Beat: Miscellaneous

Non-religious on the rise in England and Wales as Christianity declines

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USPA News - The number of people in England and Wales who say they have no religion increased by more than six million over the last decade, almost double from what it was in 2001, according to official results released on Tuesday from the 2011 census. The results from last year`s census, which takes place every ten years, shows Christianity remained the largest religion in both England and Wales in 2011.

Muslims are the next biggest religious group and have grown in the last decade, but the number of people who reported they have no religion has now reached a quarter of the population. Approximately 33.2 million people, representing 59.3 percent of the total population in England and Wales combined, identified themselves as Christian in the census last year. This is down more than four million from the 37.3 million people who recorded their religion as Christian in 2001. People who said they have no religion increased by more than six million to 14.1 million, or 25.10 percent of the population. Similar increases have been observed in other Western countries in recent years, and the British Humanist Association described the results as showing a "huge shift" in cultural identity. The religion question was the only voluntary question on the 2011 census and 7.2 percent of people did not answer the question. But Reverend Arun Arora of the Church of England said the results show that England remains a "faithful nation", and said reports about the death of Christian England have been greatly exaggerated. "Despite a decade of nay saying and campaigning by atheist commentators and groups, six out of ten people in England self-identify as Christians, a figure which rises to more than two-thirds when including people identifying with faith as a whole," he said. Arora noted that the Church of England baptized an average of 2,500 people a week during the last decade, marking an increase of 40 percent in adult baptisms. And while 253 churches were closed across England between 2001 and 2011, Arora said approximately 1,000 new congregations were started. "Doubtless, campaigning atheist organisations will attempt to minimize the significance of the majority figures for faith and Christianity," the church spokesman said. "In fact, these figures draw attention to the free ride that had been given to these bodies whose total membership would barely fill half of Old Trafford." According to a WIN-Gallup International poll conducted earlier this year among more than 50,000 people from 57 countries in five continents, 59 percent identified themselves as religious. Approximately 13 percent said they are atheists while 23 percent described themselves as not religious, but stopping short of defining themselves as an atheist.

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