

Press Release

Re: Release of the CD-Rom - *Australia s Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration*. The Standard edition was released in February 2001 and the Professional edition in March 2001.

Religion in Australian society is rapidly changing. Over the last 200 years, immigrants have brought to Australia a great range of religious traditions. Since 1946, that diversity has increased all the more rapidly. All the major religious traditions of the world may now be found in Australia.

At the same time, several other trends are evident. Australians are making choices about their spirituality in ways they have never done before. They are trying out the variety of options found in Australia, drawing on the various resources. A survey conducted by NCLS Research and Edith Cowan University in 1998 found that more than 10% of Australians had drawn on the resources of more than one religion in the previous 12 months. Millions of Australians are experimenting with Eastern Meditation, Psychic Healing and Crystals, as well as being involved in churches.

The religious choice being exercised by Australians is evident in the huge movement between the denominations. Between 1991 and 1996, 50,000 Australians moved into the Pentecostal churches from other denominations ... and 27,500 moved out of them into other denominations. In that same period, more than 18,000 Australians joined Pentecostal churches without any previous involvement in a church, and another 30,000 Pentecostals left their churches without going anywhere else. Australians are trying the options. Some like what they find - others do not.

That trend is also evident in the increase in those who describe themselves as having no religion . Between 1961 and 1996, the number of Australians claiming to have no religion has risen from 37,500 to almost 3 million people. The numbers are continuing to rise. Yet the Australian Community Survey of the NCLS and Edith Cowan University found that half of these people say that a spiritual life is important to them. While they have dropped their identification with religious organisations, many are personally putting together their own spirituality.

Within these trends has come a renewed interest in the spiritual heritage of the Aboriginal people - one of the oldest spiritual traditions on the planet. The fact that Aboriginal people of Australia lived for so many millennia in harmony with the natural environment, while in a space of just 200 years newcomers, mainly of European origin have created such havoc and destruction of the natural environment, has caused many to ask new questions. Can Aboriginal values and spirituality provide some clues to creating a more sustainable future for other inhabitants of the Australian continent? Or has Christianity something to offer the Aboriginal people?

All these changes are explored in the new CD-Rom from the Christian Research Association. This CD-Rom provides the most detailed and accessible account of Australia s religious communities ever produced. More than 20 scholars have contributed to this encyclopaedic

collection of information. The Professional Edition includes an additional database of materials about 90 small religious, making a total of 170 religious groups covered in the CD-Rom as a whole. Combined with 550 photographs, 250 graphs and maps, and more than 60 minutes of video, it provides a most valuable resource to exploring Australia's religious communities.

This CD-Rom will help Australians to explore and understand ...

- " their own traditions and background
- " the culture and heritage of their neighbours and friends
- " Australian history and the dynamics of contemporary society
- " the world of faiths and meaning.

In that process, it will help Australians to make informed and wise choices about their own spirituality and community involvements. We hope this CD-Rom will contribute to a better society.

Title: *Australia's Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration*

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Ecumenism	Gideon Goosen (Professional edition)
Religious Dialogue	John Baldock (Professional edition)
Immigration	Gary Bouma (Professional edition)
Cults	Gary Bouma (Professional edition)
Ethics and Religion	Philip Hughes (Professional edition)
Small Religious Groups	Based on materials gathered by Rowan Ireland, revised and supplemented by additional material written by Philip Hughes and Sharon Bond (Professional edition)

Note about the Christian Research Association

The Christian Research Association was established in 1985 to provide reliable data about religious beliefs and practices in Australia.

The following organisations contribute annually and have representatives on a board which directs research:

- Anglican Diocese of Brisbane
- Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
- Baptist Union of Victoria
- Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission
- Pahran Mission
- Salvation Army (Southern Territory)
- Seventh-day Adventists

Uniting Church, Synod of New South Wales
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For more information about the CRA, see the website: www.cra.org.au.

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