

Study Guide for the Australian Collaboration Fact and Issue Sheet

RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

FOR REVIEW

1. Definitions of religion

1a. What is the definition of religion as determined by the High Court of Australia?

1b. How do sociologists define the concept of religion?

1c. Using either of these definitions, could secular humanism or socialism be described as a religion? Why, or why not?

2. The development of a multi-faith Australia

2a. Write a list of all of the major faiths and denominations that are present in Australia.

2b. Arrange the list in order of the date or period of the arrival of each faith in Australia, and make a note of this date or period next to each entry.

3. Changing religious affiliations

3a. According to the statistics shown in the table provided, what percentage of the total Australian population in 1901 was accounted for by people who identified as either Anglican, Catholic, or 'Other Christian'?

3b. What is this figure now?

3c. Which of the other three categories ('other religions', 'no religion' or 'not stated/inadequately described') experienced the greatest increase over the same period of time?

3d. Name two other significant changes relating to religious affiliation that have taken place in Australia in the last decade or so.

4. Constitutional and legislative protection for religious practice

4a. Name three examples of constitutional and legislative protection for religious practice that have been enacted in Australia.

5. Religion and Australian society

5a. Can Australia be defined as a religious society? (Give evidence for your answer).

5b. Name three significant developments in the area of religion and religious practice that have occurred in Australia in the last decade or so.

FOR DISCUSSION

For each of the statements below, state whether you agree or disagree and explain why. Alternatively, use each of the statements below as a starting point for a formal or informal class debate.

1. 'The separation of church and state that is enshrined in the Australian Constitution is one of the defining characteristics of Australian society, one that distinguishes Australia from many other countries.'

2. 'Australians are tolerant of religious difference because of the traditional separation of church and state, and the many legal protections that exist in relation to the question of religious freedom.'

3. 'The recent re-discovery of religion in Australia, as evidenced by the rise of American-style churches against a longer tradition of religious decline, has occurred because the secular, individualistic, and materialistic culture that has prevailed in Australia until now has proven to be unsatisfying and inauthentic.'

4. 'Does religion play a significant part in the integration of migrants into Australian society? Give examples to support your argument.'

FOR RESEARCH

1. Use the internet to research the figures relating to the decline of the traditional Christian churches (Anglican, Catholic, etc.) and the growth of the non-traditional Christian Churches in Australia, the UK and the USA.
2. Compare patterns of growth for Islamic and Buddhist religions in Australia and comment on what you find.
3. Use the internet and/or the references found in the list of 'Useful Sources' to find out more about one religion and its history in Australia. How many people practice this faith in Australia? What are the main tenets of this faith? How do these differ from other religions that you already know about? When did this religion arrive in Australia and what was the country of origin of the people who first practiced it in Australia?