Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of New Zealanders

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Abstract: New Zealand is a multi-faith country that is becoming increasingly secular, with the mainline Protestant churches losing tens of thousands of adherents each census. The purpose of this study is to get a clearer understanding of New Zealand’s secularisation process. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) questionnaire was used to capture the religious landscape. A random selection of 2040 New Zealand adults yielded 1027 valid responses, and the data were weighted for age and gender. The results showed a decline in adherence to religious institutions, coinciding with a reduced faith in the traditional monotheistic view of God. However, reports of religious experience increased. Additionally, 30.5% agreed with the statement, “I don’t follow a religion, but am a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural.” The results draw attention to the ineffectiveness of census results and church attendance surveys as a measure of how religious a population is.

Keywords: Secularisation, Christianity, Multi-faith, International Social Survey Programme, Beliefs, Religious Experience

Introduction

ALL THROUGH HISTORY people have been looking for ways to connect with something beyond themselves. The search has generated many paths, from individual ways of finding personal meaning to inherited institutional dogmas and practices.

Since the 1970s social scientists have observed that most Western nations have experienced a process of secularisation, in which people are increasingly less likely to belong to religious institutions, even though they may still have religious beliefs (e.g. Davie, 1990; Martin, 1979; Taylor, 2007). Coupled with this, historians such as Callum Brown have noted a ‘spiritual revolution’, characterised by growing numbers of people refashioning religion as spiritual experience, without the need for a central authority (2006).

This study aims to capture the religious landscape of New Zealand in the light of these trends. Specifically, we present the results of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey of New Zealanders’ religion. The ISSP was founded in 1984 by research organisations from Germany, the United States, England and Australia to gather cross-national data on topics important to social scientists. Today the programme involves academic institutions in 43 countries in an annual survey of economic and social policy issues. A different topic is addressed each year in a seven-year cycle, and one of these topics is religion.

In line with the ISSP survey, we are using the word ‘religion’ in its broadest sense to refer to beliefs, practices and experiences that involve a framework of meaning that is beyond the everyday empirical world. This framework usually involves a form of divine or supernatural power. In contrast, we are using the term secularisation in a narrow sense to refer to a decline
in adherence to religious institutions, rather than in the broader sense of a decline in religiosity. This distinction is necessary to incorporate Brown’s observation that a spiritual revolution has occurred during secularisation.

**Religion in New Zealand**

New Zealand has no official religion. Nevertheless the country is infused with the Judaeo-Christian influence of the European settlers who arrived in the nineteenth century, and the most recent census in 2006 showed that 49.5% of New Zealanders describe themselves as Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2006).\(^1\) The total population at the time of the census was just over 4 million.

While children today are far less likely than they were in the last century to be born into religious families and to attend Sunday school, several traditions from New Zealand’s Christian past continue to be observed in the broader culture. Examples include the national anthem calling on God to defend the country, the traditional prayer before the opening of Parliament sessions, and the closure of most stores on Good Friday, Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. Further, New Zealand still has an archaic law prohibiting blasphemy against the Deity, Christ, or Christian religion, although prosecutions are extremely rare (Burrows & Cheer, 2010).\(^2\) However, despite these elements, Christian churches generally have little influence and power over New Zealand society (Ahdar, 2006). The three recent Christian political parties in New Zealand – the Christian Heritage party, the Christian Democrat party (now United Future New Zealand) and Destiny New Zealand (later called the Family party) – have been minority concerns, and several activities Christians usually oppose, such as prostitution and homosexual acts between men, are legal in New Zealand.

New Zealand supports religious freedom, and this value is enshrined in its 1990 Bill of Rights Act (New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, 1990, sections 13, 15 & 20). Multiple spiritualities are highly visible in New Zealand. Falun Gong practitioners exercise in public gardens, Revival Centre members proselytise in local parks, Krishna devotees chant and dance down streets, and billboards advertise psychic fairs. Television programmes such as *Sensing Murder* and *Dare to Believe* have given rise to celebrity psychics like Kelvin Cruickshank, Sue Nicholson and Jeanette Wilson, and most general bookshops have a New Age/spirituality stand. Although, as Ellwood (1993) notes, alternative spirituality is not new in New Zealand and has been visible as far back as the early settlers, new religious movements are much more prolific now.

Given the increasingly prominent role of New Zealand’s indigenous people, a distinctive feature of New Zealand is the growing role of Māori prayers (karakia) and rituals in civic and national events. These displays reflect New Zealand’s commitment to honouring its founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, which promises the Crown will respect Māoritanga (articles 2, 3 and 4).\(^3\) They are also aimed at counteracting previous repression of in- 

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\(^1\) The figure that is often given is 51.2% but this reduces to 49.5% when multiple responses from those who identified with more than one Christian religion are taken into account.

\(^2\) The question of whether the blasphemy law applies to non-Christian religions has not yet been tested in the courts.

\(^3\) The last of these, number 4, was verbal and not part of the written text. In response to a question from Catholic Bishop Pompallier, Governor Hobson said: “The several faiths (beliefs) of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Māori custom shall alike be protected” (Te Puni Kokiri, 2001, pp. 40-41).
There are Māori blessings at state occasions, karakia are permitted in courtrooms, and in 2001 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded kaumatua (Māori elders) to go to New Zealand embassy offices in Bangkok to do spiritual cleansing ceremonies. Māori values – especially ones associated with the sacredness and beauty of the land – are respected, and are reflected in New Zealand’s strong anti-nuclear policy (Kavan, 2004). These values are also enshrined in law, and the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Historic Places Act 1993 acknowledge places or areas that possess spiritual significance.

Another distinctive feature of New Zealand is that it has one of the highest rates of ‘no religion’ in the world (Nachowitz, 2007). The percentage of religionless New Zealanders is currently 34.7% – double the United States’ 16.1% (Pew Forum, 2008). However, this may, in part, reflect the way the census form is set out. Before 1986, New Zealanders were required to write their religion in response to the question, “What is your religion?” (which implied they were expected to have one). In 1986 the question remained the same, but the form gave eight options to choose from including ‘no religion’ (Christian Research Association of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2000). Consequently, the number of religionless New Zealanders jumped from 166,014 in 1981 to 533,766 in 1986, and now amounts to one third of the population. Webster and Perry’s (1989) survey of New Zealand values showed that half of those who professed no religion believed in at least one of the following: God, life after death, a soul, the devil, hell, heaven, sin or reincarnation. Analysing the survey data, sociologist Michael Hill also observed that Anglicans at times identify with very similar beliefs to those with no religion (in Webster & Perry, 1989).

Despite the distinctiveness of the New Zealand religious landscape, the decline in institutional Christianity is the predominant theme in studies of New Zealander’s religion, whether they be historical accounts, census statistics, church attendance rates, or values surveys. The mainline Protestant churches in New Zealand, primarily Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, lose tens of thousands of adherents every census. One reason for the decline in mainline numbers is that many of the people leaving these denominations may only have been nominal members in the first place, i.e. people who self-identified with a denomination but did not attend church. Another reason may be that many adherents to these denominations are in the older age groups and when they die they are not being replaced by younger members. The 1997 National Church Life Survey showed that about 30% of those attending mainline Protestant services are aged over 70 (Brookes & Currow, 1998).

The decline in religious adherence can also be linked to the impact of globalisation, in line with standard theories of secularisation that connect increasing social variation with religious decline (Fenn, 1978). As a geographically isolated country, New Zealand has been strongly affected by the Internet, which has both displaced traditional forms of community and provided increased access to information about alternative religious paths. Additionally, despite the proliferation of alternative faiths, New Zealand has a predominantly strong, hypermasculine Rugby culture (Phillips, 1987). The stereotypical Kiwi bloke is beer-drinking, rugged and disengaged from emotion – a man who is likely to associate religion with a need for a crutch and is more proficient at herding animals than spelling Presbyterian. Religion, in contrast, is a predominately female interest (Stark, 2002; Walter & Davie, 1998). Another factor that may have contributed to the drop in religious adherence is the increasing materi-

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4 For example, the 1908 Tohunga Suppression Act restricted the work of tohunga (Māori spiritual healers) until it was repealed in 1962.
alism of the Western world. Most New Zealanders see prosperity, not religion, as the key
to a good life, and in 1989, 79% of the population (including Christians) listed prosperity
as their highest goal (Webster & Perry, 1989). As Webster and Perry comment, this is not
altogether consonant with the churches’ ideal of being a “friend to the poor” (1989, p. 144).

Nevertheless some religious groups are on the rise. The first trend, as historian Peter
Lineham notes, is the growth of ‘megachurches’, which in the New Zealand context are
churches with over 500 members (Lineham, 2003). Although some of these churches are
Catholic, most are Pentecostal (Pentecostals have been one of the fastest growing religious
movements in New Zealand since the 1980s). A much publicised example of a megachurch
is Pentecostal televangelist Brian Tamaki’s Destiny Church, which has attracted many urban
Māori.

The second increase is in what Lineham (2003) calls the ‘micro churches’ – intimate,
unstructured groups of participants who have opted out of churches. It is likely that these
members are among the 4.5% of New Zealanders who describe their religion simply as
‘Christian’ on the New Zealand census. There is also a wide-ranging network of New Age
spiritual groups in New Zealand. Both these Christian and New Age groups are part of what
Taylor calls a “culture informed by an ethic of authenticity” in which spirituality is a quest

The third trend is the rapid growth of Eastern religions, which can be attributed to an influx
of immigrants to New Zealand (although many immigrants are Christian). However, this
number should not be overestimated as adherents to Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Chinese and
Japanese religions make up less than 4% of the New Zealand population (Statistics New
Zealand, 2006). As well as this, there has been a resurgence of interest in Māori Christianity,
especially in the Ringatua and Ratana churches. These increases are likely to be due to the
growth of the Māori population as well as growing interest in Māori spirituality (Hoverd,
2008) rooted in post-colonial guilt feelings and New Age fascination with indigenous spir-
Itualities (Ahdar, 2006).

As Hill commented over twenty years ago, researchers of religion in New Zealand have
been “few in number” (in Webster & Perry, 1989, p.ii). There is a need for a clearer under-
standing of the religious and non-religious streams in New Zealand. Most current information
is based on adherence to institutions, yet there is considerable variation within these institu-
tions. The aim of the ISSP religion survey is to get a broader and more precise understanding
of people’s religious beliefs, practices, values, and experiences, including individuals who
are unaffiliated with religious institutions.

Method

The research team used the religion questionnaire developed by the ISSP. This questionnaire
was chosen because: (1) one of the questions clearly differentiated between religious adher-
ence and spirituality; (2) the items had been carefully pre-tested for reliability, (3) the ques-
tionnaire has been used regularly throughout the world since 1984 and adapted each time,
and (4) ISSP findings regularly appear in leading academic journals, allowing scholars in
other countries to compare data and observe worldwide trends.

The survey questions were similar to those used in the 1991 and 1998 questionnaires. A
question was added that was in the 1991 survey, but not in the 1998 one, asking respondents:
“Do you feel you have ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether
you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?” Other questions were also added asking respondents how satisfied they are with their own religion or spirituality, and whether they feel they have found their purpose in life. The former has been used in other surveys, for example the Heylen poll and the Personal Wellbeing Index.

The team randomly selected 2040 people aged 18 and over from the electoral roll, and sent out the questionnaire by mail. The survey produced 1027 valid responses, an effective response rate of 52%. A sample of this size has a maximum error margin at the 95% confidence level of approximately plus or minus 3%.

The responses were analysed using PASW statistics 18. Though the sample was representative of a wide spectrum of New Zealand society, the voluntary nature of the responses resulted in a slight over-representation of older people and females. To correct these biases, the survey data were weighted so that the age-sex distribution of the sample matched that of the New Zealand population.

Results

Sample

The sample comprised 52% women and 48% men. The majority (61.3%) were married, 23.1% had never married, and the others were widowed, divorced or separated. Most participants (77.9%) were born in New Zealand. The highest age concentration was the 40–49 age group (20.6%), and the remaining age groups were evenly distributed, with 38.7% under the age of 40, and 40.7% aged over 49.

Table 1: Religious Adherence (n=1027)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Religion</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Protestant (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian)</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (not further defined)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Protestant (Brethren, Jehovah’s Witness, Lutheran, Latter Day Saints, Protestant nfd, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern (Buddhism &amp; Hinduism)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal (including Assemblies of God)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori Christianity (Ratana and Ringatu)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most participants were raised in conservative Christian households: 40.5% as Protestant, 19.9% as Catholic, and 0.3% as Orthodox. The remaining respondents were either raised in other religions (12.2%) or had no religious background (27.1%).

The religious affiliations of the sample are consistent with the 2006 census figures. Most respondents (59.5%) indicated they had a religion, and for at least 53.7%, this was a Christian religion. The breakdown of these statistics can be seen in table 1.

**Religious Beliefs**

Most respondents (53%) believe in God, although half of these people have some doubts; 19.2% do not believe in a personal God but believe in a higher power of some kind, while 27.8% either do not believe in God or do not know if there is one. Table 2 shows that one fifth of the sample changed their belief about God during the course of their life.

**Table 2: Personal History of Belief in God (n=1027)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Description of Belief in God</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t believe in God now, and I never have</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t believe in God now, but I used to</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God now, but I didn’t used to</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God now, and I always have</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the relationship between humans and God, 37.8% of respondents believe there is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally, and for 20.7% life is meaningful only because God exists. Few (8%) believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally.

As table 3 shows, participants have a reasonably high level of religious beliefs, even for practices that are often associated with superstition.
Table 3: Religious Beliefs (n=1027)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Definitely’ or ‘Probably’ Believe in</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life after death</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious miracles</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirvana</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hell</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good luck charms sometimes bring good luck</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural power of ancestors</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some faith healers do have God-given powers</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person’s star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their futures</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some fortune tellers can foresee the future</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religiosity

Asked whether they had experienced a turning point in their life when they made a new and personal commitment to religion, 24.6% said ‘yes’. It is likely that many of these experiences were ‘born again’ ones, as 19.2% said they had at one stage in their life had a born-again experience.

When asked how religious they are, 35.8% described themselves as religious (9.1% as extremely or very religious and 26.7% as somewhat religious). The rest either describe themselves as non-religious (37%) or neutral (27.2%).

These self-perceptions are reflected in the level of involvement the respondents have in religious activities. Almost half the sample pray at least several times a year, including 18.4% who pray daily. However, 38.9% never attend a religious service, only 20.1% regularly attend a service at least once a month, and 55.1% never take part in church activities other than attending services. A small number showed a higher level of commitment, and 12.3% had made a personal sacrifice during the year, such as fasting, following a special diet, or giving up an activity during a holy season as an expression of faith. Additionally, 16.1% have in their home a shrine, altar, or religious object on display, such as an icon, retablos, mezuzah, menorah or crucifix.

Personal Spirituality

Despite declining religious adherence, 45.2% said they have their own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services, and 70.3% reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their own religion or spirituality, with only 3% dissatisfied (the remaining 26.6% were neutral). When asked whether they agreed with the statement, “I have found my purpose in life,” 49.2% agreed, 10.5% disagreed and 40.3% were neutral.
As table 4 shows, most respondents said that although they do not follow a religion, they are spiritual and interested in the sacred or supernatural. Conversely, almost one sixth of the sample follow a religion, but are not interested in the sacred or supernatural. Statistics on the degree of spirituality provide a clearer picture: 8.4% describe themselves as very spiritual, 29.7% as moderately spiritual, 32.8% as slightly spiritual, and 29.1% as not spiritual at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-description</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow a religion and am a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow a religion, but am not a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t follow a religion, but am a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t follow a religion and am not a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding religious experience, when asked: “Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?” 39.5% said yes, 38.6% said no, and the remaining 21.9% were unsure.

**Attitude to Religion**

Most participants seemed to have a positive attitude towards religion. When asked whether religion helps to find inner peace and happiness, most (79.1%) agreed, and a similar proportion (81.3%) agreed that religion helps people make friends. A great majority (90.2%) also said religion helps people gain comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. Additionally, there was widespread support (60%) for children to have some form of religious education in primary schools, with 28.8% preferring the teaching of all faiths, not just Christianity.

There was a general tolerance to other religions. The majority (79.2%) believe there are basic truths in many religions, 13.7% said there is very little truth in any religion, while 7.1% believe there is truth only in one religion. In line with this, 73.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that we must respect all religions. Few had negative attitudes towards people from other religions: 92.7% were positive or neutral towards Christians, 76.2% towards Muslims, 87.8% towards Hindus, 91.8% towards Buddhists, 91.9% towards Jews, and 90.2% towards atheists or non-believers.

**Religion in Society**

Relatively few respondents (10.8%) consider that religion as a whole is increasing its influence on New Zealand life, 46% believe it is losing its influence, 27.9% think it is neither increasing
nor losing its influence, and the rest do not know. Among those who believe religion is losing its influence, 17.3% think this is a good thing, while 49.7% think it is a bad thing, and the remainder do not know.

If a law were passed that conflicted with their religious principles and teachings, 29.6% of those surveyed said they would follow their religious principles, while 23% said they would follow the law. The remaining participants either said they had no religious principles (34.1%) or they could not choose (13.3%).

**Age and Gender Effects**

Older respondents tended to be more religious than younger ones. Those over 55 were more likely than those under 35 to have a religious affiliation, to believe in God, and to believe the Bible is literal word of God. There was little difference in belief in a higher power among different age groups.

Gender differences were also evident, and, as expected, female respondents were more religious than men. Higher proportions of women than men had religious beliefs, were affiliated to a religion, reported having a religious experience, and identified themselves as spiritual.

**Discussion**

The results confirm that New Zealand society is becoming more secularised. Most participants had relatively low levels of active involvement in religion, and there is evidence they have become less religious over the last 17 years. The proportion of New Zealanders who said they have no religion increased from 29% among those surveyed in 1991 to 40% in 2008. Similarly, fewer New Zealanders now say they believe in God than they did 17 years ago (although there is no change in the proportion of respondents who believe in a higher power).

The decline in religious beliefs seems to be strongest in areas that are contradictory to science, e.g. the belief that the Bible is the literal truth and the belief that star signs and horoscopes influence one’s destiny. This finding suggests that education may be an underestimated factor in research on the secularisation of New Zealand and, given increasing access to tertiary education, it may be worth exploring the relationship between educational level and secularisation.

At the same time, there is preliminary evidence that New Zealand is experiencing the spiritual revolution that Brown (2006) describes, in which religion is refashioned as spiritual experience, without the need for a central authority. While traditional beliefs and institutional religion have declined, spiritual experience has risen: 39.5% affirmed they had experienced a spiritual presence or power different from their everyday self, compared with 32.8% in 1991. Although this statistic is lower than the 62% reported in England when respondents were interviewed face-to-face and the interviewer could explain the question (Hay & Morisy, 1985), it is consistent with questionnaire responses – 36.4% from England and 35% from the United States (Greeley, 1974; Hay & Morisy, 1978). That 21.9% chose the ‘Not sure’ option suggests the proportion could be higher.

Overall, the data present a picture of New Zealanders that can be divided into three parts of roughly equal proportions. The first group comprises one in three New Zealanders who can be called religious, though many would prefer the term ‘spiritual’. Of this group, almost
two thirds are very or extremely religious. These are the people for whom life is meaningful only because God exists. They are likely to pray daily, have religious experiences, make a personal sacrifice for their faith, and have a shrine, altar or religious object in their house. This group ranges from people who are liberal and unaffiliated with any institution to those who are conservative Christians who hold fundamentalist views. If a law were passed that conflicted with their religious principles, they would stay with their principles. They are more likely to be female than male.

The second group, comprising roughly another third of the population, is of people who are not interested in the sacred or supernatural, have no religious principles, and would describe themselves as neither religious nor spiritual. Males predominate in this group. They do not agree that religion helps a person find inner peace and happiness, and they do not presume there is an afterlife. Most have not had a religious experience, and they either do not believe in God or do not know if there is a God. They do not support religious education in primary schools.

Between these two extremes is a middle group, also comprising approximately one in three New Zealanders. They are much less religious, but not irreligious. They are satisfied with their own religion or spirituality. They believe there may be a God or a higher power and some form of life after death. Some pray and sometimes go to church (or a religious institution), others are not affiliated with any religion. They see basic truths in many spiritual paths and their prevailing attitude to other faiths is either neutrality or goodwill. They believe that religion can be a force for good, that it provides peace and happiness, helps people in times of need, and may be worth teaching in primary schools. However, they do not feel a great need for religion themselves.

The findings that (1) many New Zealanders are not tied to a religious organisation, but consider themselves to be spiritual, and (2) many who belong to religious organisations do not consider themselves spiritual, show how ineffective census statistics are in capturing the strength of people’s personal religion and predicting the future of religion. These findings also underline the need to learn more about those who identify themselves as having no religion. That many respondents seem to mean ‘no organised religion’, rather than ‘no religion’, helps explain why Webster and Perry (1989) found that half of those who professed no religion held religious beliefs. Another issue that arises is the predominance of males in this category. New Zealand is inclined towards being a masculine culture – the country’s pioneer origins and what Holmes (1997, p. 263) calls its ‘man alone’ symbolism may make both organised religion and personal spirituality unattractive options for men.

The high proportion of spiritual people who do not belong to a religion lends strong plausibility to Lineham’s (2003) suggestion that intimate, unstructured groups of ex-members are one of the fastest growing religious phenomena in the country. The high proportion also suggests the influence of New Age networks, given that many respondents hold beliefs associated with the New Age, such as spiritual healing and reincarnation. There is little research on either the New Zealand New Age movement or unstructured Christian groups (Gilling’s 1999 work on informal Christian communities is an exception) yet these seem to be important directions for the future of New Zealand religion.
Conclusion

The value of this study is that it provides preliminary empirical evidence that a spiritual revolution may be occurring in New Zealand – a country that has one of the highest rates in the Western world of people with no religious affiliation. The research also pinpoints education as possibly the most important unstudied influence on secularisation in New Zealand. Further, the study identifies three major religious streams, classifying the intensity of New Zealanders’ commitment and beliefs, independent of their religious affiliation.

Nevertheless, there are several limitations to the research. As well as the common drawbacks of quantitative research (for example, that pre-set options do not allow much scope for the respondents) there are drawbacks specific to this study. First, religion is as much, if not more, an emotional phenomenon as an intellectual one, yet the feeling dimension is largely omitted in large scale surveys such as this one. Second, as ISSP scholars use the same questions in 42 other countries, the items were not adapted to the New Zealand setting. Words in the survey like ‘retablos’, ‘mezuzah’ and ‘menorah’ would be outside the vocabulary of most New Zealanders, who would instead be familiar with words from Māori spirituality like ‘tapu’, ‘mana’, ‘karakia’ and ‘tangi’ (or its longer form, ‘tangihana’).

Nevertheless, the major advantage of the ISSP survey is that it allows researchers to capture people’s personal religion, supplying findings that can be compared with those of other countries. The data in this study provide a snapshot of religion in New Zealand, documenting the beliefs, practices, values, and experiences of a country in the process of secularisation. Our hope is that future researchers will build on these findings with qualitative research, for it is highly likely that secularisation will continue.

References


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This knowledge community is brought together by a common concern for religious study and an interest to explore the relationship between religion and spirituality in society. The community interacts through an innovative, annual face-to-face conference, as well as year-round virtual relationships in a web blog, peer reviewed journal and book series—exploring the affordances of the new digital media. Members of this knowledge community include philosophers, theologians, policymakers, and educators.

Conference
Members of the Religion and Spirituality in Society Community meet at the international conference, held annually in different locations around the world, each selected for the particular role education is playing in social, cultural and economic change. The Inaugural Conference was held at University Center, Chicago, USA in 2011 and in 2012 the Conference will be held at Robson Square, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Our community members and first time attendees come from all corners of the globe. The Conference is a site of critical reflection, both by leaders in the field and emerging artists and scholars. Those unable to attend the Conference may opt for virtual participation in which community members can submit a video and/or slide presentation with voice-over, or simply submit a paper for peer review and possible publication in the Journal.

Online presentations can be viewed on YouTube.

Publishing
The Religion and Spirituality in Society Community enables members to publish through three mediums.

First, by participating in the Religion Conference, community members can enter a world of journal publication unlike the traditional academic publishing forums – a result of the responsive, non-hierarchical and constructive nature of the peer review process. The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society provides a framework for double-blind peer review, enabling authors to publish into an academic journal of the highest standard.

The second publication medium is through the book series Religion in Society, publishing cutting edge books on religion in print and electronic formats. Publication proposals and manuscript submissions are welcome.

The third major publishing medium is our news blog, constantly publishing short news updates from the Religion Community, as well as major developments in the fields of religion and spirituality. You can also join this conversation at Facebook and Twitter or subscribe to our email Newsletter.
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