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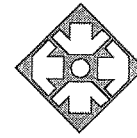
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Hyper-real religions



Fear, anxiety and late-modern religious innovation

Adam Possamai

University of Western Sydney

Murray Lee

University of Sydney

Abstract

Census data from 2006 identified 133,800 Australians as being of 'inadequately described religion'. This aggregated category conceals the exponential growth of innovative late-modern religious faiths. For example, leaked 2001 Census data suggests that some 71,000 Australians identified Jediism, as appropriated from the *Star Wars* films, as their faith. For most respondents to the Census this was no doubt an ironic late-modern *play* with the Census process as a response to an internet-based meme. However, evidence does suggest that a significant minority of respondents take the religion seriously. Such innovative faiths have raised the ire of some traditional religious practitioners who have responded with expressions of fear and anxiety. From a sociological perspective, this article examines the growth in innovative faiths and the backlash against them, and reports the results of a survey of university staff and students on the topic.

Keywords: anxiety, fear, hyper-reality, popular culture, spirituality

The rise of religious and nationalist fundamentalism, along with the collapse of communism, global warming and the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, are the most frequently cited motifs of the 'crisis of modernity' (see Beck, 1992; Garland, 2001). Arguably, the presence of these motifs has thrown into relief the need for a social scientific understanding of rapid

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social change; the intensification of the movement of capital, goods and people globally; the increasing fragmentation of locality and nationhood; and the changing nature of national and transnational structures (Mythan and Walklate, 2008). It is also arguable that the growth in innovative religions and spiritualities, and the new networks that accompany them, constitutes part of the social changes identified as this 'crisis in modernity'; a disenchantment with both organized religion and the emancipatory project of modernity itself.

David Martin (2005), one of the leading sociologists of religion, has argued for more than 40 years that secularization is a myth created by social scientists. For Martin, religion is not disappearing as part of some grand modernist project. Recent data provides tentative support for Martin's argument. Indicators of what it means to be religious have changed in recent decades, and some forms of participation in religion have increased (Lynch, 2007; Lyon, 2000).

A range of theorists have identified social change, related to a fragmentation of meta-narratives such as those of science and traditional religion, and a subsequent growth in 'ontological insecurity', to be an inherent part of the 'late-modern' reflexive condition (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1993; Lee, 2007; Lupton, 1999). Religion, having the seemingly inexhaustible capacity to surprise even its most astute observers (Introvigne, 2004), is one of the many catalysts of change. Yet religious forms are also subject to reinvention in these dynamic and changing contexts. Such changes, unsurprisingly, also apply in the Australian context. For example, while Australia is becoming demonstrably less Christian it is arguably becoming more spiritual (Bouma, 2006; Tacey, 2000). Yet, while the joint markers of late modernity – expanding opportunities and choices, and expanding insecurities – are no doubt drivers of innovative new religious practices, they are also sources of fear and anxiety. And while the persecution of fledgling religious movements based on fear of the 'other' is nothing new, the context in which it is taking place has changed. We will argue below that a backlash against a range of innovative new spiritualities is taking place, predominantly in a context of new technologies and modes of communication. This article focuses on growth in innovative spiritual networks, and the manifestations of fear and anxieties this spiritual change and reinvention has engendered in some quarters of organized religion. In the first section of the article we discuss the growth in 'hyper-real' religion and spirituality. In the second section we discuss examples of backlash and resistance against such new religious formations. In the third section we present an overview of four key groups of actors in the 'hyper-real' religious sphere. In the fifth section we present the findings of a survey aimed at exploring opinions towards 'hyper-real' religion. Lastly, we explore the implications of the survey and suggest something of the background of individuals most likely to oppose 'hyper-real' religious practice.

The growth in hyper-real religions

Sociologists of religion have recognized what has been termed the bricolage approach of many religious consumers of the late 20th century: an approach that combines religious/philosophical traditions, for example Catholicism with astrology, nature religion with Buddhism, and tarot card readings with Protestantism (Possamai, 2003). However, a new trend is also discernible. Possamai (2005) has coined the term 'hyper-real religions' to denote a specific 21st-century style of innovative spirituality. Hyper-real religions are innovative religions and spiritualities that mix elements of religious tradition with popular culture. Many hyper-real religions are empirically discrete sub-groups of so-called cyber-religions (Dawson and Hennebry, 1999; Karaflogka, 2002). These hyper-real religions are a simulacrum¹ of a 'traditional' religion created partly out of popular culture; popular cultural symbols and narratives provide inspiration for believers/consumers. At one end of their spectrum we can, for example, find individuals rejecting institutionalized religions and practising Jediism as appropriated from the *Star Wars* movies, Matrixism from the *Matrix* trilogy, and neo-pagan groups using stories from *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series. At the other end of the spectrum practitioners still involved in mainstream religions such as Christianity recount being influenced or inspired by, for example, *The Da Vinci Code*.

Followers of Jediism, for example, are actively involved with a mix of religion and popular culture. Like many other hyper-real expressions of religion Jediism appears most likely to be *consumed* and *individualized* – the traditional congregation is absent although there may well be a like-minded internet-based 'community'. In 2001, close to 71,000 people in Australia reported being Jedi by religion. While a vast majority of these recorded this on their Census return for fun or ironically as part of an internet-based 'online meme' (Marshall, n.d.), it has been estimated by one media source that at least 5000 individuals are serious about this spiritual affiliation and practice (AAP, 2002). Moreover, approximately 53,000 people in New Zealand and close to 400,000 in the UK identified themselves as belonging to this hyper-real religion in respective Census data; unfortunately, no reliable figures are available as to the numbers of 'real' believers/practitioners.

However, further evidence of these spiritualities and the seriousness with which they are practised is found in cyberspace. Investigating the many Jediist sites, chat rooms and forums, one is impressed by the creative ways in which believers/consumers re-invent old religions such as shamanism, Buddhism, Taoism and even Catholicism to validate the Jedi religion (Possamai, 2005). This online component of the phenomenon would be termed a cyber-religion by Karaflogka (2002): a religion which has been created, and exists, almost exclusively in cyberspace, where it enjoys a considerable degree of 'virtual reality'.

Religion based on popular culture is not identified in Australian government data; it is problematically lumped into the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 'Inadequately Described Religions' category. This category represented 0.31 percent of the population (around 54,000 people) in the 1996 Census, and increased by 147.1 percent in 2006 to represent 0.7 percent of the population (around 133,800, similar to the number of Hindus in Australia). It is also important to note that this statistical account is potentially under-representative of the hyper-real religions, which are not limited to 'inadequately described' religions. While there are 'inadequately described religions' that are not hyper-real religions, the hyper-real religion total can also be extended to, for instance, some neo-pagan groups (for example those influenced by the *Lord of the Rings*), and to believers from some mainstream religions who mix their beliefs with popular culture.

The fear of hyper-real religion

The growth in hyper-real religion has also provoked some resistance and strong expressions of unease. Indeed, it is fair to say that there is evidence of a certain level of fear and suspicion directed towards these worshippers from some quarters.

The presence of the phenomenon in cyber-space, its nature as disconnected from the concrete embodiment of a 'place' of worship, and its often consumption-driven popular cultural basis are all evidence that hyper-real religious practices cannot be understood as 'pre-modern' or even modern in nature. While many practitioners appear to celebrate the freedom of pick-and-mix forms of spirituality, the appearance of hyper-religions appears to present as a crisis of spirituality for some followers of 'traditional' organized religion. Indeed, it poses a challenge to the ontological and spiritual security of some worshippers, and this challenge sometimes results in the need to reinforce what they understand as the dominant or traditional spiritual belief system(s) (Possamai, 2005). The move (back) to various forms of fundamentalism is said to be evidence of a general will to ontological security in 'liquid' late modernity (Bauman, 1998). The resistance and opposition of some members of organized mainstream religions to hyper-real religion and creative forms of spirituality is something of an extension of this. In the context of a crisis of modernity and the ensuing ontological insecurity, fears and anxieties about new spiritual practices can be expected to proliferate.

Issues of backlash against hyper-real religions emerged in sharp relief to the authors of this article during the dissemination of research results from a project involving the first stage of the research on this new religious phenomenon (Possamai, 2005). Newspaper articles mentioning our work attracted the attention of practising Christians who, in turn, expressed concerns about intersections between Christianity and popular culture in their

cyber-sermons. Following a discussion of the phenomenon on a Christian Forum,² one cyber-user wrote about the 'enemy trying to win his converts through these movies and music' and another claimed that:

People are hungry for spirituality, period. Problem is they are seeking in paths of deception and untruths. This is a time where us Christians need to make a great mark on society. Show God's light to the world. We want the lost to go to the light of life, rather than the light of Luke Skywalker's sword.

As evidenced in Possamai (2005), there have been many incidents of hard-line Christian parents condemning, for example, *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, perceived as enticing children to the 'dark side' of religion (extreme examples construct the films as celebrating Satanism and Occultism). These hard-line or fundamentalist individuals and groups often express their opposition on dedicated internet forums (Possamai, 2005).

Introvigne (2002) claims that since the second half of the 1990s we have experienced the 'second cult wars'. The first 'cult wars', he suggests, were waged from 1978 (the year of the mass killing in Jonestown) to 1990 (the year of the Fishman decision)³ between scholars of new religious movements and militant anti-cultists who tried to persuade public authorities and public opinion of the dangers of a range of controversial religious groups. The second set of 'wars' included the controversies regarding the group killings at Waco (1993), the Order of the Solar Temple (1994), Aum Shinri-kyo (1995), Heaven's Gate (1997) and the movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda (2000) (Introvigne, 2002). Unlike the first 'wars', the second 'wars'⁴ have been waged on the internet in the form of an 'anti-cult terrorism' (Zoccatelli, 2001). Such 'terrorism' takes place via discussion lists, blogs, internet sites and emails. Individuals and groups disseminate religious propaganda by demonizing and dehumanizing particular alternative spiritualities/religions and their alleged supporters. But the internet is not only a vehicle of vitriol and hatred, it is also a fear-invoking technology; the mass suicide of 39 members of Heaven's Gate (26/03/1997), a religious group inspired by science fiction stories, was planned via the internet. Some anti-cultist groups are thus worried that impressionable people are exposed, via the internet, to influences that they cannot adequately handle.

Some Christian forums offer more evidence of the fears and anxieties around people and groups being influenced by certain works of popular culture in their religious lives. On a promotional internet site⁵ for a DVD campaigning against *Harry Potter*, we are told that sorcery is being introduced into school curricula disguised as children's fantasy literature. The DVD is aimed at explaining to parents how to teach children that spell-casting is forbidden territory. The site lists accounts from children.

I feel like I'm inside Harry's world. If I went to wizard school I'd study everything: spells, counterspells, and defence against the dark arts. (Carolyn, age 10)

It would be great to be a wizard because you could control situations and things like teachers. (Jeffrey, age 11)

It concludes by stating: 'Stop and Think: what will these children do when invited to visit an occult website, or even a local [neo-pagan] coven?' Specifically in Australia, the library of a private high school in Queensland has banned the *Harry Potter* books.

A Christian group observes online: '[t]hough not as overtly and sympathetically occultic as the *Harry Potter* series, Tolkien's fantasies are *unscriptural* and present a very dangerous message'.⁶ The recently formed battlecry.com community is a popular resource for Christian teens and leads a strong fight against non-Christian-recognized popular culture. These evangelical and/or fundamentalist/literalist Christian groups are not only (1) a niche market target for global brands (for example, Walt Disney promoting its adaptation of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a '*Passion of the Christ* for kids' in an attempt to secure worldwide Christian support for the film [Hastings and Laurence, 2005]), (2) a pressure group against certain exponents of popular culture (for example, Imax cinemas refusing to show movies such as James Cameron's *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* in which Earth's origins do not conform with biblical description [McKie, 2005]), but they can also be (3) a powerful influence against any use of non-Christian popular culture within actual religious practice. The Anglican Church in Sydney showed a trailer in 250 cinemas advertising their website, which challenges the theories in *The Da Vinci Code* (described as '*Harry Potter* for adults'), and the movie was banned from a cinema on the New South Wales Central Coast because of the way it depicts the Catholic Church. We are not suggesting that *all* Christian groups express these fears. Nor do we want to overstate the dangers of anti hyper-real religious activity. Nonetheless, overall there is significant empirical evidence to suggest that this phenomenon is worthy of further social scientific investigation.

Hyper-real and anti-hyper-real religious actors

In attempting to analyse the conflict concerning 'hyper-real religions' sociologically, we have sketched out the role categories of a range of important actors. Four 'ideal-types' of hyper-real religious actors are identified. These ideal-types are:

1. *Active consumers of popular culture, leading to the practice of hyper-real religion.* These individuals actively create new spiritualities (for example Jediism and Matrixism) and/or draw on their consumption of popular culture to enrich existing spiritualities (e.g. neo-paganism).
2. *Focused consumers of popular culture, leading to a sharing of characteristics with hyper-real religions.* Some consumers are already

part of established mainstream religions and use popular culture to strengthen their existing belief system/s. A case in point is christiangoth.com, a virtual site for Christians interested in Gothic popular culture. This site does not aim at converting regular 'Goths' to Christianity, but at showing the Christian establishment that not all Goths are Satanists or witches, and that Christian worship can coexist and merge with certain aspects of popular culture (Possamai, 2005).

3. *Casual consumers of popular culture, leading to a sharing of characteristics with hyper-real religions.* With the growth of diverse spiritualities in Australia (Bouma, 2006), more and more people find spiritual inspiration in popular culture. If this analogy is permitted, hyper-real actors of the first ideal-type might be Catholics who attend church regularly, whereas actors of the third ideal-type might be Catholics who believe without belonging. They might, for example, find inspiration in *The Da Vinci Code* and feel more spiritual due to this popular work, but not necessarily actively engage in any religious practices. If we accept this ideal-type, we may assume the hyper-real religious phenomenon to be more widespread than it might appear initially.
4. *Opponents of hyper-real religions.* In this category are people from religious or secular groups who oppose hyper-real religion. Within this broad category, some would obviously be more active in their opposition than others. This category would include churches trying to prevent an alternative reading of the gospels because of the *Da Vinci Code* (Moore, 2009) and individuals who publish 'hate speech' aimed at Jediists, for example. It is within this group that we see strong evidence of fear and concerns about hyper-real religions and echoes of the 'cult wars' of the 1970s and 1990s.

From the range of incidents chronicled above, and more extensively in Possamai (2005), we hypothesize that there has emerged a new conflict between some members of organized mainstream religious groups who oppose hyper-real religions (ideal-type 4) and some individuals and/or groups who practise hyper-real religions (ideal-type 1 in particular). Some religious 'moral entrepreneurs' invoke strong arguments against hyper-real religion, both on the internet and in some church sermons, and something of a moral panic⁷ appears to have unfolded. Taking into account McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) work updating the 'moral panic' literature, and accepting the work of theorists of late modernity such as Beck (1992), Garland (2001) and Giddens (1991), we suggest that the current state of a 'crisis of modernity', including the fragmentation of traditional forms of social organization, means that 'moral panics' can easily plug into a society's vague and ongoing sense of insecurity.

Having identified and located conflict between the above groups and individuals, this article now aims to test the extent of negative attitudes towards this new phenomenon. We will explore the depth of the identified backlash outside of a specific church or internet chat room, and within a relatively mainstream sample group of religious and non-religious individuals; a sample of educated people: students and staff of an university.

Survey and method

In Denmark, a survey by Hjarvard (2008) suggested that interest in spirituality can increase as a result exposure to works such as *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Da Vinci Code* and even, to a lesser extent, the computer game *World of Warcraft*. Our survey takes another approach. We assess individuals' opinions on the practices of using popular cultural texts as a basis for one's religion/spirituality.

Commissioned by an academic unit of the University of Western Sydney, one of the authors designed a survey of religious and spiritual diversity and practices, the results of which form the basis of another article (Possamai and Brackenreg, 2009). The university has six campuses spread across Sydney's western suburbs and is one of the largest in Australia, with more than 35,000 students and almost 2600 staff. The university's catchment communities are extremely varied in their cultural, religious and ethnic dispositions. As part of this survey, the opportunity arose to insert four extra questions for the purpose of research into hyper-real religion. The following study focuses primarily on the responses to these four survey questions.

The survey was posted online in 2007–8. Two thousand students and 500 academic and administrative staff were sampled electronically and were listed on two separate emailing lists. Two emails inviting staff and students to fill out this questionnaire anonymously were sent to each of the e-listings toward the end of the second semester in 2007, and one last one was sent at the beginning of the first semester of 2008.

There were 217 replies to the invitation, which is an overall response rate of 8.7 percent; 94 students and 100 staff filled out the survey, while another 23 respondents chose not to reveal their professional identities within the university community. The response rate for staff was strong at 20 percent, whereas that of students was much weaker at 4.7 percent. This sample reflects a randomized selection across religious and non-religious groups, across gender, and across generations of people working or studying in a university environment.

Results

The response rates to the first of the four questions are collated in Table 1. The question asked for respondents' opinions about 'real-world' spiritual

Table 1: The Da Vinci Code

QUESTION: *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown describes the story of a secret organization aiming at protecting the direct line of descendants from Jesus. Which of these statements would better fit your position on this novel/movie (only tick one (1) box)

	Frequency	Percent
This is a fiction story and should only be read as such	94	44.3
This is a fiction story that can provide inspiration for people who have a religion and/or spirituality	29	13.7
This is more than a fiction story and it provides some clues about religion and/or spirituality	33	15.6
This is just a work of fiction but because it can provide the wrong inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, something should be done about this	17	8.0
I do not know what this story is about and cannot answer this question	39	18.4
Total	212	100.0

applications of the novel *The Da Vinci Code* and its subsequent film adaptation. The aim was to establish how respondents viewed the text itself and responses to the text.

The largest proportion (44.3%) of respondents were of the view that *The Da Vinci Code* was only a piece of fiction. However, 37.3 percent of respondents suggested that this same text had various links to religion/spirituality; 29.3 percent of respondents who knew about the story thought that it could provide people with inspiration or clues about religion/spirituality; and 8 percent of respondents were of the opinion that something should be done about the fact that some people were finding spiritual inspiration in the text.

The second of the four questions asked about the films *The Matrix* and *Star Wars*, and sought to establish whether respondents thought it reasonable that such films should provide scripts or inspiration for spiritual activity. The responses to this question (see Table 2) are even more revealing.

Of those who replied, 24.1 percent did not see a problem with people creating a religion out of popular culture; 43.7 percent did not mind that these works of popular culture might lead to some inspiration but suggested that they should not lead to the formation of a religion per se. On the other hand, a significant minority of respondents (14.1%) were of the opinion that using these two movies for religious purpose was inappropriate and that something should be done about it.

Table 2: Star Wars and The Matrix

QUESTION: Some people use works of popular culture, such as the movies <i>Star Wars</i> and <i>The Matrix</i> , for inspiration as part of their religion and/or spirituality. Which statement do you agree with (only tick one (1) box):	Frequency	Percent
It is reasonable for people to create new religions/spiritualities from works of popular culture	48	24.1
It is reasonable for people to select works of popular culture and be inspired by them for their existing religions/spiritualities but it is not reasonable to create new religions and or spiritualities	87	43.7
It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/spirituality but nothing needs to be done about this	36	18.1
It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/spirituality and something should be done about this	28	14.1
Total	199	100.0

To understand this negativity towards these practices and, more importantly, a readiness (for someone, though not necessarily oneself) to 'do something about' the situation, other questions on religious tolerance and diversity were asked in the same survey.

Results detailed in Table 3 indicate that the sample was largely tolerant of the majority of religious practices in Australia.

Less than 5 percent of respondents suggested that no religion at all should be well treated while 90.9 percent of respondents believed that many or all religions should be well treated. A significant minority (14%) believed that some forms of religious practice should be 'better treated than others'.

The fourth question attempted to establish whether respondents believed that a diversity of religions could hold 'the truth' for followers, or that some religions were more spiritually valid than others. Table 4 shows that close to 19 percent of the sample did not see any religion as the expression of the truth; we would expect to find a good proportion of atheists in this category. The responses also indicate a trace of religious absolutism among the respondents of this survey, as just over 18 percent of respondents claimed that only one religion represents the truth and that no other is valid. In this category we have people who believe that their religious system is absolutely and exclusively true and is the only true religion. The implication is that all other religious systems are false (Charlesworth, 1997).

Table 3: Religious tolerance

QUESTION: Australia has gone through an increase of religions (e.g. migrant religions and new religious movements) and spiritualities since the Second World War. Would you say that, in Australia:

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
All religions, whatever their origin, should be treated in the same and fair way	168	81.2
Many religions should be treated more fairly than others	20	9.7
Only a few religions should be better treated than others	9	4.3
No religion at all should be well treated	10	4.8
Total	207	100.0

Table 4: Religious diversity

Do you believe that (only tick one (1) box):

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
All religions and/or spiritualities are the expression of the same truth and all are valid	38	18.2
Many religions and/or spiritualities are the expression of the same truth and many are valid	75	36.1
Only a minority of religions and/or spiritualities are the expression of the same truth and only these few are valid	18	8.7
Only one religion and/or spirituality is the expression of the truth and only this one is valid	38	18.3
No religion is an expression of the truth	39	18.7
Total	208	100.0

Discussion and further analysis

The remainder of this article attempts to establish what type of respondent is likely to be strongly opposed to the hyper-real religious phenomenon. The aim is to shed some light on the fourth type of hyper-real religious actor (opponents of hyper-real religions) as described above. Cross-tabulations of the results presented from Tables 1–4 provide us with more data in this regard. Eighty-eight percent of respondents who stated that *The Da Vinci Code* is just a work of fiction and that it can provide misdirected inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, and that something should be done about this, also showed signs of absolutism in that they also claimed that '[o]nly one religion and/or spirituality is the expression of the truth and only this one is valid'. Among this group, not one respondent indicated that *The Da Vinci Code* could even be used as a source of inspiration. Likewise, of all

respondents who claimed that '[i]t is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/spirituality and something should be done about this', 61 percent showed signs of absolutism and believed in one valid religious truth. Curiously, 69 percent of respondents who believed that something should be done about 'wrongly inspired' religion also stated that '[a]ll religions, whatever their origin, should be treated in the same and fair way'. Here we find something of a paradox. In this university sample, respondents could demonstrate religious tolerance yet hold the belief that something should be done against hyper-real religion; in other words they did not think this was a legitimate form of religion.

Paradoxical tendencies are also reflected in *The Da Vinci Code* question, as 69 percent of respondents who agreed that '[t]his is just a work of fiction but because it can provide the wrong inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, something should be done about this' show strong signs of religious tolerance. And when cross-tabulating Tables 3 and 4, we find that 80 percent of respondents who show signs of absolutism by stating that '[o]nly one religion and/or spirituality is the expression of the truth and only this one is valid' are also very tolerant of religious diversity, stating that '[a]ll religions, whatever their origin, should be treated in the same and fair way'.

The conclusion that we draw is that these respondents show signs of absolutism in terms of their own spiritual beliefs, but not in terms of broader religious tolerance. Even if they believe that their religion is the only 'true' religion, they appear to be comfortable coexisting with followers of other religions. How then to explain antagonism towards hyper-real religions? The implication here might be that these religions are simply not regarded as *bona fide* religions. This suggests a struggle when it comes to defining what is to be considered a religion and what is not. Beckford, following a social constructionist approach, can perhaps be of help:

religion is ... a particularly interesting 'site' where boundary disputes are endemic and where well-entrenched interest groups are prepared to defend their definition of religion against opponents. The history of anti-witchcraft movements in many parts of the world, particularly the Inquisition, is powerful evidence of the deadly lengths to which some interest groups go to enforce their definition of 'true' religion. (2003: 13)

Defining religion can thus be seen as a site of power in which groups and individuals attempt to impose views and agendas, such as rejection of 'pagan' practices from medieval Christianity, or authentication of miracles and shrines (see Voyé, 1998). Hyper-real religions could be part of this site of, and struggle for, power.

Taking the analysis further, more cross-tabulations of our survey data can approximate the specific types of social actor who show strong signs of opposition to hyper-real religions. Table 5 indicates that the largest proportion of the sample (46.5%) claim to be both religious and spiritual.

Table 5: Being religious and/or spiritual

Would you say that you are (only tick one (1) box):	Frequency	Percent
Religious only	29	13.4
Spiritual only	46	21.2
Religious and spiritual	101	46.5
Neither religious nor spiritual	38	17.5
Missing	3	1.4

Table 6: Various cross-tabulations

Type of religious actors	<i>[The Da Vinci Code] is just a work of fiction but because it can provide the wrong inspiration for people's religion and/or spirituality, something should be done about this</i>	<i>It is NOT reasonable for people to find inspiration from works of popular culture for their religion/ spirituality and something should be done about this</i>	<i>All religions, whatever their origin, should be treated in the same and fair way</i>	<i>Only one religion and/or spirituality is the expression of the truth and only this one is valid</i>
Religious only	6%	18%	13%	13%
Spiritual only	0%	3%	23%	5%
Religious and spiritual	94%	68%	49%	82%
Neither religious nor spiritual	0%	11%	15%	0%

The 17.5 percent of the sample who reported having no religion is a similar proportion to that from the latest national Census (18.48% in 2006).

Table 6 cross-tabulates some of the foci of this article in terms of defining types of religious actor. From this comparison, it appears that individuals who define themselves as being both religious and spiritual more likely to be opposed to the hyper-real religious phenomenon. Indeed, 94 percent of respondents who oppose *The Da Vinci Code* being used for spiritual purposes and would want something done about this are both religious and spiritual. No respondent who showed signs of being neither religious nor spiritual ticked the oppositional response. To reiterate though, it is this same type of religious actor – who claims to be both religious and spiritual – that is also the most tolerant of religious diversity in the Australian social fabric (49% of the entire sample) but the most absolutist with regards to belief system (82% of the entire sample).

Therefore our survey indicates that the type of person likely to be opposed to hyper-real religion would be someone who (1) shows signs of absolutism at a theological level, (2) is highly tolerant of religious diversity more generally and (3) claims to be both religious and spiritual.

Notes

- 1 As inspired by the work of Jean Baudrillard (1994) and adapted in Possamai (2005 and forthcoming).
- 2 See: Internet site, <http://scotwise.blogspot.com/2005/05/emergent-church.html> (14/11/2005).
- 3 The Fishman decision was a court decision in the US that stated that anti-cult brainwashing theories were not legally part of generally accepted science. For an account see Melton (2001).
- 4 These wars can even give explicit and strong support for governmental persecution of religious minorities, already present in France (Introvigne, 2002; Possamai and Lee, 2004).
- 5 See: <http://www.chick.com/catalog/videos/0127.asp> (accessed 04/08/2004).
- 6 See: <http://forums.christianity.com/html/p681045> (accessed 23/08/2004).
- 7 Although the notion of moral panic has changed in our postmodern period (Young, 1999), in the case of this application, we will use its first definition from Cohen (1972: 9):

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.

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Biographical notes

Adam Possamai is Associate Professor in sociology at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). He is the author of *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (Pearson, 2010 with James Henslin and Alpha Possamai-Inesedy), *Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y* (Equinox, 2009), *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament* (Peter Lang, 2007) and *In Search of New Age Spiritualities* (Ashgate, 2005). He is the current President of Research Committee 22 on the Sociology of Religion of the International Sociological Association, a former President of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, and was the 2002-7 co-editor of *Australian Religion Studies Review*. His work has been published in English, French, Spanish, Romanian and Slovakian.

Murray Lee is Senior Lecturer in criminology and Director of the Sydney Institute of Criminology at the University of Sydney Faculty of Law, Australia. He is author of *Inventing Fear of Crime: Criminology and the Politics of Anxiety* (Willan, 2007) and co-author (with Stephen Farrall) of *Fear of Crime: Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety* (Routledge, 2009). He is co-editor of *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* and was foundation co-convenor of the TASA Crime and Governance thematic group.