy in 1966, migration grew from non-European countries where religions other than Christianity were common. The proportion of people reporting to be affiliated with a religion other than Christianity had increased to 2.6% in 199. Continue Reading. It is found that "No Religion" is the rising fast religion. Changes over time. The religious makeup of Australia has shifted slowly over the past 50 years. In 1966, Christianity was the main religion (88%). After Australia abolished the White Australia Policy in 1966, migration grew from non-European countries where religions other than Christianity were common. Hindu and Buddhism, and also Bahai, these are the religions I wish most Australia had, for the better of our country. #5 psychoslice, Aug 20, 2016. LuisDantas Aura of atheification. hi. the fastest growing religion in the world is islam which makes prosperity, salvation for all people, its a universal religion which is mercy for all creation. in chapter 21, verse 107 in the holy quran Allah says: we have not sent you but as a mercy to the creation! www.al-islam.org has many many valuable books about islam in different. Thus, Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world. In terms of the question of gaining the most religions by conversions, again that title goes to Christianity. By conversions from other religions, Christianity tends to be the most effective by a long shot with over 2 Million conversions followed by the 800,000 conversions recorded by Islam in that period. FALSE Although Buddhism is emerging in the Western world it is not the fastest growing religion in the world. 3. The world is converting to Islam faster than any other religion. FALSE In terms of conversions Islam performs very poorly. The article states that, "Today, Islam is one of the fastest growing faiths in Australia" and makes no claim to it being the fastest growing religion in Australia.