

## **Census 2022 An article written by the late Nick Hawkes**

Australia's latest census data has just been released with headlines in the press proclaiming that there are now fewer Christians than non-Christians in the nation. I had a rueful smile at this. Jesus once told a deeply disturbing parable. (A parable is a story that teaches a spiritual truth). He spoke of there being two gates. One was wide, and an easy path led through it. The majority of people went down that path. But there was another gate, a narrow gate, which led to eternal hope. Only those who sought it out, found their way through it and found life. So, the reality is: authentic Christianity has never been in the majority, even in times when "church-going" was the social norm in society. Authentic Christianity involves asking Jesus for forgiveness, and it involves making him the leader of your life. Being a Christian is no easy option. Jesus made that plain. This is particularly the case now that Christianity is no longer "on trend". Christians today have to expect to be scorned and maligned – particularly in films and in the media.

According to Jesus, only a minority will discover the truth behind the order we see in the cosmos. Only a few will discover a hope that lies beyond the harsh realities of this life. Most people want to be their own god and design their own morality. They don't want to surrender to God's love, or accept the death that Jesus died for them.

There is a sense in which I welcome the census data. The reality is: God is refining his church. He is clearing out the dead wood of those who are merely religious rather than those who love Jesus and are obedient to him. The traditional denominations are quickly losing their nominal Christians, as well as (sadly) losing some of their elderly saints due to old age. But other denominations are growing. The reality is, there are many churches that are faithfully preaching the Christian gospel. The trick is to find one and be part of it.

But I must also confess to a growing sense of sadness at the census results. The reasons for this are two-fold. The first is: it risks a secular society pointing to the numbers and saying that Christians are now so insignificant that they don't deserve special status as school chaplains (something which has already happened), or have tax breaks because of the social work they do, or have the Christian ethos of their schools protected. (The fact that there are record enrolments of students at faith-based schools – presumably because parents view the state's secular morality with some alarm – should, however, cause governments to think a bit!)

Nick Hawkes