

Christianity Giving Way to Secularism in England

The number of Christians in England and Wales declined by 13 percent over the past decade, while the non-religious population grew from 15 to 25 percent, the most recent national census has revealed.

Christianity remains by far the largest religion in the country, with more than 33 million adherents amongst Britain's 61 million population, but over 14 million people professed to have no religion at all.

Despite this fall-off in support, church leaders welcomed the Office of National Statistics' findings.

"These results confirm that we remain a faithful nation," said the Reverend Arun Arora, Director of Communications for the Archbishop of Canterbury's Council.

But with a near-doubling in those identifying themselves as non-religious, secular commentators too have greeted the census results.

"This is a really significant cultural shift. To see such an increase in the non-religious and such a decrease in those reporting themselves as Christian is astounding," said Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association.

Amidst the overall downturn in attendance, leading church figures remain upbeat.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior cleric of Britain's established Church of England, has said that cathedral congregations have grown over the past few years.

At the same time, many individual city churches have seen their congregations expand massively.

Even those situated within the sparsely populated streets of London's financial district have reported signs of growth.

"The number of people who are nominally Christian has gone down, but that of those who are truly committed hasn't," said the Reverend Oliver Ross, Rector of the thriving St Olave church.

The last 10 years have also seen the number of Muslims increase from 1.5 million to 2.7 million, while the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Sikh populations have also risen.

Other census figures indicate that the number of people belonging to the "white" ethnic group decreased by five percent from the last census.

The latest release of census results comes at a trying time for the Church of England.

The appointment of women bishops was controversially rejected at a church council last month, while parliament is currently engaged in a hotly contested debate on gay marriage, which the Church of England opposes.

Information for Northern Ireland and Scotland is conducted by their own national statistic bodies.

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