

Strong Church or Niche Market? The Demography of the Pentecostal Church in Australia

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1 Introduction

In the spring of 1996 I interviewed a large number of Pentecostal and charismatic young adults for my doctoral dissertation. My research examined the ways in which young people told stories about their significant religious experiences. To collect data, I recruited informants from various religious clubs at my university, and found these young adults more than willing to share their stories. I heard about things that many people in the wider Australian society would regard as anomalous or outlandish: narratives about learning to speak in tongues, encounters with evil spirits, and examples of miraculous healings. “Robert,” for example, told me about how his 19-year-old friend had been healed of jawbone cancer following the prayers of people at his church (see Singleton, 2001). “Jane” told me about the first time she spoke in tongues; this occurred on a weekend Bible camp (see Singleton, 2002). Many of these young adults also told me stories about the time they were “baptised in the Holy Spirit”.

At the time, several things struck me about these Pentecostal and charismatic young adults. Each described a vibrant personal faith, grounded in direct religious experiences. Moreover, and perhaps contrary to the stereotypical view of Pentecostals, they were not from the margins of society. They were pursuing higher education and seeking professional employment. It was also clear to me, given their numbers and breadth of activities on campus, that Pentecostalism was not a religious curiosity but something much more substantial. It represented a branch of the church that had large congregations and engaged and committed young people. This trend was largely confirmed by the first wave of the Australian National Church Life Survey, which was conducted around this time (Kaldor et al., 1994, 1999).

A few of these young adults were children of the Pentecostal movement and had Pentecostal parents. They had been raised Pentecostal, and had remained loyal to this kind of church through their tumultuous teenage years. Most of

those I interviewed had joined the movement in their late teens, having been raised in the mainline Protestant or Catholic traditions. They had been looking for a more dynamic style of church than that offered by the denominations in which they had been raised. One or two were complete converts to Christianity, having come to Pentecostalism in their late teens. No matter how they arrived there, they felt Pentecostalism was the most viable religious option in the mid-1990s. In the decades up to this point, Pentecostalism had transitioned from a fringe religious curiosity to a major religious movement with many of Australia's largest congregations.

Today, some 20 years after I interviewed the students, Pentecostalism remains one of the most popular Christian options among young adults (see Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007). Churches like Riverview in Perth, Influencers Church in Adelaide and Planetshakers in Melbourne draw enormous congregations each weekend. Hillsong in Sydney remains Australia's largest single congregation and now has chapters in other Australian cities and internationally. By contrast, the mainline Protestant denominations for the most part struggle to attract young adults, and have ageing congregations (see Bouma, 2006; Singleton, 2014). And while adherence amongst Catholics remains reasonably consistent across all age groups, most young Catholics do not attend regularly (see Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007). For those who study religion in Australia none of this is news.

However, this is only part of the contemporary Pentecostal story. Many of those who joined the Pentecostal movement in the 1960s and '70s have left. They have been replaced by a younger generation of Pentecostals, many of whom are migrants or the children of migrants. It is now a religious movement characterised by great cultural diversity, perhaps more than any other Christian denomination or movement in Australia. This chapter explores this transformation, using a range of data that charts the changing demographic profile of Pentecostalism in Australia. It argues that the Pentecostals have prospered not only because of their worship style, politics and philosophies, but because they have connected with particular segments of the changing Australian community. Their success is due to both their religious activities and wider, global religious forces.

This chapter begins with methodological considerations. This is important because counting Pentecostals in the census and surveys is not without problems. Next, I document the rise of Pentecostalism in Australia, particularly its boom period from the late 1960s. From there I examine the contemporary demographic characteristics of the Pentecostal movement in Australia. I show how it has become a more culturally diverse movement in a short span of time.

This analysis of census and survey data clearly shows the Pentecostal movement in Australia continues to evolve and adapt.

2 Counting Pentecostals in Australia

For this chapter, I use two main sources of demographic data on Australia's Pentecostal community. These are the Australian Census for various years, and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA). Outside of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), these are the only reliable national-level sources of data on Pentecostals. Other surveys in Australia collect data on religion, including the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AUSA) and the World Values Survey (WVS). Unfortunately, the latter two survey programs have small sample sizes and one cannot make accurate estimates about Pentecostals because so few are included in their samples.

The excellent NCLS has collected data from Pentecostal denominations and churches for more than two decades. These data, however, are restricted to church attenders only, and not every Pentecostal congregation participates. Using more widespread survey programs enables us to see how Pentecostals figure in Australia's broader religious firmament.

In this chapter, I use census data from the 1981 to 2016 censuses inclusive. For some of the more in-depth analysis, I use the 1% census sample file from 2011. This is a random selection of cases from the census. It is extremely accurate, with acceptable margin of errors around all the estimates I make. I use it because it allows for superior data manipulation compared to the regular census data that are available. At the time of writing a census sample file for 2016 is not yet available.

The second data source I use is Wave 14 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (2014). The HILDA is a national, longitudinal survey program that collects data from more than 15,000 people. It periodically asks questions about religious identification, attendance at services of worship and religious salience (how important religion is to a person; its place in their daily life). While not as accurate as the Australian census – the number of Pentecostals it counts is much smaller – it is still accurate enough for some robust conclusions to be made about the religious lives of Pentecostals in Australia.

There are some important methodological issues to consider when it comes to measuring Pentecostals in surveys and the census. The Australian census only asks about religious identification. Religious identification is a subjective assessment of how people see themselves, whether they count themselves

“belonging” in a broader sense to a religious tradition, religious movement or a denomination. Unfortunately, religious affiliation is only one small measure of a person’s religious commitments. Declared religious affiliation cannot tell us about the salience of these ties, nor does it provide a clue about everyday religiosity (this is better measured with a metric combining religious practice and belief) (Singleton, 2014, p. 72). Furthermore, what people understand by “adherence” or “affiliation” to a “religion” is also a complex issue (see Wuthnow, 2015). For some, to belong to a religious tradition is to be a participating member of a congregation, mosque or temple. For others, including the majority of Australians, it is a loose, sometimes affective link to a religious tradition. Nonetheless, examining religious identity or adherence is a useful way of mapping religious change over time and for understanding the vibrancy of a particular religious community or group.

Another important issue is how groups are counted. Depending on the group, affiliation is counted differently. The major religions, those with no religion and several historically large Christian denominations (e.g. Anglicans, Catholics) each have their own “tick-a-box” in the Australian census and the HILDA questionnaire. This is not true of Pentecostals writ large, or Pentecostal denominations such as the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) or the Foursquare Gospel Church. These adherents have to write something in for themselves. The ACC made a concerted effort prior to the 2016 Census encouraging its members to specify that they are “Pentecostal” as opposed to being a member of a particular Pentecostal denomination. This message was communicated to its member churches on the ACC website, under a news item “Let Your Faith Count”. The website noted: “Together, let’s make a collective effort to be counted and recognised as a strong influence in our nation.” Hillsong in Sydney also asked its members to identify in the census as Pentecostal. In broader reports and data releases the Australian Bureau of Statistics counts people who nominate themselves as members of a Pentecostal denomination, like the Foursquare Gospel Church simply as “Pentecostal.”

For all of this, it is likely that census and survey counts of Pentecostals are too low and do not give us the full picture of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement in Australia. In the past, there has been some anecdotal evidence that some Pentecostals have been reluctant to nominate their religion (see Bouma, 2006). There may also be ambiguity around the label itself. Not every person who acts in ways that are identifiably Pentecostal, such as speaking in tongues or claiming to have been baptised in Holy Spirit, will see that label as applicable to them. A graduate student of mine comes from sub-Saharan Africa and happily describes himself as Pentecostal. He recently made the observation to me that many members of his church in Australia did not think of

themselves as Pentecostal in the same way that he did. He said they saw themselves as members of his particular independent church, which just happened to be Pentecostal in its style. For him, however, to be Pentecostal was an important part of his religious identity, mainly due to his experiences in his country of origin.

Additionally, people may identify as “charismatic” but declare their religious identification as something else. The term charismatic applies to individuals and groups within larger mainstream denominations who are either favourably disposed towards the Pentecostal experiences or have these experiences themselves. In Australia charismatic congregations, small groups and individuals can be found in the Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran and Churches of Christ denominations, amongst others. For these reasons, some data-collecting organisations and social scientists prefer the term umbrella “Renewalist” to cover both Charismatics and Pentecostals (e.g. Pew Forum, 2006).

There is also considerable debate around the very definitions of Pentecostalism. Scholars of Pentecostalism note the incredible diversity worldwide among Pentecostals, and the diffuse movements encompassed by the term (see Anderson, 2004; Yong, 2010). This includes established denominations, house churches and independent congregations. One also finds references in the scholarly literature to distinctions between “Classic Pentecostalism” and “Neo-Pentecostalism.” Given this, Pentecostal theologian Amos Young, for example, prefers to spell Pentecostalism with a lower case “p” to signify the broadness of this movement. In sum, counts of Pentecostals are an indicative rather than exhaustive measure of participation in the Australian Pentecostal and charismatic movement.

In this chapter, I analyse data from people who identify themselves – or have been classified – as Pentecostals in the HILDA or census. In a sense, these are people who identify with a broader religious movement, one which is not as clearly demarcated as membership of a Christian denomination, like the Methodist or Catholic churches. Nonetheless, we can reasonably infer that these are people who accept the central doctrinal elements of Pentecostalism: belief in the “gifts of the spirit” (e.g. speaking in tongues, miraculous healing), and the doctrine of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”, and as I show below, almost certainly attend a Pentecostal church.

3 **The Establishment, Growth and Consolidation of the Pentecostal Church in Australia**

This section charts the growth of Pentecostalism in Australia. It is not intended to serve as an exhaustive narrative history of the movement; this has been

done elsewhere (see Chant, 1984, 2011; Miller, 2015). Briefly, the Australian Pentecostal movement really started to grow following the seminal Azusa St Revival in Los Angeles, although its antecedents can be traced back even further than that (see Chant, 1984, 2011). From the 1920s there were Pentecostal revivals in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland (Hutchinson, 2009, p. 519). The first peak body of Australian Pentecostal churches, The Assemblies of God, was founded in 1937. It is difficult to quantify precisely how many Pentecostals there were prior to World War II, as census reports of this era do not list Pentecostals among the Christian adherents. The official 1933 census, for example, counted groups such as the Christian Scientists and the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) but not Pentecostals. Nonetheless, the Pentecostals were an important presence in Australia's religious scene.

The Pentecostal movement began to expand decisively in Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Chant, 2011; Hutchinson, 2009; Miller, 2015). This is also the case in other Western nations, and coincided with the emergence of the charismatic renewal movement that swept the Protestant and Catholic denominations (Fiddes, 1984). This is a period of great historical significance for both church and society. It is widely agreed that the 1960s and early 1970s – termed the “long 1960s” by some scholars of religion – was a social turning point in countries and regions like Western Europe, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and New Zealand (see McLeod, 2007). It was a time of tumultuous social change, as evidenced by the civil rights and peace movements, the second wave feminist movement, and the availability of the Pill. Churches were not immune to the reforming spirit of the age; Vatican II was a concerted effort by the Catholic Church to modernise (see Singleton, 2014).

Around this time the Jesus People movement began in the United States (see Eskridge, 2013). The Jesus People movement offered a new musical expression of faith, folding a Christian message into contemporary rock and folk music genres. They pioneered the praise music style that has proved so critical to the Pentecostal movement's success (Eskridge, 2013). Influential “charismatic” churches, such as the Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard churches grew from the Jesus People movement (Eskridge, 2013). More generally, the Jesus People movement's concerns and ambitions overlapped with those of the Pentecostal movement. Both proposed a more “authentic,” less doctrinal and liturgical approach to religious worship and practice. Such a popularising approach fitted with the sensibilities of the time, in which young people were increasingly turning away from the style of the traditional churches (Brown, 2014; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). There is insufficient data available to properly quantify the growth of the Australian Pentecostal movement from the 1950s to mid-1970s, however, it is worth noting that in Great Britain, the number of Pentecostal churches and congregations grew by 123% between 1950 and 1980 (Field, 2017,

p. 186). By the end of the 1970s, Pentecostalism in Australia had transitioned from a small-scale crusade to major church movement.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) first reported on Pentecostals in 1976, counting 38,393 Pentecostals, approximately 0.3% of the population. Across the next two decades they experienced their most decisive period of growth and expansion in Australia. By 1996 they had grown to 174,720 adherents, which represented 1% of the Australian population. Put another way, the number of Pentecostals had grown by 355% in just two decades from the mid-1970s.

Why did the Pentecostal movement grow? Most scholars agree that the growth between the 1970s to the late 1980s is a combination of church-related and broader social factors. Pentecostalism is a dynamic and appealing form of religion: it is contemporary, alive and energetic. This is often in contrast to the staid, liturgical and traditional styles found in the mainline churches. As noted above, the widespread use of contemporary gospel music was critical to Pentecostalism's appeal (Cox, 1995; Beyer, 2006; Miller & Yamamori, 2007). Preachers taught about the reality of supernatural intervention in everyday life, and many Pentecostal churches offered the prospect of miraculous healing, widely practised in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions (see Singleton, 2001). It is also true that successful individual congregations within mainline Protestant traditions tend to be those that have either charismatic elements or are evangelical in style. This approach to religious practice attracted "switchers" to Pentecostalism from the mainline denominations, particularly those Protestant denominations that were experiencing decline (Kaldor et al., 1999). This pattern has occurred not just in Australia, but also globally, no more so than in the Global South (see Jenkins, 2002; Pew Forum, 2006; Coleman, 2000).

Other broader social and demographic shifts seemingly assisted Pentecostalism's cause in its boom period. Pentecostal congregations were easily able to grow in the fast-expanding suburbs of the major cities, a tribute to the adaptability and flexibility of the Pentecostal movement (see Singleton, 2014). This often began with the renting out of a school hall or community centre as the first space of worship for a new congregation. As the congregation grew, new and larger spaces were financed. From often humble beginnings, the Pentecostals were able to construct so-called "mega-churches." The Hillsong Church in Baulkham Hills is an important example of this. This less bureaucratic, independent approach to church planting and growth effectively superseded the cumbersome parish system found amongst the mainline Protestant denominations – one which could be easily implemented in smaller colonial cities, but not so when attendances were stagnating and resources becoming scarcer (see Akehurst, 2013). This is less true for the Catholics, who are generally

better resourced and have an education system that has provided schools (and accompanying parishes) in the expanding suburbs. Similar processes occurred in regional towns around Australia.

Since the late 1980s, the Pentecostal movement has stopped growing in any meaningful way and has instead maintained its “market share.” Figure 1 shows the proportion of the Australian population who have identified as Pentecostal in the Australian census since 1986. This chart also shows the other major Australian denominations, along with those who claim to have no religion. It demonstrates clearly the fortunes of different religious groups across this period of time.

This chart shows that the proportion of the population who identify as Pentecostal has remained steady across the past three decades. While the absolute number of Pentecostals grew from 219,689 in 2006 to 260,558 in 2016, their proportion in the population has remained effectively the same. In other words, their numerical growth is consistent with the general population growth. They did experience an enormous dip in 2001, mainly because the Assemblies of God changed their name to the Australian Christian Churches and encouraged its members to write that on the census rather than to identify as Pentecostal. In that census, the ABS did not count members of the Australian Christian Churches as Pentecostals. Now if a person identifies as being a member of the

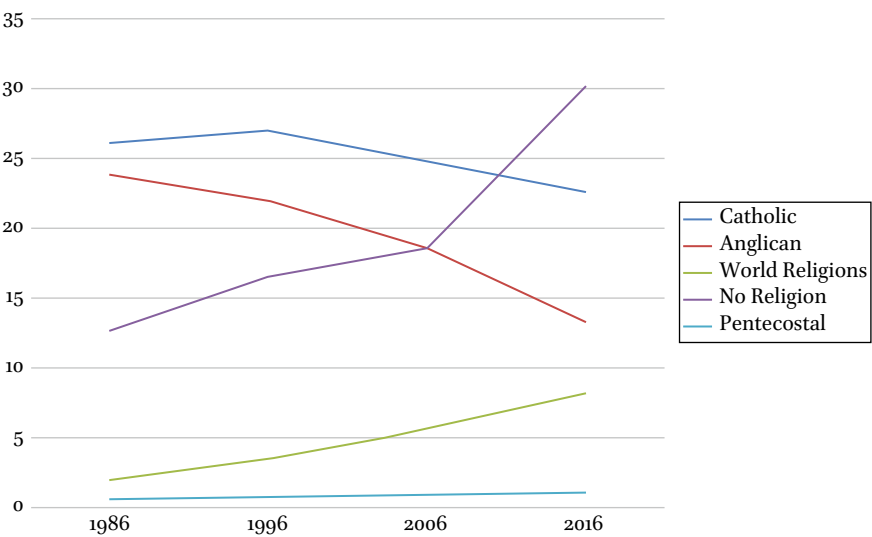


FIGURE 1 Australian Population: religious identification by census collection year
SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS CENSUS DATA FOR VARIOUS YEARS

Australian Christian Churches they are counted as “Pentecostal” by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

By contrast, the overall proportion of the population identifying as Christian has declined decisively since the 1980s. Much of this loss has come from the mainline Protestant denominations, particularly the Anglican Church. Concomitantly, the proportion of those who claim no religious affiliation – the “nones” – has increased dramatically, and now represents some 30% of the population. The nones are now the single largest grouping among “religious” categories (i.e. Catholic; Anglican etc.). The proportion of the population that identifies with other world religions has grown markedly, and now represents 8.2% of the population.

There is little doubt about the pronounced vitality of this religious movement compared to other Christian denominations and groups. Moreover, the broader Pentecostal community, unlike other mainline Protestant or Catholic denominations, exhibits a stronger relationship between religious identity, practice and salience. For the absolute majority of adherents, to be Pentecostal is to be actively religious. This can be demonstrated using the HILDA dataset.

In order to measure religious salience (what religion means to a person), the 2014 HILDA asked respondents: “On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is religion in your life”, with 10 being the most important. Table 1 compares mean scores on this item for Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, those who follow world religions (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism) and the nones.

As can be seen from Table 1, Pentecostals report much higher levels of religious salience (importance of faith in everyday life) than Catholics or mainline Protestants. All of the differences between groups are statistically significant (that is, the differences between scores are unlikely to have occurred by chance or sampling error). The high mean (average) score for Pentecostals (8.80) shows that the majority of them rate their faith as particularly important to their lives. Pentecostals rate their faith as far more important than other major denominations and groups; indeed, twice as much as the Anglicans or Catholics.

Not surprisingly, this high level of religious salience is accompanied by regular attendance at services of worship. According to the HILDA data, 92% of those who identify as Pentecostal have fairly regular or very regular attendance at services of worship (more than a few times per year). This is in contrast to the Catholics, with only 42% claiming regular or semi-regular attendance. It is even lower still among the mainline Protestants, with only 31% of adherents

TABLE 1 Australians (Ages 15+): Importance of Religion in Life by Denomination (Mean Score for each Group)

Denomination	Mean Score
PENTECOSTAL	8.80
WORLD RELIGIONS (inc. Islam; Hinduism, Buddhism)	6.36
CATHOLIC	4.72
MAINLINE PROTESTANT	4.23
NO RELIGION	0.72
Total respondents	N=14,748

SOURCE: 2014 HOUSEHOLD, INCOME AND LABOUR DYNAMICS
IN AUSTRALIA SURVEY

maintaining some kind of regular or semi-regular attendance. To put it another way, Pentecostals are three times more likely the mainline Protestants to attend regularly; and more than twice as likely as Catholics to do so. Only four people who identify as Pentecostals in the HILDA dataset say that they never attend services of worship.

Neither the mainline Protestants or Catholics can rely on their adherents to attend regularly or to rate their faith as important in their lives. This has proved particularly deleterious for the mainline Protestant dominations, who have experienced the most substantial decline in affiliation since the 1970s. This is different for the Pentecostals. There is little doubt that their success is due in large part to the defined relationship between affiliation and other religious practices. This is a community of adherents who practise their religion with vigour and commitment and represent the very strongest of Christian communities in Australia. This marks them as different to other mainstream denominations and Christian traditions in Australia, who are constituted by a mix of those who attend and those who maintain an affiliation for other reasons, whether that is tradition or culture. The Pentecostals’ characteristics are more like those of a sect (as this is conventionally understood in the sociology of religion), groups like the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Christadelphians and Brethren, whose members largely express their commitment through participation (see Stark & Finke, 2000).

In sum, the Pentecostals have prospered since the 1960s because of their worship style, politics and philosophies, and because they have connected

with particular segments of the changing Australian community, those that still seek something from church. They now represent an established and stable group in Australia's changing religious mosaic. However, this is not the whole story. The external appearance of growth and stability obscures a large change that is taking place within the Pentecostal movement. A closer look at the demographics of the contemporary Pentecostal community reveals that this religious group, perhaps more than any other, embodies the intersection between global change and local religion.

4 The Contemporary Pentecostal Community: Stability and Change

In this section, I explore the demographics of the contemporary Pentecostal community. I concentrate mainly on the age profile and country of birth of the Pentecostals, comparing them to other religious traditions on these measures.

It is generally accepted that Pentecostalism is a style of Christian practice, belief and theology particularly attractive to young people. This is substantiated by the data. Figure 2 presents the age profile of Pentecostals using census data from 2011 (as noted above, 2011 is selected for this particular comparison because the detailed 2016 data are not yet released). It compares this with other denominations and traditions. I examine the age profile of these groups by focusing on the different birth cohorts (also described as “generations”) found in each denomination or grouping. For ease of reference, each birth cohort is

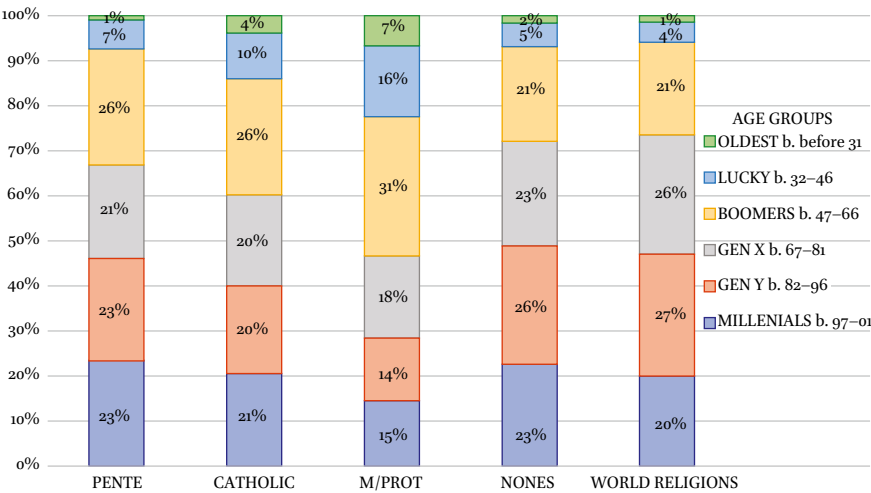


FIGURE 2 Australian Population 2011: age groups by religious tradition (% of Religious Group)
SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS CENSUS SAMPLE FILE 2011

given a name: i.e. “Boomers” or “Generation X.” The dating and naming of these birth cohorts largely follows conventions established in a series of reports by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2004; 2006).

These data show Pentecostals are comprised mainly of Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y, and Millennials. This is a similar age profile to the world religions (such as Islam Hinduism and Buddhism), and the nones. All three of these groups are dominated by members of the younger generations. Remarkably, two thirds of Pentecostals are born after 1967. Contrast this with the mainline Protestant denominations: less than half of them were born after 1967.

Since the late 1970s, the Pentecostal movement has drawn most of its members from the younger birth cohorts. Increasingly, however, it is appealing to people who are young *and* are migrants, or the children of migrants. I suggest that it is this fact more than any other that has sustained the church in the past decade. This point requires some explanation.

In 1981, more than two thirds of Pentecostals were born after 1947. This is not surprising, as the 1981 census captured all of those Baby Boomers (and their young children) who had come to Pentecostalism in the 1970s, that period of rapid expansion for the Pentecostal movement. In effect, its major expansion in Australia through the 1970s was built on Boomer affiliation. However, many of the Boomers who came to the Pentecostal movement in these decades have left for all time, and been replaced by others, many of whom are migrants, and their children. This is evidenced in part by the current age profile of the Pentecostals, dominated now by members of Generation X, Y and Millennials. It is also clear if we look at the changing cultural profile of Australia's Pentecostal community.

Figure 3 compares the changing cultural profile of four major groups: Pentecostals, Catholics, those with no religion and the largest of the mainline Protestant denominations, the Anglicans. It is here we see a change that has occurred among the Pentecostals, and almost no one else. This figure shows the proportion of each denomination or group who was born overseas from 1981 until the latest census in 2016.

In 1981 about a quarter of all Catholics were born overseas. In 2016 about the same proportion of Catholics were born overseas. However, it is a different story for the Pentecostals. In 1981 about a quarter of all Pentecostals were born overseas. This remained fairly stable until 2001. Between 2001 and 2016 the proportion of Pentecostals born overseas increased rapidly, so that by 2016 *36% of all Pentecostals were born overseas*. No other group has experienced such a profound shift in its demographic composition. Additionally, a substantial proportion of Australian-born Pentecostals have either a mother, father or both

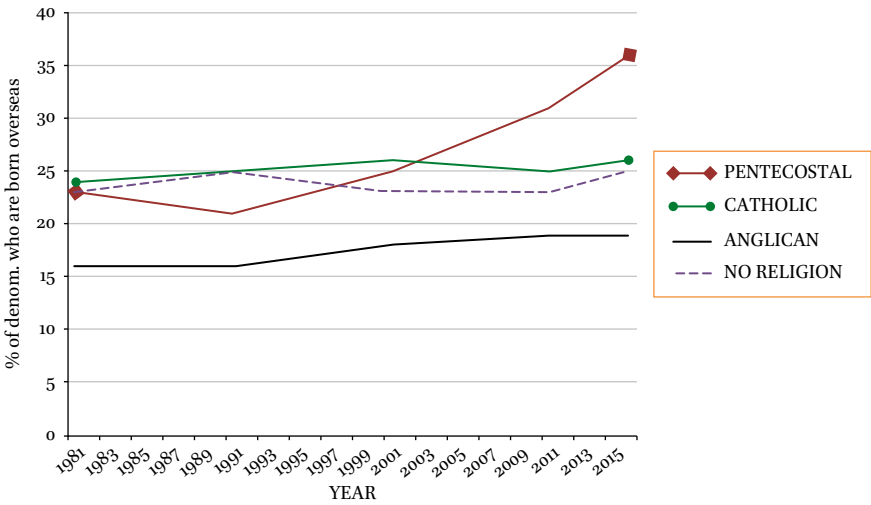


FIGURE 3 Religious Identification by Place of Birth by Year
SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS CENUS DATA FOR VARIOUS YEARS

parents born overseas. Pentecostals are more likely than Catholics, Anglicans and those with no religion to have one or both parents born overseas.

Pentecostalism in Australia is thus profoundly affected by migration, and broader global trends. As evidenced by abundant research, the Pentecostal movement has grown globally, especially throughout the Global South (Anderson, 2004; Cox, 1995; Jenkins, 2002; Johnson & Grim, 2013; Kalu, 2008; Pew Forum, 2006). It is the fastest, or one of the fastest-growing Christian movements throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. It is now the dominant strand of Protestantism in many nations (remembering that the Latin American countries and the Philippines are majority Catholic), having overtaken other more established Protestant denominations. For example, in present-day Brazil, which has a majority Catholic population, about seven out of ten Protestants are Pentecostals, while in Kenya, which has a majority Protestant population, about 50% of Protestants are Pentecostals (Pew Forum, 2006, p. 4).

This global growth is impacting Australia's religious life, in much the same way that Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism have grown here too. Pentecostals are migrating from around the world and join or form Pentecostal churches once they arrive in Australia. Australian Pentecostals who are born overseas come from many locations, however, the largest groups are those from sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania (including New Zealand). These regions have been

profoundly affected by Pentecostalism. In 2016, approximately 15% of *all* Australian Pentecostals were born in one of these two regions.

In a sense, these people typify what Bouma (1996) describes as “religious settlement,” the processes by which migrants bring their faith with them from one country to another. In Australia, we see Pentecostal migrants enriching established Pentecostal churches. We also see the establishment of wholly migrant community churches, or Australian branches of overseas congregations (see Figures 4 & 5).

Figures 4 and 5 show two migrant churches in Melbourne’s inner city. These were founded to meet both the cultural and religious needs of migrants from one country (in this case, Peru and Nigeria), and to nurture specific transnational religious networks. Both of these churches were founded in the country of origin and thus have extended their mission to expatriates in the host country. Services are in familiar languages, and there is less interest in expanding their mission to those outside the cultural community. By contrast, other Pentecostal migrants are less committed to a transnational church and thus seek out a new congregation on arrival, joining in with others from a range of



FIGURE 4 Peruvian-Based Pentecostal Church in West Footscray, Vic
 SOURCE: THE AUTHOR



FIGURE 5 Nigerian-Founded Redeemed Christian Church in Kensington, Vic
SOURCE: THE AUTHOR

cultural backgrounds. Established Pentecostal churches sometimes offer services in languages other than English, but this is not a given.

Further, the increasingly irreligious Global North is a particular focus of the missionary activity of Pentecostal churches in the Global South. We see the phenomenon of “reverse mission,” where missionaries are sent to the Global North to conduct mission work (see Jenkins, 2007; Dennis, 2017). The Foursquare Gospel Church in PNG, for example, have sent missionaries not only to neighbouring Pacific nations but to nearby Australia as well (see Singleton, 2014).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the changing demographic characteristics of Pentecostalism in Australia. Perhaps more than any other Christian movement, save for the Mormon church and Asian evangelical churches, Pentecostalism has prospered in Australia in recent decades, its fortunes bolstered somewhat by the recent migration of people from countries where Pentecostalism is a major religious movement. The title of this chapter asks whether it is a strong church or simply represents a niche market, reaching out to those who still seek faith in contemporary Australia. In a sense, it is both. As illustrated by the HILDA data, its adherents maintain the strongest levels of religious belief and practice amongst all Christian adherents. However, a declining proportion of people in

Australia are interested in practising the Christian faith, and the larger “market” for Christianity has shrunk in recent decades. The notion that the Pentecostal movement can grow significantly or maintain their current level by appealing to the religiously disaffected or the nones is not supported by the data. Indeed, many of the Baby Boomers who came to the movement in the 1970s and 1980s are no longer Pentecostals. This strong form of religion does not appeal to secular Australians. It seems unlikely that any Christian movement can alter Australia’s broader secular trajectory. Rather, Pentecostalism is the religion of choice for particular segments of the changing Australian community, including recent migrants, and the children of recent migrants. Australia’s religious life, more than any other time, is shaped by global religious forces, and Pentecostalism aptly illustrates this.

5.1 Note

This research uses unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this research, however, are those of the author and should not be attributed to either FaHCSIA or the Melbourne Institute.

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