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Faith for all

New Zealand's growing religious diversity

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Editorial: Faith in a pluralist society

Ruth DeSouza

There's nothing quite like birth, death, separation, cancer, and selling your home to make you think about the meaning of life and what you believe. The last few months have completely tested every thing I believed to be true and real about life. William Blake, the mystic and poet said that we are here to learn to endure the beams of love. I've had to be vulnerable and allow the cracks to show. In doing so, I've received love, support and unexpected kindnesses which have reminded me that we can touch each other through our vulnerability as well as our strength. The purpose of this journal issue is to explore the ways in which our deepest beliefs are manifested in the private and public sphere.

Where religion was once implicitly woven into our social, legal and artistic lives (Wilkinson, 2006) it has become more explicit. Increased immigration from non-traditional source countries, the growth of Muslim communities in the West and the politicisation of Islam has increased societal anxiety and the desire to address issues of cohesion and national identity. Peach (2006) argues that in Britain the discourse on racialised minorities has shifted from 'colour' to 'race' to 'ethnicity' and now to 'religion'. Globally, inter-faith developments have increased in response to concerns about social cohesion.

This brings me to the theme of this journal issue: Faith and ethnic communities. The word, "ethnic" (which is used in New Zealand policy to denote people who are NOT Pākehā, Pacific or Māori) originates from the word 'heathen' according to the Oxford Dictionary. "Ethnic" originally referred to people who lived on the heath and specifically to those who were considered

non-believers by believers. This journal issue has the following aims

- To provide a background nationally and internationally to the issues of faith.
- To outline some of the tensions of using faith as an umbrella term.
- To provide an overview of some of the practical steps organisations are making to engage with faith issues.
- To facilitate debate about the terms that are being used such as faith, ethnic, diversity, pluralism and diversity including obtaining perspectives from people who don't have a religious identity.
- To highlight new local research about the inclusion of groups for example lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons in

Christian congregations and the experiences and impact of Muslim converts.

- To promote religious literacy and knowledge of other faiths.

Many of the articles are about religious issues in general, and those that refer to specific religions also function as case studies that make points of general relevance. The heightened interest in Islam in recent years is reflected in the number of contributions in this area.

To set the scene a little we begin with the need for this dialogue about faiths and between faiths. Three trends are becoming noticeable: first, that religious participation by Pakeha New Zealanders is declining while changes in immigration policy have resulted in the introduction and growth of both diasporic religious traditions (such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and so on) and the invigoration of Christian denominations. The 2001 Census noted that more than half the New Zealand population identified with a Christian religion (Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian dominating) and the largest non-Christian religions were Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Spiritualism and New Age religions. However, the rise in diasporic religious traditions has been viewed as increasingly problematic since 9/11, for example where Islam was once viewed as a religion of peace and tolerance, more familiar media images are of politicised crowds burning effigies (Werbner, 2004).

Joris de Bres our Race Relations Commissioner begins with an exploration of why dialogues about faith are necessary. De Bres suggests that the Human Rights Commission has an obligation under the Human Rights Act are to promote respect for human rights, and to encourage the maintenance and development of harmonious relationships between the diverse groups that make up New Zealand society. He argues that no other public

agency has such a clear statutory mandate to promote the right to religion (including the right not to hold a religious belief), and to promote understanding between faith communities. de Bres argues that this does not in any way compromise the secular nature of the Commission. The state has as much of a responsibility to engage with citizens who share a community of belief as they do with those who share a community of culture, ethnicity or geography. Global tensions and conflicts associated with different religions can have consequences within New Zealand in terms, for example, of prejudice against visible religious minorities.

Asking if tolerance is really enough, Todd Nachowitz outlines the architectural contributions of new migrant communities where the “new rounded domes and marbled spires represent triumphs.” Nachowitz quantifies the growing ethnic and religious diversity of New Zealand from 1991 to 2006 pointing out that not only has the number of adherents increased but there is also an increase in the diversity of faiths themselves. Nachowitz suggests that New Zealand is a religiously illiterate nation going by the lack of understanding about other religions and forms of practice. Who knew that there were more ‘Jedi Knights’ than adherents of Buddhism, Islam Hinduism and Judaism in New Zealand in 2001! Nachowitz advances going beyond the passivity of tolerance to active engagement suggesting individual and collective strategies. Individually we can comparatively study religion and experience what others do in their places of worship. Collectively, our faith communities can work to engage in interfaith dialogues as well as ensuring that multicultural curricula are a part of the classroom experience.

Jon Carapiet uses appropriated images from the media to explore political and spiritual themes through photo-installations. His Anglo-Armenian heritage provides him with a personal connection to genocide and

holocaust. He questions the numbing effects on viewers fed a visual diet of war by mass media. His aim is not to reiterate such imagery but to provide an antidote, crossing the boundaries of labels like "Christian", "Buddhist" or "Hindu" to collaborate against war and instead speak of compassion and love.

A European perspective is provided by Bashy Quraishy, President of the European Network against Racism in Brussels and the Chief Editor of Media Watch in Copenhagen who argues that the concerns of ethnic and religious minorities have been homogenised and displaced by a perceived Islamic threat. The increasing emphasis on European-ness at the cost of interculturalism seems to be leading to the dismantling of a multicultural society replaced with monocultural ideologies and a fortress mentality. Quraishy suggests that unless racism is confronted, integration and social cohesion will not occur.

The shift from religion being an implicit aspect of society to an explicit one is discussed by Andrew Butcher who argues that New Zealand's rapidly changing demography, with high levels of immigration has meant that the Interfaith Dialogue and the Statement on Religious Diversity have received far more mainstream media coverage and public discourse that they would have in more homogeneous New Zealand fifty years ago. Butcher proposes that "joining a faith community provides an immediate social network for many migrants and frequently gives migrants a place to belong and a new sense of 'family' and 'home', particularly where they have left those two things behind in another country". Butcher contextualises Christianity, suggesting that it is not and never has been a Western religion; it began in a pluralist social context similar to the New Zealand in the third millennium.

Two writers examine perceived 'threats' to religion. Verpal Singh suggests that

organised religion is fighting a losing battle with philosophies and sciences which encourage people to question everything. While questioning is viewed as the starting point of reasoning, leading to ever greater insights, in a religious context can be seen as an indication of heretical behaviour. Thus, even though science and philosophy do not seek to consciously undermine religion, they are viewed as doing exactly that. Singh's view is that science has taken a pre-eminent position in providing answers to our questions, but in doing so presumes that it has answers to all the questions. He argues that scientists, it would seem, are the new clergy - or the new prophets. The need to discuss and study the collapse of religion and what might be taking its place in most of the West is proposed by John Raeburn who suggests that the implications are potentially profound, radical and irreversible. Raeburn argues that religion has been a driver of Western society and history for centuries and notes the pressures affecting Christian religions and asks how traditional religions of migrant groups will withstand these changes. Raeburn talks about the arrival of the 'new spirituality' which encompasses a broad array of different spiritual, holistic health, body, personal development, self-help, metaphysical, astrological, occult, and other items often termed 'New Age'. Raeburn's article raises questions about the links between spirituality, religion and faith; and also whether the 'me' focussed new spirituality omits the community and public good which Churches were focused on.

The need for dialogue between faith and secularity (Leith, 2006) is critiqued by Ken Perrott who debates the hegemony and exclusivity of the inter-faith developments occurring in New Zealand from an atheist perspective. Arguing that current efforts to develop understanding and cooperation in New Zealand focus on ethnic and religious groups at the expense of the third of the population with non-religious beliefs, Perrott suggests a more inclusive platform is

required. Critiquing the National Statement on Religious Diversity, Perrott proposes a focus on diversity of belief, rather than religious diversity. Perrott concludes by indicating that critique is necessary for cooperation to occur between groups, and a lack of debate and criticism in this area will limit progress and result in work built on shaky foundations.

Practical strategies for engaging with faith communities are shared from a local government and Asia-Pacific regional perspectives. Abigael Vogt outlines Auckland City Council's Community Development Group's Inter-faith project. The project focuses on religious and spiritual diversity within the community and aims to both strengthen existing relationships and foster new ones between communities. Within the project the council's role is to support, promote and facilitate these relationships. In addition there is a focus on working locally, nationally and internationally. Joris de Bres outlines developments such as the Auckland Alliance of Civilisations Symposium and Building Bridges: The Third Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue which took place at Waitangi, New Zealand in May this year. From this dialogue the New Zealand delegation prepared a discussion paper and put forward recommendations which have now been incorporated into the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan and focuses on three main areas: Building bridges, education and media.

The issue of faith in an increasingly anxious society is taken up by Heather Kavan who takes a closer, more sympathetic look at the case of Korean exorcist Luke Lee who was found guilty of manslaughter in New Zealand in 2001 and who had his conviction overturned by the High Court last year. With a background in research on extreme religion, Kavan suggests that Lee was a typical example of a person in a religious altered state. Kavan contextualises Lee's Korean Pentecostal background suggesting

that Korean Pentecostals routinely engage in shamanistic rituals of freeing people from evil spirits, accompanied by thunderous sounding prayer and such exorcism is considered a normal activity.

Contributors also grapple with issues of inclusion and exclusion within and between faith communities. Mark Henricksen talks about the Lavender Islands study of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons in New Zealand. Henricksen's research participants struggled to reconcile a religious affiliation with a sexual identity, and in each instance had chosen in favour of their sexual identities at the expense of the religious affiliation. Despite their fraught relationships with faith communities, some LGBs remain resilient and connected to their religious traditions. The development of new kinds of relationships between religious communities and individuals is described by American contributor Lance Laird as "interreligion". The sharing of symbols and stories across boundaries can lead to understanding and invention. Using a dance metaphor, Laird outlines the temporal and relational aspects of his faith. Elaborating how his journey from Southern Baptist roots to dancing with Islam opened up a whole new world of Christian devotion leading him to practice his faith differently, in partnership and in dialogue. Laird speaks about how he began seeing religious traditions in relationship to each other and how people make choices to read, do, believe certain parts of their tradition more than other parts—under different conditions and at different times in their lives. Which leads to a piece by Ruqayya Sulaiman-Hill who questions why anyone would willingly choose to restrict their eating options, fast for a whole month every year, adhere to a different dress code, suffer possible rejection from friends and family and enjoy spending time in contemplation and prayer? Sulaiman-Hill discusses the phenomenon of religious conversion and shares some of the results of a study undertaken prior to the terrorist attacks in

2001 with a group of thirty one Kiwi Muslim converts. She finds that conversion to Islam is the result of a gradual change in beliefs and attitudes, often over several years rather than the highly emotional transformations sometimes associated with Christian revivalist meetings. From an Islamic perspective the term reversion is apt referring to the experience of believing they were already Muslim in their souls and a sense of returning to Islam. The most common challenges facing converts in their relationships with fellow New Zealanders and other Muslims is also discussed. This fertilisation and openness to new ideas is taken up further by Larry Stillman from Melbourne who traces his quest for God-wrestling—the struggle with Jewish tradition combined with a social justice perspective with the internal journey of understanding his religious, cultural, and ethnic identity while living in Israel, Australia and the United States.

On a final note, I'd like to acknowledge the tremendous work Andy Williamson has put into this journal. Andy has moved to the United Kingdom to begin a new life there. I'd like to acknowledge the wonderful cover produced by FitzBeck Creative. The cover highlights the hope that we can have many different kinds of flowers in our gardens and celebrate their differences (and note their similarities too). To continue the gardening theme, this journal provides some rich compost that I hope feeds the new kinds of relationships we can have with each other that nurture human flourishing (Leith, 2006).

Whatever you believe in whether it's faith, family and friendships may it support you to flourish through life's major transitions!

Ruth

P.S Should we be calling non-believers ethnic?

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Human Rights and Religious Diversity

Joris de Bres

Some people have, over the past two years, asked why the secular New Zealand Human Rights Commission facilitates a national interfaith network, produces a monthly electronic interfaith newsletter, and has facilitated the development of a Statement on Religious Diversity.

The answer is simple. The primary functions of the Commission under the Human Rights Act are to promote respect for human rights, and to encourage the maintenance and development of harmonious relationships between the diverse groups that make up New Zealand society. No other public agency has such a clear statutory mandate to promote the right to religion (including the right not to hold a religious belief), and to promote understanding between faith communities.

The Commission has been able to provide a human rights framework for the public debate that has proved a useful way of advancing the dialogue. It has provided spaces in which central and local government agencies can engage with faith communities, faith communities can engage with each other, and faith communities can engage with the community generally.

This does not in any way compromise the secular nature of the Commission or the separation of church and state: the state has as much of a responsibility to engage with citizens who share a community of belief as they do with those who share a community of culture, ethnicity or geography.

This is particularly so when globally there are tensions and conflicts associated with different religions, and when these have their consequences within New Zealand in terms, for example, of prejudice against visible religious minorities.

The interfaith network, Te Korowai Whakapono, is one of a number of networks facilitated by the Commission as part of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. It is a response to an identified need just as other networks in the Programme are – Te Waka Reo for those with an interest in a national language policy, Nga Reo Tangata on the media and diversity, and Te Punanga on refugee issues. In each case the Commission provides a monthly electronic newsletter, promotes action projects that enhance respect for diversity and improve relationships, and through the New Zealand Diversity Forum and other means, provides spaces to discuss some of the key issues of concern.

Last year's Diversity Forum was a launching pad for the draft Statement on Religious Diversity. The subsequent public debate, including strong differences within

the Christian community and equally strong views expressed by rationalists and humanists, has done much to raise public awareness of the issues, and particularly of the human rights and responsibilities that apply in the context of religious diversity.

Following the process of public consultation, a revised Statement was discussed and endorsed by the national interfaith forum in Hamilton in February. It was published as a small booklet in May, with additional commentary, a preface by the Prime Minister, and a foreword by Dame Sylvia Cartwright, former Governor General and presently Chair of the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO. The publication of the booklet, in an initial edition of 10,000 copies, was funded by UNESCO. The Statement has since been translated into ten other languages commonly used in New Zealand.

The Statement itself is very brief: it consists of a preamble setting out both the historical and contemporary context of religious diversity in New Zealand, and the basis for freedom of religion in international treaties and domestic human rights legislation. There are then eight simple statements, largely setting out human rights and responsibilities, which had the most resonance in public consultation and which also, in some cases, sparked the most debate. These statements, mostly comprising a single sentence, cover the state and religion, the right to religion, the right to safety, the right of freedom of expression, recognition and accommodation, education, religious differences and cooperation and understanding. Together they are proving to be a robust framework for ongoing discussion about religious diversity.

Faith communities and other organisations are now being invited to endorse the Statement, and to provide suggestions for improvement. A review of the Statement is scheduled for 2009.

Initial endorsements include not only the National Interfaith Forum, but also the Buddhist organisation Sokai Gakkai International, the Anglican and Catholic Bishops of New Zealand and the New Zealand Federation of Islamic Associations. Seeking endorsement rather than just comment means that organisations really have to engage with the content, and the content itself covers the key principles that will provide for religious tolerance and interfaith cooperation. The strength of the Statement is that it is a community based initiative, rather than a government edict.

The Human Rights Commission will continue to encourage discussion on the Statement, and record feedback for the review in 2009 – this provides a two year period for people to continue to discuss religious diversity in a human rights context.

In the meantime, the 2007 New Zealand Diversity Forum will focus on one of the hot topics in the Statement and in public debate: Religion in Schools, covering both education about religion and the human rights questions raised by religious instruction in schools.

Details of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme can be found at www.hrc.co.nz/diversity and information about the Statement on Religious Diversity can be found at www.hrc.co.nz/religiousdiversity. New Zealand interfaith news is also available at www.interfaith.org.nz.

Building Bridges: The Third Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue, Waitangi, Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 29-31 May 2007.

Report of the New Zealand Delegation

Introduction

Faith community representatives from 15 South East Asian and Pacific nations met in Waitangi from 29-31 May 2007 for the third Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue. The two previous dialogues took place in Cebu, Philippines in March 2006 and Yogyakarta, Indonesia in December 2004.

The regional dialogue process is sponsored by the governments of Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and the Philippines. The sponsoring governments were represented at the opening of the Waitangi dialogue by New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters, and Andri Hadi, representing the Indonesian Foreign Minister. New Zealand Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, acted as Host Minister throughout the Dialogue and gave the closing address.

The New Zealand Delegation

The New Zealand delegation was led by Dr Manuka Henare (Auckland University, Catholic) and comprised Rehanna Ali (Muslim), Dr Ashraf Choudhary (Muslim), Archbishop John Dew (Catholic), Joris de Bres (Human Rights Commission), Javed Khan (Muslim), Professor Paul Morris (Victoria University, Jewish), Bishop Richard Randerson (Anglican), Rev Feiloaiga Taule'ale'ausumai (Presbyterian), Dr Pushpa Wood (Hindu), and Ven Amala Wrightson (Buddhist). Because the conference was being held in New Zealand, it was also possible to include an observer group which worked closely with the official delegation. They were Glyn Carpenter (Vision Network, Christian), Mustafa Farouk (Muslim), Rabbi Johanna Hershensen (Jewish), Dr Upala

Manukulasuriya (Buddhist), Rohit Sharma (Hindu), Prithipal Singh (Sikh), and Keith Thompson (Mormon). Rev Bob Scott was the liaison officer for all delegations, and the New Zealand Government was represented by Minister Laban, Ambassador Dell Higgin and Cathie McGregor from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

New Zealand Country Report and Statement on Religious Diversity

New Zealand submitted a country report which included a brief religious and constitutional profile of New Zealand and actions that had been taken to follow up on the previous Dialogue in Cebu. Delegates were provided with a copy of the recently published booklet on the Statement on Religious Diversity, which received considerable positive comment. The Statement was also the focus of a demonstration outside the conference grounds by members of the Destiny Church, who presented their own statement seeking to have New Zealand declared a Christian nation. Representatives of the New Zealand delegation met with the leaders of the demonstration and received a statement from them.

Auckland Alliance of Civilisations Symposium

The dialogue was preceded by a high-level international symposium chaired by the New Zealand Prime Minister the previous week (23-24 May) in Auckland on the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations report. The outcomes of this symposium were reported to the Dialogue. These formed the basis for one of the workshop sessions. The recommendations of the Alliance of Civilisations report focused on education, the media, youth, and migration, and these themes (particularly the first three) were reflected in the final declaration from the Dialogue. Concern was expressed that the

language of the Alliance of Civilisations initiative (particularly in relation to “Muslim and Western” countries) needed to be modified to reflect the particular characteristics of the Asia Pacific region.

New Zealand Discussion Paper

The New Zealand delegation was also responsible for a discussion paper for the plenary session and workshops on Building Bridges: Faith Communities and Governments Working Together for the Common Good). The paper put forward three recommendations for discussion:

- That governments commit to extending their support for regional interfaith dialogue to fostering positive relationships between faith communities at the local and national regional levels and that faith communities take initiatives to work together at the local, national and regional levels with each other and governments.
- That governments take the responsibility to designate faith and interfaith points of contact with government at the local, national and regional levels.
- That a regional digital database be established with web page access mapping the range of religious activities in our region, including the faith and interfaith groups, faith-based organizations, charities and NGOs.

All three recommendations found their way in some form into the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan.

The Waitangi Declaration

The Dialogue concluded with the adoption of the Waitangi Declaration and Action Plan. The Action Plan focused on three areas - Building Bridges, Education and Media - as

well as welcoming the Alliance of Civilisations report. The New Zealand delegation commends all the recommendations for action to central and local government, faith communities, education providers, media and others, but suggests that follow-up action in the first instance focus on the following:

- Identifying clear points of contact within government for relations with faith communities and interfaith cooperation. We note the Auckland City Council's initiative in allocating this responsibility to a particular community development officer, and commend this to other councils. We note that the Human Rights Commission has established a national interfaith network and newsletter as part of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme following the previous Interfaith Dialogues, and consider this an important means of communication between faith communities and government. We believe it would be appropriate now to establish a responsibility for relations with faith communities and interfaith cooperation within central government, either at the Ministerial or departmental level, and consider this might be appropriately supported within the Ministry of Social Development. Equally, we encourage faith communities to participate in or establish interfaith networks or councils at the local level to liaise with local government, and to participate in the national network under the umbrella of the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme

- Strengthening interfaith dialogue and addressing concerns within religious communities. We note that the Statement on Religious Diversity has now been published in the form of a booklet with additional information and commentary, with an invitation for organisations to endorse the statement and suggest improvements, with a view to a review of the statement in two years time. We consider that this provides an appropriate framework for strengthening interfaith dialogue and addressing concerns, and urge central and local government, faith communities and the wider community to engage in the continuing discussion on the Statement.
- Establishing an Asia Pacific regional interfaith network and database. We believe that the New Zealand Interfaith Network facilitated by the Human Rights Commission provides a useful low-cost model for a regional network. The expectation from the Dialogue is that New Zealand will facilitate the regional network, and an appropriate home for such a network will need to be determined. It will involve resourcing the development of a website and equally importantly its maintenance as a reliable and up to date source of information, as well as the compilation of a regular electronic newsletter.
- Education about religions. We note that the new school curriculum is currently being finalised. We express the hope that this will include provision for education about diverse religions as well as diverse cultures, and that this will be followed by a more detailed curriculum statement and supporting educational resources. We note further that there will be a forum on Religion and Schools at the New Zealand Diversity Forum on 27 August, and encourage the Government, Ministry of Education, teachers and Boards of Trustees to participate in this forum to advance the discussion.
- Tertiary education institutions and religious diversity. We commend to government and tertiary education providers the concept of student and staff exchanges to promote understanding of religious diversity, the establishment of an Islamic Studies Centre in a New Zealand tertiary institution, research such as exploring any nexus between religion and conflict and perceptions of security in different faith communities, and the inclusion of education about other religions in the training of faith community leaders.
- The media and religious diversity. We note the work that has been done by the Journalists Training Organisation and the Human Rights Commission with the media on this issue since the cartoon controversy last year, including the recent JTO forum on reporting diversity which recommended scoping a media supported multicultural news agency. We encourage the Commission and the JTO to continue to address the issue of religious as well as cultural

diversity and the media. We also note that the New Zealand Press Council has recently initiated an independent review of its role, and urge them to adopt a more proactive stance in promoting high standards in media representation of diverse religions and cultures.

Joris de Bres is the Race Relations Commissioner in the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. The Commission facilitates the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. Joris is also Deputy Chairperson of Oxfam New Zealand, a trustee of Project Crimson (a trust for the conservation of New Zealand's native pohutukawa and rata trees), and on the Advisory Board of Victoria University's Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Studies.

Statement on Religious Diversity

The Statement on Religious Diversity is a project of Te Ngira, the New Zealand Diversity Action Programme. It was prepared by the Victoria University Religious Studies Programme and was the subject of a national process of public consultation coordinated by the Human Rights Commission. The Statement was endorsed by the National Interfaith Forum in Hamilton in February 2007 as a basis for ongoing public discussion. [Click here to read Professor Paul Morris' speech to the National Interfaith Forum in which he outlines the background to the Statement, the submissions process and the feedback given on the individual clauses of the Draft Statement. Further amendments were made after this paper was discussed at the Forum. Organisations are invited to endorse the statement and to provide further suggestions on its content for future review.](#)

Statement on Religious Diversity

New Zealand is a country of many faiths with a significant minority who profess no religion. Increasing religious diversity is a significant feature of public life.

At the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Governor Hobson affirmed, in response to a question from Catholic Bishop Pompallier, "the several faiths (beliefs) of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Maori custom shall alike be protected". This foundation creates the opportunity to reaffirm an acknowledgement of the diversity of beliefs in New Zealand.

Christianity has played and continues to play a formative role in the development of New Zealand in terms of the nation's identity, culture, beliefs, institutions and values.

New settlers have always been religiously diverse, but only recently have the numbers of some of their faith communities grown significantly as a result of migration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These communities have a positive role to play in our society. It is in this context that we recognise the right to religion and the responsibilities of religious communities.

International treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights uphold the right to freedom of religion and belief - the right to hold a belief; the right to change one's religion or belief; the right to express one's religion or belief; and the right not to hold a belief. These rights are reflected in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and Human Rights Act. The right to

religion entails affording this right to others and not infringing their human rights.

The following statement provides a framework for the recognition of New Zealand's diverse faith communities and their harmonious interaction with each other, with government and with other groups in society:

1. The State and Religion

The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no official or established religion.

2. The Right to Religion

New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.

3. The Right to Safety

Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security.

4. The Right of Freedom of Expression

The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy but should be exercised with responsibility.

5. Recognition and Accommodation

Reasonable steps should be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.

6. Education

Schools should teach an understanding of different religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the diversity of their national and local community.

7. Religious Differences

Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs will occur but must be exercised within the rule of law and without resort to violence.

8. Cooperation and understanding

Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and to promote mutual respect and understanding.

New Zealand as a Multireligious Society: Recent Census Figures and Some Relevant Implications

Todd Nachowitz

Let's face it; we are a religiously diverse nation. Over the years there's been much talk and a lot written about our rising cultural diversity, but the significant increases in the horizontal growth of our faith-based communities are little mentioned. We embrace the multicultural dimensions of New Zealand as we sample the cuisine at ethnic restaurants, take yoga and tai chi classes, and attend cultural functions in our public places. We enjoy the fruits of our increasingly cosmopolitan country and, hopefully, become more tolerant of difference. But is tolerance really enough?

Historically, we think of ourselves as a nation made up of indigenous Māori and immigrant European and Pacific Islanders. This view, however, is not entirely correct as early migrant populations from non-traditional sources (e.g. China, India) certainly helped to build New Zealand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These early immigrant groups are not well recognized in the writing of New Zealand's history. More recent waves of immigration from Asia, Africa and South America have significantly altered the Māori-Pākehā landscape of New Zealand. This "new wave" has widened the debate from the bicultural discourse that has dominated New Zealand's identity crises since European arrival, to the more layered and complex multiethnic discussions of today. While debates of biculturalism and indigenous rights must continue, one cannot deny that the new demographic picture of New Zealand in the early 21st century is truly multicultural and multireligious.

As our awareness of cultural diversity increases, some become mindful that our nation is also religiously diverse. But many remain largely unacquainted with this shifting religious landscape. New Buddhist temples and stupas rise where warehouses and wool sheds once stood, varied Hindu temples are consecrated where cows once grazed paddocks, and Muslims from around the world work together to build community mosques in both inner cities and suburbs. These new rounded domes and marbled spires represent triumphs for the new immigrant communities. But how might these architectural contributions enhance the social fabric of New Zealand?

To address the issues it is first necessary to quantify the ethnic and religious diversity of New Zealand resulting from our forward-thinking immigration policies. In order to ascertain trends, I have chosen to portray figures from the last four censuses, beginning in 1991 and ending with the recently released 2006 Census figures. I have chosen 1991 as a starting point in order to portray demographic changes since the implementation of a progressive immigration policy introduced in 1987. Fifteen years is also a reasonable length of time in which to measure population growth.

Table 1: Ethnic Groups in New Zealand, by Percent of Population, 1991-2006

Ethnic group	1991 Census	1996 Census	2001 Census	2006 census
European	83.2%	83.1%	80%	67.6%
Māori	13%	15.1%	14.7%	14.6%
Pacific Island	5%	5.8%	6.5%	6.9%
Asian	3%	5%	6.6%	9.2%
MELAA	0.2%	0.4%	0.7%	0.9%
New Zealander	-	-	-	11.1%
Other	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%	0.04%

(Sources for data: Statistics New Zealand Censuses for 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006.)

Notes:

1. Percentages are based upon the 'census usually resident population'.
2. Percentages will not total 100 since individuals are allowed to report more than one ethnic group.
3. MELAA is a new term introduced in the 2006 Census to identify people of Middle Eastern, Latin American and African ethnicity.
4. 'New Zealander' was introduced as a new response option for the 2006 Census. Prior to 2006, 'New Zealander' responses were grouped in the 'Other Ethnicity' category. This would account for the drop in the 'European' category in the 2006 Census.

What is interesting to note here is the significant growth in those reporting Asian ethnicity. Over a 15-year period, this population has more than tripled.

Furthermore, recent projections from Statistics New Zealand for the twenty-year period from 2001 to 2021 (released in 2005) show that Māori, Pacific Island and Asian populations are projected to grow at significantly faster rates than the European population, albeit with smaller numbers. While the projections to 2021 forecast the European population to increase by 5%, the Māori population is projected to increase 29% and the Pacific Island population 59%. However, during this same period Asian populations are forecast to grow a remarkable 145%, a growth rate nearly 30 times that of the European population. These figures assume the usage of mid-range statistical projections for all estimates, rather than the lower or higher extremes. Of significance is that while Māori and Pacific Island population increases are largely expected to be driven by births, growth in Asian populations over the next two decades is expected to be driven by continued inward migration.

The actual population growth over the previous 15-year period is as follows:

Table 2: Change in Ethnic Groups in New Zealand, by Number, 1991-2006

Ethnic group	1991 Census	2006 census	% change in since 1991
European	2,783,028	2,609,592	-6.2%
Māori	434,847	565,329	+30%
Pacific Island	167,070	265,974	+59%
Asian	99,756	354,552	+255%
MELAA	6,330	34,746	+449%
New Zealander	0	429,429	
Other	270	1,494	+453%

(Sources for data: Statistics New Zealand Censuses for 1991 and 2006)

The drop in the 'European' category can mostly be attributed to the creation of the 'New Zealander' category for the 2006 Census. This skews the percent change figure in both categories. As before, what is important to note from these figures is that new immigrant populations are rising at significantly faster rates than European, Māori and Pacific Island populations.

One result of increasing cultural diversity is the rise in religious diversity. It goes without saying that immigrant populations bring novel cultural practices and different belief systems, but in the New Zealand context this is such a recent occurrence that many of us may not even be aware of

the new faith-based communities resulting from inward migration. To understand the changes in religious diversity, let us first look at the Christian denominations since it is our largest single religion.

As a way of comparing changes in the Christian population, I have compared figures from the 1991 with the recently released 2006 Census.

Table 3: Percent Change in Populations of Christian Denominations Since 1991

Religious Affiliation	1991 Census		2006 Census		Population change
	number	percent	number	percent	
Adventist	15,675	0.5%	16,191	0.4%	+3.3%
Anglican	732,048	23%	554,925	15%	-24.2%
Asian Christian	0	0%	195	0.005%	+195%
Baptist	70,155	2.2%	56,913	1.5%	-18.9%
Brethren	21,915	0.7%	19,617	0.52%	-10.5%
Catholic	498,612	15.6%	508,437	13.6%	+2%
Church of Christ	4,842	0.15%	2,988	0.08%	-38.3%
Evangelical	5,169	0.16%	13,836	0.37%	+168%
Jehovah's Witnesses	19,182	0.6%	17,910	0.48%	-6.6%
Latter-day Saints	48,009	1.5%	43,539	1.2%	-9.3%
Lutheran	4,965	0.16%	4,476	0.12%	-9.8%
Methodist	139,494	4.4%	121,806	3.3%	-12.7%
Orthodox	4,263	0.13%	13,194	0.35%	+210%
Pentecostal	49,596	1.6%	79,155	2.1%	+59.6%
Presbyterian	553,386	17.3%	400,839	10.7%	-27.6%
Protestant	1,785	0.06%	3,954	0.11%	+122%
Salvation Army	19,992	0.63%	11,493	0.31%	-42.5%
Uniting/Union Church &	1,026	0.03%	1,419	0.04%	+38%

Ecumenical					
Other Christian	3,276	0.1%	3,798	0.1%	+16%
Christian nfd	79,317	2.5%	186,234	5%	+135%
TOTAL CHRISTIAN	2,272,707	71%	2,027,418	54.2%	

(Sources: Statistics New Zealand 1991 and 2006 Censuses.)

Notes:

1. Includes only those who stated a religious affiliation.
2. Prior to the 2001 Census, only a single religious affiliation was collected. From 2001 onwards, up to four responses were collected. Where a person recorded more than one religious affiliation they have been counted in each applicable group.
3. Categories in this table follow the New Zealand Standard Classification of Religious Affiliation 1999 and are used in the tabulation of census results.
4. nfd = not further defined.
5. In the 2006 Census, 'Born Again' and 'Fundamentalist' responses are included in the 'Evangelical' category.
6. All figures are for the census usually resident population.

Here, some general trends are observable. Overall, those reporting adherence to a Christian faith have declined from 71% of the population in 1991 to 54% of the population today. Of the largest denominations, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Latter Day Saints populations are all in decline, albeit at different rates. Other denominations show growing populations (e.g. Catholicism, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant, Ecumenical), but these increases may be a result of changes to the way in which particular denominations may have been classified or grouped together (e.g. Ecumenical, Evangelical, Born Again and Fundamentalist classifications) or perhaps as a result of increased immigration (e.g. Catholicism, Orthodox). Where actual population numbers are small, percent changes may be difficult to compare with larger groups.

In the larger picture of reported faiths, population changes in religious affiliation since 1991 are as follows:

Table 4: Population Change in Religious Affiliation Since 1991

Religious Affiliation	1991 Census		2006 Census		Population change
	number	percent	number	percent	
Buddhist	12,762	0.4%	52,362	1.4%	+311%
Christian	2,272,707	71%	2,027,418	54.2%	-11%
Hindu	18,036	0.6%	64,392	1.7%	+257%
Islam	6,096	0.2%	36,072	1%	+492%
Judaism	3,126	0.1%	6,858	0.2%	+119%
Maori Christian	56,055	1.8%	65,550	1.8%	+17%
Spiritualism/New Age	5,196	0.2%	19,800	0.5%	+281%
Baha'i	2,865	0.09%	2,772	0.07%	-3%
Chinese religions	327	0.01%	912	0.02%	+179%
Jainism	0	0%	111	0.003%	+111%
Japanese religions	0	0%	384	0.01%	+384%
Māori religions	318	0.01%	2,412	0.06%	+658%
Sikh	2,061	0.06%	9,507	0.25%	+361%
Theism	0	0%	2,202	0.06%	+2,202%
Zoroastrianism	0	0%	1,071	0.03%	+1,071%
Unification Church	0	0%	105	0.003%	+105%
Other (nfd)	0	0%	4,830	0.1%	+4,830%
Other (nec)	14,298	0.45%	258	0.007%	-98%
No religion	670,455	21%	1,297,104	34.6%	+93%
Don't know	0	0%	1,743	0.05%	+1,743%
Object to answering	251,709	7.9%	242,610	6.5%	-3.6%

Religion unidentifiable	0	0%	10,653	0.28%	+10,653%
Response outside scope	0	0%	30,945	0.83%	+30,945%
Not stated	0	0%	249,711	6.7%	+249,711 %

(Sources: Statistics New Zealand 1991 and 2006 Censuses.)

Notes:

1. All figures are for the census usually resident population.
2. nfd = not further defined; nec = not elsewhere classifiable

Where responses for individual faiths are small (i.e. less than 1% of the total usually resident population), comparisons of percent growth in populations may be problematic, especially where particular categories didn't exist in earlier censuses (e.g. 'Theism', 'Zoroastrianism') or where the classification of particular groups has changed (e.g. 'Other nec'). As before, there are some general trends. While there has been an overall decrease in the numbers of respondents stating adherence to a Christian denomination (a decrease of 11% since 1991), other religions with significant populations are showing substantial gains. Most significant of these population increases over the last 15 years are the growth of Buddhism (+311%), Hinduism (+257%), and Islam (+492%). Percentage changes in populations of other religions with exceedingly small numbers (e.g. those with total populations of less than 5000 adherents (e.g. Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Jain) are usually difficult to compare with larger denominations as one must take into account the relatively small numbers of followers.

Of considerable interest is the rise of those reporting 'No Religion', with numbers nearly doubling over the past 15 years to where about 1.3 million people, nearly 35% of the New Zealand population, now report no religious affiliation at all. This comprises the largest single category of respondents after Christianity. It should be noted that New Zealand also has one of the highest incidences of 'No religion' responses in the western world. Within an emerging multireligious context, it is especially important to view these respondents as having a belief system that is as equally valid as those that choose adherence to more traditional faith-based beliefs. The absence of religious belief may simply indicate the conscious choice of an individual or group to pursue the principles of an alternate belief system. This might imply a deep conviction in the principles of science, awe of the natural world, or adherence to atheism, agnosticism, humanism, rationalism, or any one of many such moral and/or ethical philosophical ideals.

Numbers of those stating 'Object to answering' appear to be dropping slightly over the same period. This may be a response to the increasing options one now has for reporting religious affiliation or non-affiliation or it may be evidence of a growing sense of comfort about one's beliefs, i.e. the fear of discrimination on the basis of religion may actually be decreasing. Either way, responses of this nature might simply imply that religion is a personal matter not to be divulged, or that it is not the business of government to pry into one's personal life. It is interesting to note however that the number of respondents in this category is larger than the sum of all the non-Christian religions combined, or roughly 6.5% of the total population.

'Religion Unidentifiable' is an interesting classification. According to Statistics New Zealand's 'Glossary and References' for religious affiliation¹, 'Religion unidentifiable' refers to a response where "it is unclear what the meaning or intent of the response is – this most commonly occurs when the response being classified contains insufficient detail, is ambiguous or vague." It also states that contradictory responses, e.g. where both 'yes' and 'no' boxes may be ticked, are placed in this category. Furthermore, if the response is "clear and seemingly [falls] within the scope of the classification but cannot be coded because no suitable option...exists in the classification or codefile" (particularly if there is no other residual category that applies, like 'not elsewhere classifiable' or 'not further defined'), then the response is placed in this category. Over 10,000 responses were eventually grouped into this category by Statistics New Zealand and possibly includes a variety of nonsensical responses, a few megalomaniacs, and lots of people with bad handwriting.

The 'Religion outside scope' category is also of particular interest. Statistics New Zealand's 'Glossary and References' for religious affiliation states that "this category is used for responses that are positively identified (i.e. the meaning and the intent are clear) but which clearly fall outside the scope of the classification/topic as defined in the standard." Though Statistics New Zealand provides no examples in its definition, this classification addresses our nation's light-sabre wielding Jedi Knights, along with other such similar rejoinders. In 2001, some respondents recorded a protest vote by recording 'Jedi' as their religion of choice. Reporter Alan Perrott wrote in the New Zealand Herald (31 August 2001) that 53,715 New Zealanders had recorded 'Jedi' in the 2001 Census. If these numbers are correct then there were more believers in "The Force" than either adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism for the same year. This phenomenon was also widely reported in Australia (where the Australian Bureau of Statistics issued an official press release on 2 May 2001²), as well as in Canada and the UK. Back at home, Perrott reported that a spokesperson for Statistics New Zealand informed him that the 'Jedi' response was assigned the same category as such comparable replies as 'the Church of Elvis,' 'rugby,' 'racing' and 'beer'; that is, they were all lumped together as "responses deemed outside the scope of recognized religions." One can only assume that these types of responses occur in the 2006 Census and that these continue to be reported as 'Religion outside scope'. The recently released 2006 Census figures place nearly 31,000 people in this category. It is relevant to point out that responses of this type have no effect on classification and there is no magic number used to obtain officially recognized status. The words 'Church of Elvis' will never appear on a census form no matter how many responses are received.

It is clear then that there is not only an increase in the number of adherents to an increased diversity of faiths, but there is also an increase in the diversity of faiths themselves. With the degree of our religious diversity established and observable trends identified, we can now focus on the extent of our religious literacy. Like most places, we are essentially a religiously illiterate nation. We may know about our own beliefs, but how much do we really understand about the religions of our neighbours? There is often a lack of understanding about other religions and their forms of practice. In terms of cohesive social policies, religious literacy should be as important a measure of our internal security as are health, education and the unemployment rate. A better understanding of and appreciation for all faith communities may have a positive impact on our race relations. Both as individuals and as members of our larger congregations it is imperative

1 available from < www.stats.govt.nz/statistical-methods/statistical-standards/religious-affiliation/glossary-and-references.htm>, accessed 20 April 2007.

2 <www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3110124.NSF/0/86429d11c45d4e73ca256a400006af80?OpenDocument> accessed 20 April 2007.

that we devote more attention to understanding the beliefs and practices of our other faiths. This does not mean we must alter our own forms of worship; rather, we need to move to a place beyond mere tolerance of other beliefs into a realm diffused with a deeper understanding of the world's religions.

How are we to do this? Individually, we can begin to gain a better appreciation through a brief personal study of comparative religion. There is much literature that can provide insight into other faiths. Another example is to experience what others do in their places of worship. A friend, neighbour or workmate of different faith can take you to their respective place of worship. These are only two ways to increase individual understanding of other religions and there are countless more. Collectively, our faith communities need to be more actively engaged in interfaith dialogues—active in the sense of promotion and deep connection. For instance, when a single faith reaches out and says “Come join us on our open day” (Islam Awareness Week is one such example), other faith communities must not ignore the appeal—they should respond in kind and organize their members to attend. Multicultural curricula and the teaching about (not of) other religions needs to be a greater part of the classroom experience as teaching understanding, acceptance and respect to children helps build a more tolerant society. These types of activities may motivate us to discard the status quo of indifference in favour of a more practical and appropriate form of active engagement that's worthy of our nascent multicultural and multireligious status.

By now we should know that sustaining solidarity in a culturally and religiously diverse population is one of the foremost challenges facing nation-states today. As inward migration increases, many countries grapple with increasing discrimination, ethnic tensions, racism and violence, while simultaneously struggling to improve health, education, employment and immigration policies that stimulate social cohesion. A robust, culturally diverse population and the freedom of belief can therefore be strong indicators of a nation's internal security. Fostering public policies in support of these initiatives is therefore of utmost importance. Moving beyond mere tolerance of difference and into a sphere of active engagement is not only urgent, but also increasingly vital in today's global social climate as New Zealand manages the myriad issues arising from recent immigration and the continued growth of its cultural and religious diversity. Let's hope that we're up to the challenge.

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Kill War

Jon Carapiet

This work was produced for the exhibition “Kill War” which featured work by Bruce Mahalski and Jarad Bryant, and examined our responses to the horrors of war in Iraq and elsewhere, which we see each night on our TV screens.

Since undertaking a Masters degree at Elam School of Fine Arts I had been using appropriated images from the media to explore political and spiritual themes through photo-installations. My Anglo-Armenian heritage has given me a personal connection to genocide and holocaust which came through in this earlier work as I sought to subvert the pictures and question the numbing effect on the viewer of a visual diet of war provided by the mass media. For ‘Kill War’ my aim was not to reiterate such imagery but rather to provide an antidote to it, and to war itself. I wanted to cross the boundaries of “Christian”, “Buddhist” or “Hindu” arts and draw on a range of spiritual traditions. Together these images are of ‘collaborators’ against war, who act as a counterbalance to guns, blood and pain, and instead speak of compassion and love.



Jon Carapiet is an Auckland-based researcher, writer and artist. Born in Ghana in 1963 and raised in England he studied Anthropology and Art History at St John's College, Cambridge, and Fine Arts at Auckland University. His career encompasses work in the commercial fields of advertising and research as well as in the visual arts, consumer rights and green politics.)

Immigration, integration and Islam

Bashy Quraishy

There is a tendency to simplify the issue of ethnic and religious minorities in the political and academic discourses in EU member states and broader debates in civil society. The use of terminology, such as immigration and migrants and connecting this exclusively with Islam and associating Islam with terrorism, is very wide spread. The political elite who want to win cheap votes use the term immigration to cover all sorts of groups who enter Europe. Is this a deliberate effort on the part of European rulers to mislead public opinion or can this be attributed to a simple case of ignorance and arrogance?

Besides, this apparent misuse of terminology, another process can also be noticed in Europe. This is the lack of will to tackle racism and discrimination. Since 1997, when Europe officially talked of racism and designated that year as the European Year against Racism, the whole question of discrimination has been pushed in the background. Now, we have the year of mobility, equal opportunity, social cohesion and inter-cultural dialogue. The year of integration is not far behind. Not that there is anything wrong with these positive sounding concepts but the fact remains that unless racism is confronted, integration and social cohesion will not succeed.

In terms of terminology, there isn't a European country that has a well-organised and defined policy of immigration. This is due to the fact that since 1973, legal immigration has not been permitted, except in the case of a few very highly qualified experts in various fields who are allowed to move to some EU countries for a limited period.

But when it comes to third country nationals, they have to pass through the eye of the needle. They come as family reunion spouses, UN allocated refugees and in some cases as students. The present restrictive policies in most EU member states have drastically and effectively reduced the numbers of these groups. For example, in Denmark the reduction in numbers of third country nationals is as high as eighty percent. Then there are a sizeable number of undocumented and exploited seasonal workers who are used in many South European countries. No one knows their true numbers. In popular language, they are called illegal immigrants. They work in vegetable and fruit picking plantations, in the agricultural sector and on night shift cleaning services. They live in make-shift shanty houses, have no security and are often hounded by police.

In addition, there are a sizeable number of asylum seekers who come from war torn areas or flee from oppressive regimes like Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia and Sri Lanka. Most of them come as refugees but find EU doors closed shut. They are routinely

rejected, many sent back against their will and some go underground.

Putting all these groups under the umbrella term migrants is not only misleading but also indirectly supporting the right wing political movements who want to frighten the European masses by raising the spectre of a flood of migrants swamping the EU. That is why, it is absolutely vital that anti-racist NGOs do not jump on the bandwagon.

When it comes to migration, there are several kinds of migrations going on in Europe. Internal migration consists of EU citizens, migrating to richer parts of the EU in search of a better life. This is happening in spite of the fact that most EU countries have raised barriers. But many East European workers are moving to the West because there is a demand for cheap employment and because they blend in well with the majority because of their appearance. Even people from non-EU countries like Ukraine, Moldova and other former Eastern block countries; have found jobs in the EU.

The construction industry in Portugal is entirely made of skilled and semiskilled workers from the Ukraine, Albanian labour is being used in Italy and Greece. Denmark which has tightened policies and curtailed refugees and family reunions to a trickle has officially started inviting skilled and unskilled labour from other countries. This is happening even when 50 percent of already settled ethnic minorities are without a job but are available for employment.

In this internal migration, there are few signs of non-European citizens who are settled in EU for many years, moving to other EU countries. In most cases, they stay where they originally settled. There is also migration from Latin America to Spain, Portugal and Italy. As well as English speaking people from South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada, who have easy access to the UK labour market.

It is in this context that we need to be clear, precise and nuanced. If not, then the misuse of the word, migration or immigration scares most Europeans but also creates a gulf between settled ethnic and religious minorities from outside Europe and the European majority societies. It is thought provoking that in public debates and official data, children of first generation immigrants are often referred to as 2nd or even 3rd generation immigrants. In practice, it means that people who are born and bred in Europe are still considered foreigners.

To make this clear distinction between various groups does not mean that an inclusive policy is not desirable or focusing on a particular ethnic group is the aim. All it means is that decision-makers should have a better understanding of the reality at the ground and shape their policies accordingly.

And while, we are at the subject of policies, it is important to point out that authorities must make a distinction between ethnicity and faith when they talk of the integration of minorities. Here again, the word immigrants, integration and Muslims are very loosely used. The notion that integration has failed because of a lack of will among minorities and the use of the term Muslims rather than ethnic and religious minorities results in Islamophobia and an intense dislike of Islam.

Integration without religious colouring

There is no doubt that in these modern times, Muslim communities in Europe are going through a rough patch. They are not being accepted as equal human beings let alone appreciated as co-citizens. They are often regarded as "Outsiders".

But why mix integration, which is a socio-economic process, with Islam, which is a faith and private affair for an individual. In

many years of work with diverse ethnic minorities in Europe, I have noticed that problems of integration are mutual among various groups irrespective of their religious belonging. It is not difficult to note that some wounds of non-acceptance are self inflicted while most problems are created by the society at large.

It goes without saying that while demanding that minorities should adopt and integrate societies must give place to individuals to participate in the process of their development – without discrimination or prejudice. In response, it is the obligation of an individual to avail themselves of the opportunities provided. It is important to emphasise that an individual needs to make an effort to fit in as much as possible without being a copy of the majority.

Having said that, I also wish to state that non-European ethnic and religious minorities have to face the reality that they came to the European continent at a time when their services were needed and thus their stay tolerated. This situation has changed. Now non-European minorities are not needed or desired. This can be noticed in the new pyramid of racism, which has appeared on the European horizon. In this new scheme of globalisation, non-European minorities and their children are being pushed down the ladder of labour market through the opening up of the EU towards East and Central Europe. Poles, Czech and Baltic workers are replacing Turks, Pakistanis and Middle Eastern workers. As one Danish politician put it to me; " Why should we give people like you a job, when we can have our cousins from East Europe who look like us and with whom, we share a common culture?"

Even if I do not like or accept this line of argument, I do understand it. It also makes sense to the wider European public and to future globalisation trends. Many young people with a non-European background who are born and bred in Europe really believe that they can get respect or attain

equality in this part of the world. It is a naive thought. Why would the children of yesterday's colonists give the children of their former subjects, equal rights or even a bit of respect?

And on top of this historical "hangover", European societies are now secular in their thinking and thus the argument of religion is like a red cloth being waved in front of a bull. In my numerous conversations with European politicians, academics and even grassroots activists, I am told that it is very difficult for them to relate to Muslims or take their concerns seriously, because they explain all their actions with reference to events and preaching which took place centuries ago, in an area of the world, Europe had to fight to survive.

Thus many Europeans are not happy that Muslims who were historical enemies are now living among them, demanding respect and acceptance of their religious rights. This situation becomes more complex, when some among these Muslim communities want to hold on to their traditions and values. On top of this, the media produced images of diverse Muslim groups as a generic and monolithic entity have made the concept of living together a near impossibility.

Is social cohesion possible?

It is of course important to say that an individual's cultural or religious values are not affected or put under pressure to change. Such attempts often fail and create a backlash. But seen from a European perspective, it is equally vital to stress that since the French revolution, European societies have been built or so it is claimed, on non-religious foundations. A century's long struggle against the established church helped to shape present day's norms, traditions and value systems in Europe. A

hard battle was won against the hegemony of the Christian Church elite.

beating of women, physical punishment of children, and preach martyrdom, female circumcision and honour killing.

That is why; most Europeans are in no mood to give ground to demands from religious forces among Muslim communities in the name of mutual integration. There is no doubt that due consideration must be given to reasonable wishes from any minority, religious or ethnic. This is a part of the adaptation process. And since Muslim communities contribute to the welfare of the societies, they live in, they too rightfully can ask for justifiable concessions, like; Halal meals in educational institutions, separate swimming classes for girls, funding for the building of mosques and graveyards or the possibility of observing religious duties which do not interfere with majority norms.

It goes without saying that social cohesion can only be achieved when there is a room for diversity and a visible acceptance of non-European cultures and religions. But at the same time, it is vital to emphasize that a minority must not insist on having its way when some of its religious dogmas contradict or are in conflict with the majority thinking.

For example, some groups among Muslim communities in Europe insist on;

- Using Shariah guidelines with regard to family matters
- Prayer rooms in educational institutions or work places
- Wearing of Niqab or Burkas in public and institutional places
- Having Imams from their villages, tribes or countries of origins that have no knowledge of European cultures and often hinder integration by making bombastic statements. A few of these Imams even glorify violence, justify the

Since Imams are considered representatives of Islam, their extreme statements are taken as the opinions of all Muslims, but it is far from the empirical reality of all Muslims. To make matters worse, populist and nationalist politicians exploit such situations and create greater barriers to mutual integration. This is exactly why one should not assume that every thing Muslims do is due to their religion. It leaves very little room for valuing people's own efforts, common sense, human ethics and morals.

The British/Pakistani writer, journalist and broadcaster Ziauddin Sardar wrote very tellingly in the New Internationalist in May 2002;

" Muslims have to realise that Islam does not provide ready- made answers to all their problems. Rather, it provides an ethical and moral perspective within which Muslims must endeavour to find answers to all human problems. The way forward to a fresh, contemporary appreciation of Islam requires moving away from reduction to synthesis and from single literalist interpretation to a pluralistic understanding of Islam."

On a more personal level, Europe is my home. Here, I not only want to be respected and listened to, but most of all, wish to be left in peace, to find my own way in society. I shall participate, observe my duties and then demand my rights. Not because I am a Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, but because I am a decent human being and I contribute to society, on all levels.

I sincerely believe that the desire for integration will not succeed if it is imposed on by the majority or coloured by religious demands, rather than human rights. No

European with a little bit of self respect would dare to argue against rights based on humanity but it would be easy to deny the same rights if asked in the name of religion. The choice is ours – humanity first or religion. I would go for humanity, because it also includes my beautiful religion, Islam.

Europe has slowly but steadily seen very disturbing progress towards nationalist movements and extreme right wing political parties. Today not only European countries with sizeable non-European minority populations like France, UK, Germany, Spain, Holland and Italy have strong nationalist and anti-immigrant electorates but so do countries like, Sweden, Poland, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark. Nationalist movements play a very significant role in shaping local politics. This situation has even forced left wing parties to not sound or look minority friendly. The influence of nationalist parties is no more limited to just local politics.

On 15th January 2007, a new far right coalition was included in the European Parliament, as a recognised group. According to the BBC news web site (15 Jan 2006) most of the parties in this group are strongly anti-immigration. One should also remember that this group got almost 25% of the votes at the last European Parliament elections.

Another side effect of this strong political rhetoric is the debate concerning the dismantling of a multi-cultural society and its replacement with mono-cultural ideologies. Tony Blair has recently joined a long list of European politicians who are using very strong language in promoting Europeanness at the cost of inter-culturalism. In a recent interview in the Daily Telegraph (08-12.2006), he plainly said, "Adopt or leave". Interesting enough, he was evasive in naming, who he was addressing this message to. Commenting on Mr Blair's statement, conservative newspaper, Daily Telegraph could not hide its pleasure. In an

editorial, called "as Blair seen the multi-culturalism light?" the newspaper asserts; "Multi-culturalism portrays itself as a means of celebration: in fact, it is an invitation to all minorities to complain, loudly and persistently, about their victim hood".

I am not a great fan of Francis Fukuyama, professor at Johns Hopkins School of International Studies. His super liberalistic approach to solving complex socio-economic problems of ethnic minorities amounts to blaming the victim. But in his latest essay about Identity and migration in the Journal of democracy (2006), he came close to admitting, why multi-culturalism has not succeeded in Europe. He writes; "Multi-culturalism, as it was originally conceived in Canada, the USA and Europe, was in some sense a "game at the end of history. That is, cultural diversity was seen as a kind of ornament to liberal pluralism that would provide ethnic food, colourful dress and traces of distinctive historical traditions to societies often seen as numbingly conformist and homogeneous."

Seen from an ethnic minority perspective, this mindset has not changed over the years. Many European still see non-European as exotic but inferior beings who can sing, dance, entertain and have the dirty, hard and dangerous jobs no self respecting European would ever do. So nothing has changed since the sixties.

The unfortunate development of structural racism is not only visible in political parties but it has also been slowly poisoning the institutions and the street for a long time. Talking of the European racist attacks, EU Commissioner for Justice, freedom and security, Mr Frattini recently voiced his concern during a visit to Germany. Speaking after a visit to Berlin's memorial to victims of the Holocaust, he mentioned EUMC's new report to be published in March 2007 which documents a significant increase in racist violence in many EU countries (Herald Tribune.21.02.2007).

But racist violence is not the only worry of ethnic minorities. Strict outer EU border control, visa restrictions, the lack of opportunity to seek asylum and ever diminishing opportunities to bring one's spouse to the EU have contributed to frustration among those to legally want to enter Europe. According to UNITED's documentation (Death by Policy- the Fatal Realities of "Fortress Europe" www.united.non-profit.nl), since 1993, 8107 asylum seekers and refugees have died at the shores of Europe. It has been monitoring the deadly results of the building of a 'Fortress Europe' by making a list of the refugees and migrants, who have died in their attempt to enter Europe as a result of Europe's immigration policies.

Commissioner Frattini wishes to change the situation by introducing limited time legal migration quotas where cheap labour from

African countries can work in agriculture, tourism, and public works. But the condition is that after the seasonal work is over, African workers must return home. MEPs however, stress that the free movement of EU job seekers across the block should come prior to measures aiming to boost immigration from third countries.

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Not a Western story: the Christian faith and migrant communities in New Zealand

Andrew Butcher

If Christianity could have ever been called a Western religion, it is certainly not one now. Christianity was born in the Middle East; it reached Africa before it reached England. The vast majority of the world's Christians live in the two-thirds world, in Asia and Africa. When a Christian prays, she is most likely to speak in a language other than English.

It is rarely recognised that Christianity began in a similar pluralist social context to the New Zealand in the third millennium. The Christian voice was a distinct minority and remained so for many centuries. The relative peace that Christians in New Zealand experience is frankly more of a historical exception. Even today, most of the world's Christians endure significant persecution and suffering. The level of religious freedom that exists in New Zealand is unmatched by most countries in the world.

New Zealand's rapidly changing demography, with high levels of immigration from Asia in particular, is seen by some as a threat to Christianity in New Zealand. With the new immigrants comes new ways of seeing, doing and believing. It is hard to conceive that the recent Interfaith Dialogue or the Statement on Religious Diversity would have received the same level of mainstream media coverage or public discourse in the more homogeneous New Zealand society of fifty years ago. With a diversifying population come a diversified number of religious beliefs.

Some definitional clarifications are needed up-front. While we generally use 'migrant' as a synonym for 'Asian', the majority of immigrants to New Zealand are still coming from the United Kingdom and that there remains a significant amount of movement between Australia and New Zealand. So when we talk of migrants to New Zealand, we need to remember to include our nearest neighbour and our colonial 'Mother Country'. The Pacific communities in New Zealand have also had strong ties with the church. 80% of Pacific peoples in New Zealand are Christian, according to the 2006 Census, and the church plays a central role in Pacific culture and life. With Pacific peoples being such an integral part of New Zealand culture now, we forget that thirty years ago they were the new migrants bringing their styles and culture to New Zealand.

The role that religion, in particular religious communities, plays in the settlement experiences of migrants is well canvassed in international and New Zealand literature.³ In

³ For example, see, Frank Pieke, Community and Identity in the New Chinese Migration Order, Centre of Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford, Working Paper No. 24, 2005. Retrieved from

other Western countries, as in New Zealand, Christian churches, for example, are often non-denominational and are often open to migrants from many different social backgrounds and places of origin. Joining a faith community provides an immediate social network for many migrants and frequently gives migrants a place to belong and a new sense of 'family' and 'home', particularly where they have left those two things behind in another country. My own research has shown that churches play a very significant role in the pastoral care of international students in New Zealand.⁴ Religious beliefs, like migrants' experiences, are transnational: they cross borders, are easily transportable and often access international as well as local and national networks.⁵

While there is recent significant growth in churches that cater specifically for migrant groups (though these have always existed in one form or other; the Anglican Chinese Church in Wellington began in 1979), "European" churches also have significant ministries to particular migrant populations.

<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/publications/Working%20papers/Frank%20Pieke%20WP0524.pdf>;
Nyíri, Pál, *New Chinese Migrants in Europe: The Case of the Chinese Community in Hungary*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999; Macpherson, Cluny, *From Pacific Islanders to Pacific People and Beyond* in P. Spoonley, C. MacPherson and D. Pearson (eds) *Tangata Tangata: The Changing Ethnic Contours of New Zealand*. South Bank, Thomson: 135-56, 2005; Clive Pearson (ed) *Doing theology in Oceania: partners in dialogue*. Proceedings of the Theology in Oceania conference, Dunedin, 17-21 September, 2000 Dunedin, Centre for Contextual Theology, Knox College. For a full annotated bibliography see Neil Darragh, *Theology in Aotearoa New Zealand An Annotated Bibliography under Subject Headings* <http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/2292/447/1/ANZ-AnnotBib-07.pdf>, 2007

4 Butcher, A., Lim, L-H., McGrath, T., & Revis, L. (2002) *Nga Tangata: Partnership in Providing Services to International Students*. Auckland, Asia Pacific Migration Research Network; McGrath, T.M., & Butcher, A. (2004), *Campus-Community Linkages in the Pastoral Care of International Students with specific reference to Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch, for the Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand*.

5 see Pieke, 2004

6 Stephen Young, 'Politics and Culture' retrieved from <http://www.stevenyoung.co.nz/chinesevoice/politics/politicsandculture.htm>

Auckland Baptist Tabernacle, for example, has a large and highly successful ministry to international students.⁷ Christian groups in New Zealand have often seen the provision of support to migrant communities as part of their mission. Specific Christian ministries to migrant communities and international students have existed for many years in New Zealand. For example, OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship, formerly the China Inland Mission), which began in New Zealand the early 1890s, has a ministry to Chinese and Japanese diaspora in New Zealand; TSCF (Tertiary Students' Christian Fellowship),⁸ which began in 1937 in New Zealand, has a large ministry to international students at universities, while ISM (International Student Ministries)⁹ provides pastoral care to international students, works closely with education providers, particularly through university chaplaincies, and gives input into government research and policy.

In many respects, then, the Christian church plays a significant social role in the settlement of migrants. Though is this role any different to a role that might be played by a mosque or a synagogue? Is Christianity in New Zealand and amongst migrant communities more than just a social support network?

The statistics

A look at some figures is instructive here. The latest Census data illustrates an overall decline in the number of people identifying themselves as Christian, from 60.6 percent in 2001 to fewer than 50 percent in 2006. While the traditional Christian denominations decreased (Anglican and Presbyterian) or grew only slightly (Catholics and Methodists), there were significant

7 www.tabernacle.org.nz

8 www.tscf.org.nz

9 www.ism.org.nz

increases for those affiliating with 'Orthodox'; 'Evangelical', 'Born Again' and 'Fundamentalist'; and 'Pentecostal' religions.¹⁰ 'Pentecostals' are estimated about 10 percent of nominal Christians, 30 percent of churchgoers, and 3.5 percent of the total population.¹¹ By 2011, data suggest, Christians will be a significant minority in New Zealand. Even the current Census figures don't show what percentage of Christians regularly attend church, which can be charitably estimated to be at about 8-10 percent, which does not include those who make an annual church visit at Christmas time.¹²

The Census data goes onto show that there has also been an increase in other religions, which is attributed to the increase in migrants from Asia. Notably Chinese migrants identify as having 'no religion' though are often inclined to find religion in New Zealand. There were significant increases in the Sikh religion, Hinduism and Islam, with the vast majority of those who identified themselves in one of these categories born overseas and in Asia. Of Hindus and Muslims, almost half arrived in New Zealand in the last five years. European New Zealanders and New Zealanders were most likely to state they had no religion at 37.7 percent and 37.6 percent each.¹³

Of those who identified themselves as Asian, there was an increase of those who identified themselves as Christian from

66,390 in 2001 to 97,809 in 2006.¹⁴ Proportionately, Asians were 4.8% of total Christians in 2006, which was an increase from 3.2% of total Christians in 2001. Compare that to an overall decrease in the number of Christians from 2001 to 2006.¹⁵

So while the overall Christian population in New Zealand is decreasing, that cannot be attributed entirely to new migrant populations. While the new migrant population is clearly responsible for the increases in other religions, the decrease in Christianity in New Zealand may also be the result of problems of attrition and/or retention amongst New Zealand's non-migrant Christian communities and an increasing number of skeptical European New Zealanders who would state they belong to no religion. We could also infer that the growth in the 'Orthodox', 'Evangelical' and 'Pentecostal' denominations is the result of new migrant populations inasmuch as it can be attributed to 'natural' growth or changing denominations amongst New Zealand Christians.

The statistics then would suggest that the reading of migration threatening Christianity in New Zealand is not that simple. Furthermore, these statistics are not unique. Other Western countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom and Germany, are all facing declining church attendance (albeit to different degrees), while in other parts of the world, including the Republic of Korea and China, the Christian church is growing, though is far from a majority religion in these or similar countries.

10 What the Census refers to as 'religion' in this context might be better described as 'denomination'.

11 Peter Lineham, 'Wanna be in my gang?' New Zealand Listener, 195, 3357, Sep 11-17, 2004, retrieved from http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3357/features/2554/wanna_be_in_my_gang

12 Dennis Welch, 'Jingle Tills' New Zealand Listener, 206, 3476, Dec 23-29, 2006 retrieved from http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3476/features/7758/jingle_tills.html;jsessionid=4597DCC68AA6BC57B40B35522E9C11AB

13 Statistics New Zealand, Quick Stats about Culture and Identity, 2006 Census, retrieved from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/5F1F873C-5D36-4E54-9405-34503A2C0AF6/0/quickstatsaboutcultureandidentity.pdf>

14 Tables on culture and identity from the 2006 Census, retrieved from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/F1A5AEF5-198F-4F42-8B86-51419FBA82E3/18595/2006CensusQSCI.xls>

15 Tables on culture and identity from the 2001 Census, retrieved from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/226BAFE2-4B1C-4A84-A2E9-B6D2E3FDB4AA/0/CulturalTable16.xls>

The stories

However, using Census data remains a very rough guide to measuring Christianity in New Zealand. Statistics are very limiting when trying to gauge the everyday experiences of believers and for that reason we need to be careful that we interpret these data with great care. By the same token, we have to be careful that we don't take the 'public' faces of Christianity in New Zealand and make them representative of all New Zealand Christians. Christians, while confessing the same beliefs, nevertheless practice their faith in very different ways, depending on their context and their culture. The practice of Christianity in many Western churches is far removed from how it was practiced in the first century world amongst its first believers, who themselves practiced it within their particular contexts.

For that reason, any discussion about the Christian faith in New Zealand needs to do more than just sociological analysis; recognition of the Christian theology that underpins the work of the Christian church is also warranted. In particular, the Christian faith makes claims about its uniqueness so that while it may be practiced within a pluralist society, it would not extend to saying that other faith traditions or religious beliefs outside Christian theology are equally efficacious in spiritual or theological terms. Christian theology confesses particular things about the God who created the world, became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and continues to work in the world in redeeming and restoring it.

There is no doubt that New Zealand's increasingly diverse society is changing how Christianity in New Zealand is practiced. It is this diverse culture, with its bi-cultural foundations; its strong Pacific elements, particularly demonstrated in Pacific people's dedication to their church; and New Zealand's growing Asian population, which

makes Christianity in New Zealand unique. A journey New Zealand religious historian Peter Lineham takes down Chapel Road in Auckland conveys this well:

Flatbush has suddenly sprung up in the last five years as an overflow from the huge growth of new housing in the Howick area, primarily accommodating Asian people. The little chapel [that gave Chapel Road its name] still stands, now a joint Anglican-Methodist church half way down the road that takes its name from it, but at the other end is the exotic Botany Downs shopping centre, a Truman-Show like phenomenon, looking like it has dropped as a unit from the sky, a whole plastic town centre modelled on traditional towns. The central focus of Chapel Road is the enormous, almost completed Buddhist Temple. On the other side of the road is a new co-educational Catholic School, reflecting a huge boom in Catholic education and in baptisms into the Catholic Church by Asians concerned at the violent tone of New Zealand. Other sites down the road have been purchased by Baptist churches, and doubtless the fine facilities of the new secular high school are rented out to a Pentecostal Church group on Sundays. It is boom time in Flat Bush and religion is booming there as well, but not in the little chapel. There is a plan for Anglicans and Methodists to build a big new church, but they are struggling to find the money. Meanwhile the Presbyterians have made a separate move. Their old Pakuranga congregation, famous for its evangelical and conservative tradition, has rebuilt just around the corner from Chapel Street and have attracted a large congregation including many Asian people with a formula that has something of the Pentecostal flavour mixed in.¹⁶

¹⁶ Peter Lineham, 'Among the believers', Massey News, April 2005, retrieved from http://masseynews.massey.ac.nz/magazine/2005_Apr/stories/thoughts-1.html

It is then in these images, the stories of its diverse believers, and the support of Christian communities that we can see what the Christian faith in New Zealand is all about. Theologically, Christianity is open to all, whatever colour or creed. To be sure, Christian theology invites that certain confessions be made about a God who creates, redeems and gives life. But it does not demand that believers are white, male and speak English. Christianity is not, after all, a Western religion.

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Atheism and religious diversity

Ken Perrott

Efforts to develop understanding and cooperation in New Zealand are concentrating on ethnic and religious groups. The third of the population with non-religious beliefs are mostly ignored and this undermines true acceptance of diversity. We need to widen our horizons beyond the "Interfaith" approach if we are to address problems underlying suspicion and conflict between people of different beliefs.

Introduction

In the 2006 Census about 51% of New Zealanders described themselves as Christian, a total of 3.8% as Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim (the next three largest religions) and 32% declared no

religion. 17 This data doesn't accurately describe individual beliefs. For instance, some people declaring no religion may still believe in a god. Similarly there will be people declaring a religion who don't believe in a god. For many, if not most, people religion is an inherited tradition rather than describing a belief. However, the trends over time shown by census results do suggest beliefs are changing in New Zealand (Figure 1)¹⁸, as they are internationally¹⁹.

Any true depiction of New Zealand's diversity has to include a large group of non-religious people and recognise a large (even if a minority) group with non-religious beliefs. Otherwise we may be unaware of many problems and tensions arising from our diversity. We also risk supporting customs and policies that undermine true cooperation between those of different ethnicity and belief in New Zealand.

Yet, non-religious beliefs are often ignored. The National Statement on Religious Diversity²⁰ is an example. A working group comprised of only religious people managed its discussion and an "Interfaith" Forum formally confirmed it. Yes, the resulting document does extend some of the rights it grants religious people to those with other beliefs, but only as an "extra." There was no extension of rights to safety and security (clause 3), recognition and accommodation in education and work environments (clause 5), and to building and maintaining relationships with government (clause 8).

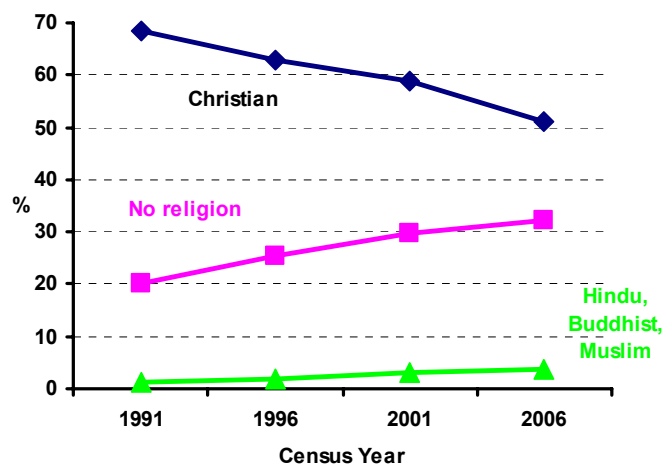


Figure 1: Proportion of New Zealanders declaring specific religions in last four census dates (Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim combined for ease of presentation)

The document would have been more convincing, and (more importantly) the discussion more valuable if it had dealt with diversity of belief, rather than the subset religious diversity. I believe the Human Rights Commission is wrong to give “Interfaith” groups such an exclusive role on diversity questions. As a secular organisation charged with duties to the nation as a whole the Commission should ensure involvement of representative of all beliefs.

Why exclude the non-religious?

I can't help feeling some people actively encourage blindness toward, and exclusion of, non-religious beliefs out of intolerance towards atheists and their ideas. Recently, there has been an increase in debate between atheists and theists, particularly in Europe and the North America. This is obvious in the publication of books arguing the case for atheism²¹ which have become best-sellers. They have encouraged many atheists to “come out of the cupboard” and argue for their beliefs, to defend them when attacked and to challenge those of many theists.

Religious commentators have responded. Such debate is natural and we should encourage it, even if it is sometimes intemperate. However, I often find resistance to atheist involvement in presentations on religious diversity. Sometimes there are even attempts to deny the legitimacy of an atheist position. Perhaps this helps explain the common exclusion of non-religious beliefs when considering ethnic and belief diversity.

This non-inclusive approach doesn't help us deal with problems arising from our diversity. After all, atheists, non-theists and theists alike can be victims, or perpetrators, of hate crimes and acts of terrorism. I believe that this exclusion could arise from a lack of understanding, or even a fear of atheist beliefs. Possibly this is common among religious people, and may even result from lack of contact with atheists. However, I think these attitudes are wrong. Looked at dispassionately we would find that people of religious and non-religious belief have a lot in common. Perhaps I can show this by describing some common atheist beliefs, ones that are familiar to me.

A personal perspective

The words atheism and theism are limited descriptions of beliefs as they only define one small aspect – non-belief or belief in a god (Fig. 2). Personal beliefs are of course much more extensive than that – they include this but are not defined by it. So, we cannot characterise or understand the beliefs of all “atheists” by that word alone. I can only give my own perspective, although I believe that many non-theists hold similar beliefs. My beliefs have a strong philosophical alignment with the scientific motivation and method. Emotionally and spiritually there is a powerful sense of awe at the beauty and complexity of the natural world and our process of understanding it. This stretches from subatomic particles to the cosmos itself. They include an appreciation also of the beauty of humanity's cultural and artistic achievements and a strong appreciation of personal and social values and morals. I discuss these further below.

The Nature of Belief

Our beliefs about our world vary widely – they can't all be right. Of course, science uses methods to ensure that its theories

²¹ See, for example, Daniel C. Dennett (2006): *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*; Sam Harris (2005): *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, and (2006): *Letter to a Christian Nation*; Richard Dawkins (2006): *The God Delusion*; Christopher Hitchens (2007): *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

correspond well to reality and so there is a high degree of agreement about scientific theories. But in practice most of us get by with less exact procedures. The scientific method involves interacting with the world to collect data and using these to build a hypothesis – a model describing the aspect under investigation. From this model we can develop experiments, or search for more data, which will test predictions resulting from the model (to be scientific the hypothesis must be testable). We then accept the model, reject it or change it to agree with the new data. The resulting scientific theory is dynamic, continually being changed or replaced as we collect new data. It is self-correcting. Some people might find this unsatisfactory; preferring to have the comfort of a belief which they feel is “absolutely true”. But while our scientific knowledge gives only an imperfect picture of reality, with time, with more data and experiment, this picture does become more accurate. So we can become so confident of a theory that we may express it as a “law” - for example the thermodynamic laws or evolution. The scientific method is a powerful way of understanding the world as shown by the progress in knowledge and technology it has driven.

We can contrast this with a method which involves starting with a reconceived (or “revealed”) model. We then try to interpret the world according to this model. Any “testing” of the model usually involves selection of data or evidence which accords with our preconceived ideas and ignoring, or reinterpreting, evidence which doesn’t accord. This is the way a drunk uses a lamppost – more for support than illumination (Fig. 3). These beliefs may be comforting to the holder as they appear absolute and permanent. However, they are hardly likely to agree with reality, being in essence insulated from reality.

It is tempting to identify the later method with religion and to contrast religious and

scientific approaches to knowledge but this would be unkind to most religious believers. In practice we usually acquire our personal beliefs by a mixture of these two methods. In fact, recent investigations suggest the human brain is more comfortable with the later method of interpreting the world. The human brain appears to use preconceived ideas, or maps, to interpret incoming information – we often see more with our brain than with our eyes.²² This may have evolved as an efficient (if sometimes misleading) way of dealing with our perceptions.

Scientists are human and are not immune to, unconsciously, selecting or interpreting data to support, rather than test, their favourite theory. Fortunately, the scientific method (including statistical analysis of data) and publication procedure help to overcome this and prevent promulgation of discredited theories, at least for long. Also, while many religions have “revealed truths”, in practice most modern adherents have adjusted their beliefs to accommodate scientific discovery and select which parts of historical dogma to keep or reject. However, the willingness to accept scientific knowledge over “revealed” knowledge varies. Attitudes towards evolution are a current example. The conflict between science and religion usually results from these two different ways of gaining knowledge, the scientific method and the “revealed” method.

Conflict between Science and Religion?

Some people claim science and religion deal with different spheres of knowledge; they each have their own role and therefore can coexist peacefully. And indeed they do, often

²² Michael Shermer gives a very convincing demonstration of the power of pre-conceived ideas in his video “Why People Believe Strange Things” (<http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/22>)

within the same person. Many scientists have a personal religion and many (perhaps most) religious people accept scientific knowledge. Sometimes this is because the religious beliefs are no longer those old ones which conflicted with scientific knowledge. But many people are able to hold concurrent beliefs which are not consistent. The physicist Stephen Weinberg mentions meeting an oil man who believed in creation of the earth 6000 years ago. At the same time he held scientific beliefs about the far greater age of the earth which enabled him to explore for and discover oil!²³ I think this is possible because of the emotional commitment that many people have to one or another belief, particularly a religious belief.

Intrusion into each others' spheres

However, any apparent peaceful coexistence cannot be permanent because there is no lasting agreement on spheres of influence. There are some obvious examples of the science/religion conflict today. On the one hand, some religious believers take their beliefs into the scientific sphere. They make powerful and well financed political challenges to reliable scientific knowledge such as evolution or the age of the earth. They try to replace scientifically obtained knowledge with a "revealed" knowledge, thereby undermining the scientific method itself. Around the world today some religious groups demand incorporation of unscientific creationist myths into national science education curricula.

On the other hand humanity does not restrict its investigations (Fig. 4). Today evolutionary psychologists and neuroscientists are investigating human values and morals, often claimed by religions as its sphere of influence. Neuroscientists are making

exciting new discoveries about human consciousness. One could say that humanity is trying to understand the human "soul". In its investigation of the fundamental nature of reality science is even asking the "why" questions – questions which are sometimes claimed to be in the exclusively religious domain.

I think it unavoidable that this challenge between science and religion will continue because of the nature of these two systems. Inherent in science is the concept of a reality existing independently of our consciousness. A reality capable of interaction and therefore with an internal logic which, in principle, can be perceived and understood. This means that we can study everything; the so-called "supernatural" is just that which we don't yet understand.

While religion continues to make claims about the cosmos, consciousness and human nature it puts these in the realm of science and inevitably exposes them to the possibilities of investigation. These claims cannot be "ring-fenced" or "walled-off". Similarly, investigation of the evolutionary, social and neurological basis of values, morality and ethics brings science into areas actively debated by all of society. This requires open-mindedness, humility and a respectful attitude towards less scientifically informed sections of society.

We just have to accept this ideological conflict and have the debate, because, of course the debate will continue. And we know that it is possible to do this politely and with respect. After all, this goes on all the time within science between adherents of different views and that is how we make progress. If this debate is honest it can only benefit both sides in developing their ideas as no real living knowledge is static. The continuing discussion between western scientists and Tibetan Buddhists, led by the

²³ See presentation at Beyond Belief 2006 Conference (<http://beyondbelief2006.org/>)

Dalai Lama²⁴, are an example of what this debate can achieve.

Treading on toes – religious sensibility

The sensitivity to criticism of belief is a key issue for prospects of cooperation between people of different ethnicity and belief. Rudeness undermines cooperation but lack of debate and criticism is a false cooperation and limits progress. I think that religious believers often take offence at any criticism of their ideas. As Richard Dawkins says, most people assume that “religious faith is especially vulnerable to offence and should be protected by an abnormally thick wall of respect”.²⁵ Religion receives a privilege not granted to other beliefs such as those of politics, sport, science or atheism. And this attitude towards criticism of religion is common among the non-religious as well as the religious.²⁶

Debate and criticism are essential ingredients to the search for knowledge which is more important than the offence some religious people may take from this knowledge. Charles Darwin held off publication of *On the Origin of Species* for many years because he knew it would offend religious people²⁷ and recent correspondence also reveals religious pressure on his publishers to prevent publication.²⁸ But, benefits from evolution theory have been far more important to humanity than the offence taken by some religious people.

²⁴ See, for example Daniel Goleman (2004): *Destructive Emotions: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama*.

²⁵ Richard Dawkins (2006): *The God Delusion*

²⁶ See for example an atheist review of *The God Delusion* (NZ Listener, Vol 207 No 3485, 2007: No Doubt by David Larsen)

²⁷ Charles Darwin (1859): *On the origin of Species*, Introduction.

²⁸ Times Online, April 25, 2007 (http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article1701409.ece)

Values, morals, spirituality

Some theists claim their god, and their holy scriptures, as the source of all human values. This argument is often used to justify claiming New Zealand as a Christian country.²⁹ As a non-theist I find these claims insulting because they imply that personal values require a belief in a god; that atheists cannot be moral. Another common claim is that non-theists are somehow (unconsciously) adopting theist beliefs to produce their values. Christopher Hitchens points out that this attitude is an insult to humanity in his comment on the Old Testament Ten Commandments: “.. however little one thinks of the Jewish tradition, it is surely insulting to the people of Moses to imagine that they had come this far under the impression that murder, adultery, theft, and perjury were permissible.”³⁰

Religions and religious teachings have served as a way of proclaiming and teaching values and morals. They have also done this with ideas of social arrangements, laws and myths of origin. This can explain why religion has been such a part of human social evolution. The stories, mythology, commandments and traditions of religious scriptures have helped to pass on and to gain compliance with these ideas when the advantages of modern education and mass communication were not available. However, religions were not the source of these ideas. They resulted from social and historical needs, from human interaction and from human evolution. The work of evolutionary psychologists is helping explain the real source of our values and morals.

So our values and morals have natural, rather than supernatural, origins and we proclaim and teach them using social and secular ways as well as religions. They are common to people of all beliefs. This viewpoint is important because it provides grounds for cooperation, despite our diversity. It also excludes any ground some religious believers have for thinking that cooperation with non-theists is impossible.

²⁹ See “Your Views” New Zealand Herald: (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/feature/story.cfm?c_id=1501154&objectid=10443080).

³⁰ ; Christopher Hitchens (2007): *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

There is no basis for theists to fear cooperation with non-theists.

“Interfaith” limits?

There are several “Interfaith” organisations in New Zealand, and groups in other countries use the same term. As these have been given a central role in consideration of New Zealand’s diversity I believe it is important to evaluate the fitness of these organisations for this role.

These are usually umbrella groups containing representatives of organised religions. But why should groups intending to promote cooperation between peoples of widely different beliefs limit themselves in this way? I guess they use the word “faith” as a synonym for “religion” which usually includes belief in a god. But this belief is not necessary for Buddhists, who the “Interfaith” groups include. So we may ask, if these groups already contain such a wide diversity of belief why exclude non-religious organisations? And how do we define religious or “faith” organisations, anyway?

So again we have this problem of ignoring a large section of the community. Why is religious plurality limited to plurality of religious organisations, or a plurality of ways in believing in a god? Too often diversity of belief is similarly restricted. Such limits are a major hindrance to developing true cooperation between people’s of different ethnicity and beliefs. Surely religious diversity also includes those beliefs which are not religious. We could take a lesson from Norway where the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities, equivalent to our “Interfaith” groups, includes Humanists in its organisation. Similarly, the United Nations Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief includes people of different beliefs, including the President Matt Cherry who is a Humanist. This committee oversees

international treaties on freedom of religion and belief. Such an inclusive approach to religious diversity would be more consistent with our own human rights legislation which recognises international treaties and is therefore careful not to raise religious belief over non-religious belief. In this sense the National Statement on Religious Diversity is not as inclusive as existing New Zealand legislation! If we aim to build understanding, tolerance and respect for each other’s beliefs we have to move away from this current arbitrary and exclusive idea of belief and cooperation.

Common values – common action

Cooperation requires respect and tolerance. However, respect and tolerance shouldn’t violate the rights of others or prevent humanity’s search for understanding and knowledge. In the following I quote dictionary definitions. We need tolerance in the sense of “acceptance of the differing views of other people in religious or political matters, and fairness towards the people who hold these different views.” But not tolerance in the sense of “putting up with something or somebody irritating or otherwise unpleasant” - this violates the rights of others. Similarly, respect in the sense of “consideration or thoughtfulness” to people is acceptable but not in the sense of “admiring or being deferential” to something we personally find absurd, or of preventing or limiting healthy debate. With these understandings, “religious diversity” includes people with non-religious beliefs and freedom of religion must include freedom from religion. Non-religious people have the right to be free from interference by religious people and organisations, freedom from proselytising, and freedom from imposition of values, morality and practice. I don’t think religious people should see this as in any way violating their rights. If anything, it helps

preserve the sacredness of their beliefs – imposition on others degrades a belief.

Fortunately, impositions of religious customs and traditions in New Zealand have declined with the increasing secularisation of society. There are still some residues such as the national anthem assuming a belief in a god, and Christian prayers in Parliament and some local body council. Similarly, Christians sometimes impose prayers inappropriately in work and other social situations. I believe this is insulting to people of different beliefs. Of course, removal of these residues is a continuing process, although the recent debates over parliamentary prayers and the concept of a Christian nation, and the current campaign to legislate this,³¹

³¹ See for example the Destiny Church's Christian Nation website (<http://www.christiannation.org.nz/>)

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suggest that it is not irreversible. I think we should also challenge incorporation of Christian prayers into ceremonies based on Maori customs, such as powhiri and karakia, which we use today in secular situations. These can offend New Zealanders who otherwise accept these ceremonies. Yet objection is difficult because this can be taken as cultural intolerance rather than a request for respect of other beliefs.

Conclusion

As a nation our values morals and ethics precede any religious belief (theist, non-theist or atheist). This gives us common interests and enables us to act together to overcome any problems arising from our cultural and religious diversity.

Auckland City Interfaith Project - A case study. A Secular Institution Engages with Faith

Abigael Vogt

How does a city council engage with faith and interfaith groups? How does it build relationships with these groups and support relationships between faith communities?

The term interfaith or interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (ie. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level [1].

Auckland City Council's Interfaith project focuses on religious and spiritual diversity within the community. It works to strengthen existing relationships between communities and to foster new ones. Within the project the council's role is to support, promote and facilitate these relationships. Given its budget and the political impetus behind it, the project is fairly high profile for Auckland City Council's Community Development Group. A number of factors contributed to the establishment of this project. Whilst Community Development practitioners within Council recognised there was an opportunity to work with different faith groups in an 'Interfaith' capacity, Auckland City Councillors were working to engage with different faith communities in the region, recognising their unique role in the communities of which they are a part and their contribution within the city as a whole. This project followed an international trend of similar initiatives such as the Greenwich Multi Faith Forum and the Interfaith Network in the City of Greater Dandenong [2].

Auckland, both the city and the region, is becoming more diverse with greater religious

pluralism. According to recent census figures 'over one-third (37.0 percent) of people who live in the Auckland Region were born overseas... [And] it is the most ethnically diverse region in New Zealand.' This backdrop of diversity also reflects growing religious diversity. As the number of people affiliated with Christianity continues to drop there has been an increase in people affiliating with non-Christian religions and of people indicating that they have no religion. Christianity is changing as well, the 2006 census figures indicate that, 'the number of people affiliating with Orthodox Christian religions increased by 37.8 percent, and affiliation with Evangelical, Born Again and Fundamentalist religions increased by 25.6 percent, affiliation with Pentecostal religions increased by 17.8 percent [3]. The 2001 census showed massive percentage increases in the Hindu (56%), Buddhist

(48%) and Muslim (74%) faiths since 1996 [4].

In October 2005, Auckland City Council's Partnerships Committee which focuses on 'the council building strong partnerships with the community to celebrate and harness the rich diversity and vitality of the city' accepted the Interfaith Project report [5]. The report focussed on key themes: Interfaith groups, community development, strong, healthy and safe communities, belonging

To quote directly from the report:

'Harmonious relationship between communities of different faiths is intrinsic to ensuring strong, healthy and safe communities in our city. Auckland City, takes pride in its safety and to maintain this culture it is critical to respond to the growing multi-faith profile of our city. There has been a focus on multi-faith relationships internationally and there is a growing recognition that government, and especially local government, has to have a stronger commitment to these relationships.'

The faith communities also are realising the growing importance of ensuring that members of different faiths are educated and aware of each other's traditions, have mutual respect and are able to coexist harmoniously. This also helps establish the personal links critical to ensure positive and rapid response if occasional religion tension occurs. Interfaith groups are an emerging sector that needs to be supported through local government.'

From the beginning the project had the support of His Worship the Mayor, Dick Hubbard and strong leadership from the Interfaith Project Working Group on the Partnerships Committee. The project is delivered by the Interfaith Project Team within Community Development. This team works alongside Deputy Mayor Bruce Hucker, and Crs Cathy Casey and John

Hinchcliff from the Partnerships Committee Interfaith Working Group.

The council's role is to support, promote and facilitate. The project objectives are;

- To support the safety culture of Auckland city by building a community that has respect and understanding of our religious diversity.
- To establish dialogue and partnership with different organisations both nationally and locally those are working to promote inter-faith respect and understanding.
- To facilitate spaces and opportunities to bring people of different faiths together to learn more about each other
- To raise community awareness and understanding around different faiths that co-exists in the city

Building the project

Initially the most important element of the project was to develop relationships within and external to Council. Community Development staff met with Auckland City councillors, faith leaders and the Auckland Interfaith Council. We attended meetings held by other groups including the Council of Christians and Muslims. Councillor Hinchcliff and staff also attended the National Interfaith Forum in Wellington in February 2006.

Auckland City Council had a number of existing relationships with faith communities. Community Development, for example, was engaged through community networks and funding relationships. Our team began building a database of contacts.

His Worship, the Mayor and Auckland City Councillors had hosted a breakfast for faith leaders in 2005 and in May 2006 our Partnerships Committee hosted an Interfaith Planning Workshop.

The workshop's purpose was to gauge interest in the project and gather community perspectives. Faith leaders and members of the Auckland Interfaith Council were invited. The Mayor, Dick Hubbard opened the gathering.

The workshop provided an opportunity for relationship building and strengthening, to explore opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Auckland City was also able to be clear about its commitment to supporting Interfaith activities in the Auckland region. New ideas were examined and fed into the project with a diverse mix of faiths including Bahai, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist representatives amongst the 30 people who attended. A Working Group of faith representatives formed at the meeting that continues to work with Auckland City.

This was followed in June 2006 by the Interactive Community Forum on Interfaith Initiatives in Auckland.

The community forum was structured with speakers who provided an international, national and local perspective before breaking into small groups for discussion. We were able to draw on the experiences of Bishop Richard Randerson, a member of the group of faith leaders who accompanied Prime Minister Helen Clark to the Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue in Cebu, Rohan Jaduram from the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in his role as facilitator of Te Korowai Whakapono – The National Interfaith Network, and Suzanne Mahon, Secretary of the Auckland Interfaith Council as our resource people.

On the invitation participants were asked the question: Do you participate in activities with different faith groups? And were offered the opportunity to:

- Hear about regional, national and international interfaith initiatives and approaches.
- Focus on how we can work together in terms of common approaches to interfaith activity.
- Take the opportunity to engage in dialogue with interactive small group work.

Approximately 70 people attended. The small group work provided an opportunity for those who are working in their local environments with people of other faiths to share and learn about each other's work and to discuss their visions for interfaith activity.

The strength of interfaith activity already within the Auckland area was highlighted. Examples of this include the positive relationship between neighbours the Ponsonby Mosque and St Colomba Centre, the active Councils of Christians and Muslims, and Christians and Jews who also combine for an annual meeting and the variety of community education programmes such as the 'Understanding Islam', workshop run by Sister Catherine Jones for Christians to understand and appreciate Islam. Agencies like Migrant Support Services work with a cross-cultural group of migrants visiting each others' places of worship.

Feedback on the community forum was very positive. The next one will be held in June 2007.

These two events served as a strong base for us to work from and helped us to build our own relationships. Auckland City

Councillors were able to engage as participants. Facilitating these Interfaith events was a pleasant experience given the levels of respect and goodwill. People spoke of the wish to not simply be 'tolerated like a bad rash' but be respected. This sentiment is articulated time and again at Interfaith gatherings.

Working locally

The Auckland City Council Interfaith working group established at the May workshop continues to meet. From this group came the idea of an Interfaith e-list or network to continue the sharing of information and to highlight different events happening in the Auckland region. To avoid duplication, this was discussed with the Human Rights Commission and the Auckland Interfaith Council who affirmed there was a need and the e-list was developed.

The working group acts as a sounding board for Auckland City Council and raises issues. Amongst the many topics members have discussed, the proposed 'Draft National Curriculum' [6] and the 'Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity' [7] sat alongside discussions around building dialogue and interaction locally.

In an effort to keep building knowledge, awareness of others' traditions and supporting spaces for dialogue, the project team continues to work closely with the Auckland Interfaith Council. Auckland City Council support their 'Lifecycles' series of panel discussions with invited speakers from different faith communities to discuss the rituals and traditions of their faiths regarding different milestones within life. The series started with 'Death', moved onto 'Birth', and will be followed with a discussion on 'Youth - Rites of passage and coming of age ceremonies'.

We also supported the Auckland Interfaith Council on September 21 2006, the International Day of Peace, when they

organised a large and successful concert to celebrate the day. Our mayor attended and Auckland City Council provided the venue.

The strength of this project is being able to support and respond to local initiatives. In December 2006 I was invited by the Glen Innes Health Project facilitator to work with members of the community in Glen Innes where I facilitated a workshop at the Glen Innes library. It was an opportunity to discuss interfaith work at a grassroots community level.

In Mt Albert, for example, the Auckland City Council Urban Facilitator has strong relationships with that community. Ministers in the area want to engage in Interfaith work and in Community Development we now have the links to support locally focussed activity.

Working Nationally

Although Auckland City works in the Auckland region this project has been of interest nationally. I presented on the project in August 2006 at the Interfaith Strand of the Diversity Forum alongside the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), the Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Auckland City is working with Professor Paul Morris of Victoria University to host the Interfaith Strand of the forum to be held in Auckland in August this year.

Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres asked Auckland City to host the Auckland Regional Consultation Hui in November 2006 on what was then the Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity. We facilitated some very active engagement from groups who had previously not responded to our invitations such as Destiny Church and the Association of Rationalists and Humanists.

January 2007 marked a year since the project team came together. Auckland City

Council participated in the National Interfaith Forum in February and attended the women's forum. It was dynamic, energised and highly engaged, relying on the strength of storytelling and women sharing their different experiences.

Current Plans

At the forum, plans for visiting Canadian, Dr Lois Wilson's nationwide speaking tour, 'When Freedom's Collide' were discussed. As part of Lois' tour Auckland City Council, in particular, is supporting through a panel discussion at the Anglican Cathedral entitled 'Does Religious Diversity Undermine Christian Faith?'

The topic came about particularly from conversations and questions raised around the "Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity" and provides a space for these conversations to continue. A broad range of speakers from across the Christian spectrum will be speaking.

Internationally Auckland will be the city in which Helen Clark hosts the High Level Symposium on the Alliance of Civilizations Report on 24 May 2007. The Prime Minister is then hosting the Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue in Waitangi. We would value the opportunity to observe these processes as they inform our own as we continue to make the connections between local, national, and international work.

Linkages nationally and internationally

One of the foci of the Interactive Community Forum held in June 2006 was to link international and national developments with the local and personal efforts of people and groups in the community. Much is happening at both national and international levels. Prime Minister Helen Clark and the current government are committed to the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue

process. These conversations and their outcomes inform our project just as the government's political leadership strengthens it. Working at local government level provides a unique opportunity to straddle and link national and international efforts locally and regionally.

As part of the Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue the government was part of developing the Declaration of the Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation [8]. Our project fits comfortably within the following excerpts of the Declaration.

'We believe that interfaith dialogue builds understanding, goodwill, and relationships across religions and among peoples,

We recognize that believers, communities, and institutions exercise a distinct and vital role in the promotion of peace, development, and human dignity in this region,

- We will hold local, national, and regional forums to build knowledge, respect, and understanding and to provide opportunities for dialogue, thereby deepening relationships and friendships among faith communities and enhancing capacity for interfaith cooperation.

-We will promote interfaith dialogue at the grassroots level to serve as an instrument to promote sustainable livelihoods and community cohesiveness or unity, thus, becoming the basis of civil society to promote the democratization process.'

Nationally, the project is part of the Human Rights Commission's Diversity Action Programme (DAP). Whilst many of the programme's 'Ten Steps to Strengthen Our Cultural Diversity' tie in with the project, Point 10 is most relevant [9].

'Information and education alone is not enough. People need to meet face to face, experience diversity and discuss issues with people who differ. Communities need to

reach out to each other. Dialogue and exchange between people of different views, cultures and faiths is the glue that will hold us together and enrich us all.'

The DAP also refers to our responsibility as local government,

'Territorial local authorities (regional, city and district councils) are required to have community plans, and to provide for economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. They form a crucial link between central government and local communities and have a key role in fostering safe, connected and diverse communities. A particular focus is to develop refugee and migrant settlement plans, provide opportunities and support to celebrate diversity, connect with heritage and promote dialogue.'

The nature of the project

The importance to this project of political will cannot be underestimated. The project has high-level support and the Deputy Mayor Bruce Hucker regularly attends working group meetings.

Working within a community development context essentially means a 'bottom up' approach. We work alongside politicians who often work at a more 'macro' level. There can be a myriad of styles at work, goals and visions to achieve.

The work is extraordinarily multi-layered. It is always a challenge to stay abreast of what is happening at a community level. At what level do we work? With-in the space of an hour communication can be taking place with the Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres, on national strategic level, with the Auckland Interfaith Council on a regional level and with Jenny Harrison an Anglican Minister in Onehunga.

Given the project is so focussed on relationship building and the strengthening

of relationships, linking with other diversity workers has been very positive. Amongst these relationships, working closely with the Human Rights Commission has provided strong linkages, support and publicity for the project. Additionally, taking part in the Aotearoa Ethnic Network offers access to information, learning, dialogue and the strengths of that community.

Our relationships with those working at the grassroots level are the nourishment for the work we do within a local government context. These offer the opportunity to be able to address the most basic building blocks of the conversation, to work out how to build relationships through coffee groups or shared dinners. We are consistently working to challenge, remove and lessen the sense of 'otherness' or at the very least to provide an opportunity to get to know 'other'.

Within Auckland there is a committed group of people who actively engage with these issues and participate in many public meetings and activities. We frequently need to question how we reach others and if there are individuals and communities out there doing the work (as of course there are) that we do not know about. Working within local government always runs the risk of us talking to who we want to talk to for its ease and convenience.

Of the dedicated group we do work with, we need to ask ourselves if we are supporting them appropriately so they have the time, energy and capacity to keep doing the work they do within their own communities, the 'Interfaith community' and in their wider relationships. Do they have the ability to engage with the council as much as the council may want?

'Preaching to the converted' is a term that is bandied around our office. One of our challenges is trying to engage with those who do not want to be engaged, ensuring they can be part of the conversation if they wish to be. Some may consider that there is

not a conversation to be had, or is the conversation the right one and do people know about it?

I recently attended a community development practitioner's forum. As practitioners, forum participants were challenged to act as power brokers, and use their roles to redistribute power. How does this sit with this project?

For me, coming from a background in peace work, this project allows me to be part of a peace building process. I also bring experience as a Treaty educator and peace activist to this work. Working with a dominant culture, in this instance a nation with a dominant religion, raises challenges as to how space is created and how change happens to allow for expansion of diversity, understanding and acceptance. If you are in a position of power and privilege what makes you question that position? It is also challenging for me to ask these questions knowing I sit in a position of power within local government structures. Given the complexity and multi-layered nature of this work, these reflections raise as many questions as they answer. We continue to wrestle with them in the everyday work we do in partnership with others, working towards establishing dialogue, promoting Interfaith respect and understanding of our religious diversity.

In conclusion the Interfaith Project continues to explore ways to achieve its objectives. The conversations around interfaith can be both enlightening and challenging. As the face of Auckland city changes so does the range of faith communities and the importance of the development of a cohesive society that understands, acknowledges and respects its diverse parts. This Auckland City Interfaith Project recognises the work of others, working alongside them to strengthen and support interfaith dialogue, respect and understanding. We recognise the work of the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA), Ministry of Social

Development (MSD), New Zealand Police, Interfaith Councils and the myriad of faith groups, organisations, communities and individuals who are involved in Interfaith and ongoing relationships.

Resources for this article

- [1] Wikipedia Interfaith Definition
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/InterfaithAuckland_City's
- [2] Web based resources regarding interfaith projects overseas <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g4s54.html> and www.greaterdandenong.com
- [3] Quick Stats About Culture and Identity, 2006 Census, Statistics New Zealand
<http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-data/quickstats-about-culture-identity/quickstats-about-culture-and-identity.htm?page=para012Master>
- [4] Census Snapshot Cultural Diversity, 2001 Census figures, Statistics New Zealand
<http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/Articles/census-snpst-cult-diversity-Mar02.htm>
- [5] Auckland City Partnerships Committee, Interfaith Project Report
http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/members/committeemeetings/partnerships/20051114_1330/Part%2D141105%2Dopn%2Dagd%2D%2307.pdf
- [6] Draft New Zealand Curriculum
<http://www.tki.org.nz/r/nzcurriculum/>
- [7] National Statement on Religious Diversity
<http://www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/introduction/tengirathenzdiversityactionprogramme/nationalstatementonreligiousdiversity.php>
- [8] Declaration of the Cebu Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity 14-16 March 2006
http://opapp.gov.ph/downloads/Regional_Interfaith_Dialogue_Declaration_Cebu_2006.pdf
- [9] Diversity Action Programme
<http://www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/introduction/tengirath>

enzdiversityactionprogramme/tenstepstostrengthenulturaldiversity261.php

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The Korean exorcist meets the New Zealand Justice system

Heather Kavan

The trial and appeal of Korean exorcist Luke Lee began with a dead body and ended with a victory for religious freedom.

The arrest of Korean immigrant Luke Lee in 2001 was headline-generating material. Pastor Lee, founder of the Mt. Roskill Lord of All's church was charged with manslaughter when a woman, Joanna Lee, died during an exorcism.¹ As the trial unfolded a bizarre tale of daily exorcisms emerged, generating media analogies with the bile-spewing, head rotating rituals in *The Exorcist*.

If ever there was a case that called into question religious freedom, this was it. While the judge, Justice Paterson, announced that Lee was not on trial for his religious beliefs, outside of the court room Lee's repeated announcements that the deceased would rise from the dead compelled public comment and often amusement. Moreover, Joanna's consent to a demeaning and - as it turned out - lethal ritual challenged the Courts to decide whether they would respect her religious choice.

As a researcher of extreme religion and altered states I was fascinated by Lee's case - I had seen such behaviour and activities many times before but never with such tragic consequences. I was keen to interview him. A series of bureaucratic obstructions and University ethical considerations delayed me from getting in touch with Lee and it was not until 2005 that I finally made contact with him via email. At this stage Lee

had ceased to believe that Joanna would rise from the dead, but continued to maintain his innocence.

This is his story followed by a discussion of the religious issues.

Lee and his church

At thirty-one years of age Lee had a vivid conversion experience, after being involved in some shady business dealings in South Korea. Leaving his wife and children in Korea, Lee came to New Zealand in 1994 to study at the Assemblies of God Advanced Ministry of Training Centre in Auckland. Two years later, he re-married, this time to Korean New Zealander Joyce Lee to whom he later had a daughter Hannah. After completing his training he preached in South London for six months, and then returned to Korea where he faced conviction for fraud and was imprisoned for a year for defaulting on his compulsory national military service. After his release Lee believed that God called him back to New Zealand, and he moved to Mt. Roskill, traditionally known as Auckland's Bible Belt. He became an Assemblies of God pastor and founded the Lord of All's church, attracting almost twenty followers, mostly Korean.

Korean Pentecostal Christianity is much more exuberant than its Western equivalent,

usually incorporating shamanistic rituals of freeing people from evil spirits accompanied by thunderous sounding prayer.² For Lee and his followers, exorcism was a normal activity – the earth is swarming with demons. While the practice of exorcism is in keeping with Assemblies of God culture, Lee's exorcisms were relatively plentiful and vocal. His all night prayer-chanting sessions, which took place in his home, involved participants making grunting noises, screaming at the top of their lungs, playing horns, trumpets and drums, and blowing whistles to keep demons away.

In October 2000, 37-year old Joanna Lee (no relation to Lee) joined the church. Not much is known about Joanna. Her parents were divorced and Police have been unable to contact friends and family. She had met Lee when he was in Korea in 1999 and was so impressed by his devotion that she came to New Zealand to get healing from him. A former member described Joanna as a quiet introvert who was Lee's best follower, always striving to fulfil his requirements.³ On the night of 9 December both Joanna and Lee had been fasting for several days when, according to Lee, Joanna lay on the floor of his lounge, told him how much she loved Jesus, and complained that demons were killing her. Lee suggested a 'prayer session' and she agreed.

The exorcism

Having been with the group for six weeks and having previously been exorcised by Lee, Joanna would have known the physical force Lee's exorcisms involved. As Lee believed that demons usually live in a person's stomach, he would press on the person's stomach, chest and throat to drive the spirits up through the person's mouth. Lee divined that Joanna had around twenty demons and did not anticipate a quick deliverance.

Joanna was a small woman. While six other members beat drums, blew horns, and chanted incantations building up to loud roars and screams, Lee sat on Joanna's stomach and chest and bounced up and down. Over five hours later, Lee believed that there was one particularly belligerent demon left that had lodged in Joanna's throat and was going to kill her. He held her neck hard for several minutes. Joanna struggled to pull Lee's hand from her neck and cried "no, no", but fellow members thought this was the demon speaking and held her arms and legs down. Finally, according to Lee, the demon told him that he was leaving. A few seconds later, Joanna closed her eyes and did not move again. Blood was coming out of her mouth where she had bitten her tongue.

According to Lee, God then spoke to him and told him that Joanna was still alive. So he went to bed and got up on Sunday to prepare for his church service as normal. But Joanna never woke up and for five days members prayed intensely for her to come back to life. Lee quoted from the Bible and members sang and danced, blew into her mouth, and Lee shouted at Joanna to rise up.

Around the fifth day members thought they saw Joanna's finger moving and observed that her blackened skin appeared to be regenerating (in fact this was the decaying skin peeling off to reveal a pink layer underneath). They believed that a great and wondrous miracle was occurring in front of their eyes. Lee told followers to get a video camera to film Joanna's resurrection, which would be international news. One of the members also invited Edwin Muir (a neighbour who sometimes joined them) to visit, and Lee asked him to be the group's media representative. Instead Edwin called the police. Lee was arrested and charged with manslaughter.

When the arrest became national news I rang the Criminal Investigation Branch of the

Police and the District and High Courts to find the name of Lee's lawyer. Nobody could supply a name. I found out later that although Lee initially had a lawyer, Lorraine Smith, he believed that God told him that he didn't need her, so he dropped her from his case. At this stage, Lee was on remand at Mt. Eden prison where he reportedly continued his exorcist activities.

The trial

The trial began on 26 November 2001 before a jury of five men and seven women at the High Court in Auckland. The crown alleged that Lee killed Joanna by strangling her. An interpreter was present for Lee. Lee mounted no defence as he believed that Joanna would rise from the dead. He questioned no witnesses and called no witnesses, and did not testify on his own behalf. The only time he took part in his trial was to deliver a closing message.

Some of the crown's evidence was damning. Joanna had three fractures to her ribs and breast bone. Followers testified of painful exorcisms that interfered with their ability to breathe. However, one of the Crown's star witnesses, Sun Kyoung Park, opened up a possible defence by saying that Joanna had willingly consented to the exorcism.

The pathologist, Dr Simon Staples, also gave evidence that gave room for a plausible defence. Staples testified that he could not determine the cause of death because Joanna's body was so decomposed, but thought that the cause could have been pressure to a small area of nerve tissue next to the carotid artery, which blocked the blood to the brain or nerves, rather than blockage of airways as would happen by strangulation. This suggested that Joanna's death was relatively quick and opened up the possibility that Lee, or any non-medically trained person, might not have realised that

the pressure that caused the death was dangerous.

Of particular interest, from the perspective of religion, was that the Crown called another Pentecostal exorcist, Bill Subritzky, to suggest that Lee's actions went beyond those normally associated with deliverance. Subritzky, who claims to have done thousands of exorcisms, said that it was only necessary to lightly press hands on a possessed person (unless the person was, for example, about to jump through a plate glass window). To a jury unfamiliar with Pentecostal beliefs and practices this evidence may have been convincing but to those who have observed the overtly aggressive nature of their exorcisms, there was room for questioning. Former Vatican professor and exorcist Malachi Martin cites physical strength as one of the most important prerequisites for being an exorcist⁴ – a surprising requirement for lightly touching people on the head.

When the Crown Prosecutor Aaron Perkins gave his summing up, Lee wept openly. Rejected by his colleagues and followers and publicly ridiculed as a cowboy exorcist, he waited for a miracle to vindicate him. The only person who supported him was his wife Joyce who had been in the bedroom with her daughter during the fatal exorcism. She too believed that Joanna would be resurrected.

On the last day of the trial, Lee, Bible in hand, pleaded with Justice Paterson and the jury to give him more time for Joanna to come back to life, prophesying the resurrection would occur before the following Monday. It was now almost a year since Joanna's death, her body had been cremated, and two earlier dates Lee had predicted for her resurrection had passed uneventfully. Nevertheless, Lee likened himself to the great Biblical prophets whose faith had been tested. The devil, he said, killed Joanna. This seemed only to confirm Perkins' statements to the jury that Lee had lost touch with reality.

In his summing up Justice Paterson, while acknowledging Lee's right to practise exorcism under section 15 of the Bill of Rights Act, gave two directions to the jury that made a guilty verdict almost inevitable. Ordinarily in an assault the Crown has to prove that the accused's actions were objectively dangerous, but Justice Paterson removed this requirement and advised the jury that the amount of force Lee used was irrelevant. More importantly in relation to religious freedom, on the basis of a United Kingdom 'public interest' policy, he also removed the requirement that the Crown prove that Joanna did not consent to the exorcism.⁵ Therefore even if Lee had only applied force that was unlikely to cause death and Joanna had consented to this force, Lee was still guilty.

The jury took four hours to find Lee guilty of manslaughter. He was sentenced to six years in prison – a sentence intended to deter both him and other exorcists.

The appeal

In prison Lee realised that he had made a mistake by not launching a defence, and in 2004 he began efforts to appeal his case. He recalled that he had been in shock at the time of Joanna's death and had read passages of the Bible that led him to believe that he should be passive. Also, other Christians who used the same practices did not want to give evidence.

The appeal, led by Nicolette Levy, raised an important issue for freedom of religion in that it highlighted the issue of whether Joanna's right to consent to the exorcism should be respected. Levy compares a person agreeing to being exorcised with a person consenting to tattooing, body piercing or cosmetic surgery: they consent to risks because they hope for a successful outcome.

The aim of liposuction is a flatter stomach; the aim of exorcism is a clean soul....[We] can consent to the former which causes serious injury and carries serious risks, so why should exorcisees be denied the same right?⁶

Levy also observes that the law accepts a person's right to refuse medical treatment for religious reasons – even when this makes their death likely or certain – and contrasts this with the Court's non-recognition of the right to consent to exorcism.

The Court of Appeal agreed and stated that the jury should have been directed to consider whether Joanna had consented, and the fact that Lee did not have a lawyer placed a greater responsibility on the judge when guiding the jury. On 7 April 2005 Lee's conviction was overturned and a retrial ordered. By this stage, however, most of the witnesses had returned to Korea. Lee was in Korea too – during the appeal he finished his sentence and was deported.

Discussion

In my communications with Lee he did not come across as a brutal man. He was humble, respectful, and willing to help, repeatedly thanking me and praising God. However, he still perceived himself as a holy hero, asking me not to boast about him to anyone.

Lee seems to fit the profile of a person prone to hyperaroused religious altered states of empowerment in which the individual becomes vehement and manic and appears to be delusional (although they are not delusional by psychiatric standards because their beliefs are shared by their subculture). This state is usually brought on by excessive spiritual activities. Typically, the person is a male, under fifty, who has experienced a crisis-based conversion, is absorbed by his

own spirituality, and tends to dominate others.

My own view of Pentecostal exorcism – and I have witnessed at least twenty exorcisms during my research on the Pentecostal movement – concurs with investigative researcher Joe Nickell's observation that possession is often indistinguishable from bad acting.⁷ Even so, such acting out can be therapeutic, giving both the exorcist and the possessed an opportunity to release negative – especially aggressive – impulses they would otherwise be unable to express. Were Lee's exorcisms as aberrant as the Prosecution implied? I don't think so. However, Pentecostal exorcists are more extreme than those in other denominations. For example, Catholic exorcist Father John Rea doesn't see exorcism as a big deal; usually he just tells the 'demon' to go.⁸

An aspect of the case that New Zealanders struggled to understand was the submission of Joanna, on whose possible consent the appeal centred. Joanna's submission reflects deeply patriarchal Korean Christianity. Also, Joanna was devoted to Lee and may have perceived the ritual as a way of intensifying her relationship with him. The gender dynamic of her exorcism is typical. Exorcists are almost always male and the possessed are usually female. (If the afflicted person is a male the exorcist usually divines that a female transmitted the demon, e.g. that his mother spoke to a fortune teller during pregnancy.)

It is interesting to contrast Lee's deterrent sentence with the lenient treatment other self appointed exorcists have received in New Zealand courts. In 1998 Paul James Martin was charged with causing grievous bodily harm during an exorcism. Although Martin is Pakeha, he claimed to be possessed by a Maori curse, Makutu. Despite psychiatric evidence that Martin was capable of more psychotic acts, the judge

unreservedly accepted testimony on Makutu and gave Martin a two-year suspended sentence. Another case involved Janice and Lindsay Gibson of the Apostolic church, who in 1995 were charged with killing their son during an exorcism. They were found not guilty by reason of folie a deux, a psychotic syndrome where two people in close proximity share the same delusions.

In the end at least one of Lee's prophecies came true: that he would be acquitted eventually. I don't know how Lee responded to having his conviction overturned as I lost track of him at this stage. However, I like to imagine that Joanna – who died in sacrificial style beneath a wooden cross decorated with a crown of thorns – would have some consolation in knowing that by her death she advanced the law on religious freedom.

Epilogue

The Court has issued a Bench Warrant for Lee's arrest in the event of his return to New Zealand, at which time a retrial may take place.

Footnotes

1. I refer to Luke Lee and Joanna Lee by their English names as these are the names by which New Zealanders know them. Their Korean names are Yong Bum Lee and Keum Ok Lee respectively. The church's name 'Lord of All's' is correct, although in some documents it is changed to "Lord of All". I am indebted to Lee's appeal lawyer, Nicolette Levy, who generously gave me legal information that helped me to understand the case.
2. Cox, H. (1995). *Fire from heaven: The rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

3. Stickley, T. (2001, Nov. 28). Exorcism victim fought – witness. New Zealand Herald.
4. Martin, M. (1992). Hostage to the devil: The possession and exorcism of five contemporary Americans. San Francisco: Harper.
5. Trial ruling of Paterson J. on issue of consent. (2001, Dec. 3). In the High Court of New Zealand Auckland Registry. T10974. The Queen v Yong Bum Lee.
6. Submissions of counsel for appellant on substantive appeal. (2005, March 15). In the Court of Appeal of New Zealand. CA 437/04. Between Yong Bum Lee (appellant) and the Queen (respondent).
7. Nickell, J. (2001). Exorcism! Driving out the nonsense. Skeptical Inquirer, 25(1), 20-24.
8. Samson, A. (1999, Feb. 4). Exorcist priest drives out demons eye to eye. The Dominion, p. 1.

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A Queer kind of faith: Religion and spirituality in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual New Zealanders

Mark Henrickson

Lavender Islands is the first strengths-based study of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons in New Zealand.

In total, 2,269 LGB participants responded to questions in many domains, including spirituality and religion. Women respondents expressed more belief in a spiritual force than men, and older respondents more belief than younger. LGBs appear to be disaffiliating with Christianity at 2.37 times the rate of the general New Zealand population since 1966. Respondents who were raised as Christians in particular reported that their religious tradition was more a difficulty than a support than those with No Religion. LGBs reporting No Religion experienced more support from their families for themselves and their partners than those who were raised Christian. These quantitative findings are echoed in unprompted qualitative remarks submitted by respondents. Respondents clearly articulated their struggles with reconciling a religious affiliation with a sexual identity, and in each instance had chosen in favour of their sexual identities at the expense of the religious affiliation. Human rights issues are suggested. Despite their fraught relationship with faith communities, however, some LGBs have remained connected their religious traditions which demonstrates their resilience and their unwillingness to abandon faith traditions that have in many instances abandoned them.

Introduction

Religion remains a contended area in communities of sexual minority persons, with an extensive literature expressing the sense of alienation and isolation that LGBs feel about most organized religions. This sense of alienation is reflected in the widely held belief among faithful LGBs that 'it is easier to be religious and gay, than gay and religious'; that is, it is easier to remain with one's same-sex affiliated identity concealed or unarticulated within religious congregations (or even announced, in welcoming congregations), but the mistrust and approbation that LGBs have about traditional religions means that LGBs who remain affiliated with them are made objects of curiosity, pity or scorn. This article explores religion and spirituality from a national study of LGBs in New Zealand. In providing these data it is hoped that this article may contribute to an improved understanding of the meaning of the challenges, conflicts, expectations and, less often, supports that LGBs get from spirituality and religious faith.

In this study researchers defined spirituality as having to do with meaningfulness and the purpose of life, which may include beliefs in spiritual forces, god or gods, and religion as having to do with

particular structured expressions of that meaning within existing or traditional institutions. These are inevitably fungible and overlapping concepts. The study responses show that LGB New Zealanders have found various ways of addressing the conflicts between religious traditions and personal identities, but that residual hurts and disappointments remain, particularly among respondents who identified themselves as raised as Christian.

Literature Review

The literature is well populated with stories of the struggles of LGBs of faith to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity. Much of this writing comes from an historically American perspective, (Bergin & Smith, 2002; Boyd, 2000; Glaser, 1996; Kader, 1999; Kearney, 1997; Rosser, 1992; Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1978; Sherwood, 1987; Yip, 2005) and to a lesser extent from a British perspective (e.g., (Pittenger, 1976). There is also an Australasian literature on this contended issue (e.g. Bergin & Smith, 2002; Rosser, 1992). A number of studies of religion and homosexuality have been done in an American context where more of the population than any other developed nation professes religious affiliation (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2002). Lee & Busto (1991), for example, in a non-peer-reviewed study of religion and spirituality in LGBs, found that 84 percent of LGBs found that religion was important, and 66 percent believed in God. In their sample they found that 42 percent said there was no such thing as an LGB spirituality, while 33 percent said there was. Their sample included 83 percent who were born Christian (36 percent Protestant, 30 percent Roman Catholic) and 11 percent Jewish; 10 percent said they were not raised in any religion. However, at the time of the survey only 34 percent claimed a Christian or Jewish religious affiliation. The dilemma that many LGBs face is that they must either reject religion in order to accept themselves, or reject themselves in order to conform to deeply held religious traditions (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris and Hecker, (2001). Contemporary discourse holds that LGB sexuality and religion are incompatible; thus LGBs participate less in religion than do heterosexuals, and when they do participate religion can be detrimental to the psychological health of LGBs (Lease, Horne and Noffsinger-Frazier, (2005), even though there is an association between spirituality/religion and mental health (MacDonald & Holland, 2003). This has led to a process of LGBs abandoning, and being abandoned by, their religious traditions. Kirkman's (2001) study of 30 New Zealand lesbians found that many of these lesbians had essential conflicts with their religious traditions before coming out as lesbians, and identified the phenomenon of "defecting in place"; that is, maintaining the appearance of active participation in a religious organization, while failing to adhere to its beliefs. They report that after their participants came out they wanted inclusion in both lesbian and Christian communities.

The literature proposes that there is a contended and fraught relationship between LGBs and organised religion, and that the way many LGBs resolve these issues is to reconstruct the meaning of spirituality and religion in the context of their own life experiences. This supports the notion, however, that there is a kind of subcultural yearning among LGBs for inclusion in the discourses of religion and spirituality. Some communities of faith and congregations in some religious traditions have responded to this yearning, and have made deliberate efforts to identify themselves as welcoming sexual minorities to their communities; there are LGB-oriented organisations within many religious traditions, and there are some LGB-specific denominations and congregations (Maher, 2006). The existence of these separate sexual identity-based organisations and denominations, however, serves also to demonstrate that in many ways LGBs remain marginalized by mainstream religious traditions.

With some exceptions, both religionists and LGBs themselves largely understand LGB identity and religious faith as incompatible with each other. For people who belong to both groups this antagonism has been a source of difficulty, requiring careful negotiation of individual identity and religious/spiritual beliefs. For LGBs who undertake these negotiations successfully, the outcomes appear to be positive and advantageous to their mental and emotional well-being. Many, if not

most, LGBs, however, appear to have chosen not to undertake that negotiation, and have abandoned the faiths of their births. The present study seeks to explore LGB identity and spirituality in the New Zealand context where much of the population is not religiously affiliated.

Methodology

Lavender Islands: Portrait of the Whole Family (LI) is a national study of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in New Zealand. The research team and community advisory group took a deliberate decision not to include questions about HIV, safer-sex, mental health, suicidality, or alcohol and drugs, since those issues have been well-researched in other, more appropriate projects (e.g., Fergusson, Horwood and Beautrais, 1999(1999); (Saxton, Dickson, Hughes, & Paul, 2002); (Rankine, 2001); (Welch, Howden-Chapman, & Collings, 1998)). The study was developed by an interdisciplinary research team in close consultation with a community advisory group made up of LGB community leaders and members. These key informants were recruited to be as broadly representative as possible of LGB communities in New Zealand. The community advisory group identified the overall research question— ‘What do we look like?’— and then developed specific domains that they wanted to include in order to answer the question. Multidisciplinary interest areas were developed by the community advisory group, and included identity and self-definition, families of origin, families of choice, immigration and internal migration, well-being, politics, work, income and spending, careers and leisure, community connections, challenges, and religion and spirituality. A full description of the methodology, results and links to other publications from the project are available on the project website.

The final survey instrument was 133 items, and took between 18-45 minutes to complete. Funding and practical limitations meant that the instrument was available only in English, which may have excluded some recent immigrants from participating. We were also mindful that a survey methodology is not a preferred method for researching some cultural groups, and would probably result in undersampling those groups. The survey instrument was made available both by website and paper copy from April-July, 2004. In addition to distributing paper copies, an electronic link to the website URL was sent out through the community advisory group, and from them to their email lists, and so on. This last proved to be the most efficient and productive avenue of recruitment. The only significant difference between the web and paper response pathways was age; the mean age of paper respondents was about ten years older than that of website respondents. Data were examined to ensure that they met assumptions before tests of significance were carried out.

In all, 2,269 unduplicated responses were received, 83.6 percent from the website and 16.4 percent on paper (returned by Freepost). With respect to gender, 45.3 percent of the entire sample was female and 54.7 percent male. (There were five transgender and intersex responses received, and 13 respondents did not indicate a gender; these responses have been removed from gendered analyses in this article.). Respondents were very well educated: 51.3 percent held at least an undergraduate degree, compared with approximately 11 percent of the New Zealand population overall (Ministry of Social Development, 2005). This also meant that respondents were of high income relative to the general population.

Questions about religion and spirituality included whether a respondent believed in God, gods or spiritual forces; in what religious tradition(s) they were raised and currently practice; how much their religious tradition/spiritual practice been a difficulty or support in coming to terms with their sexual identity; and how satisfied they were with an LGB identity. At the end of the survey instrument respondents were asked if they would like to say anything else about their experiences of being LGB in New Zealand. These qualitative responses were otherwise unprompted. Where relevant, for the sake of comparison with general population census data, the question and

response format of these questions conformed largely to the style and structure of the New Zealand Census.

In order to develop comparison data with the 5-yearly New Zealand census, we performed some simple calculations. The mean age of respondents to the LI survey was 38.5 years (s.d.=12.86, range 12-80 years; there was no difference by gender). Since the survey was completed in 2004, we subtracted the mean age of respondents from 2004 in order to determine a mean approximate birth year. This mean birth year corresponded most closely to the New Zealand census year of 1966. Because the number of responses to the census itself grew from 2.67 million in 1966 to 3.52 million in 2001 percentages of responses were used rather than the actual number of respondents in calculations. References to changes in the general population below, therefore, use percentages to describe these changes from 1966.

This study has the usual limitations inherent to self-selected samples, including that these respondents are willing to self-identify as LGB to the extent of participating in such a study, and that they are people whose identity has coalesced to the extent that they are willing to identify with an LGB community³². Since there is no other comparable study of LGBs in New Zealand, nor is sexual identity included as a New Zealand Census question, it is impossible to determine how representative this sample is of all people who identify themselves as LGB in New Zealand. Nevertheless, this unique sample is quite large, and is in many respects consistent with New Zealand census data and other relevant Australasian studies (e.g., (Pitts, Smith, Mitchell, & Patel, 2006)).

Results

Quantitative responses

Of the 2,246 respondents to the question about belief in God, gods or spiritual forces, 59.8 percent said that they believe in such a divine power. Responses to this question differed significantly by gender ($p < .001$ by chi square). In women, 64.9 percent claimed belief, while 55.5 percent of men did so; Table 1 summarises these data. Not surprisingly, then, women rated the importance of spirituality in their lives significantly higher ($M=4.6$, $s.d.=1.98$, where 1=lowest and 7=highest) than did men ($M=3.9$, $s.d.=2.07$, $p < .001$ by ANOVA), although neither gender rated spiritually particularly high. Respondents aged forty and older also rated spirituality significantly more important in their lives ($M=4.4$, $s.d.=2.07$) than those under forty ($M=4.0$, $s.d.=2.03$, $p < .001$).

To the question about belonging to an organised religion, 72.8 percent of the participants said that they were raised Christian, and 22.5 percent were raised in 'No Religion'. All other responses were less than 1.7 percent (see Table 2). Table 2 also summarises the responses to religions currently practiced. Only 14.8 percent of respondents currently practice Christianity, and 72.9 percent currently practice No Religion. While Buddhism and 'Other' religions appear to be increasing, overseas-born respondents contributed 38.8 and 21.1 percent respectively to these two responses, and the overall proportions remain comparatively low, both in LI responses and the general population. It is not possible to tell from the data what the different constituents of Other

³² The author acknowledges that a lesbian, gay or bisexual 'identity' is primarily an identity located in Western, Europeanised cultures and societies, that the identities themselves are contended, and are a priori for the construction of LGB communities. The use of these Westernised constructs is not meant to imply the primacy or hegemony of Western identities, or even the appropriateness of applying these constructs to individuals or to non-Westernised cultures. This contended language is used both for the sake of convenience, and because it is what most of the New Zealand LGB respondents said they called themselves. Such language obviates the larger discussion which has been well-developed elsewhere (see, for instance, Chou, 2000, or Murray, 2002). This issue has also been addressed by the author elsewhere (Henrickson, 2006a) (Henrickson, 2006b)

are, although this is clearly an area for further exploration. For these reasons the balance of the data presented will focus on the 'Christian' and 'No Religion' responses.

The difference between the 72.8 percent who were raised Christian and the 14.8 percent who are currently Christians is a 79.9 percent decline. Likewise, the difference between the 22.4 percent who were raised in No Religion and the 72.9 percent who currently claim No Religion is a 225.4 percent increase. Without further exploring these differences, which is not possible within the structure of the LI survey instrument, we cannot attribute reasons to them. However, we can put them in the context of the larger New Zealand population. In the 1966 New Zealand Census, approximately 90.1 percent of the New Zealand population of 2.67 million reported that they were Christian, and 1.6 percent reported No Religion. (An average of seven percent of the population do not respond to this question in each census). All other religious groups were less than 0.5 percent each of the population in 1966. The Christian responses gradually declined each census year until they were 59.8 percent of the 3.52 million general population responses in 2001. The No Religion responses gradually increased until in 2001 they were 29.2 percent of all responses. All other responses in 2001 were less than 1.5 percent each. Census respondents identifying themselves as Christian dropped from 90.1 percent to 59.8 percent, or a decline of 33.6 percent in 35 years. Census 'No Religion' responses increased from 1.6 to 29.2, or an increase of over 1700 percent. It appears, then that LGB respondents are disaffiliating with Christianity at a rate 2.37 times the general population, but affiliating with No Religion at a rate somewhat less than the general population. (This apparent change, however, may be rendered less meaningful because of the relatively low proportion of the general population that claimed No Religion in 1966).

Finally we found that current Christian respondents were significantly older ($M=41.4$, $s.d.=15.06$, $n=327$) than current No Religion respondents ($M=37.9$ years, $s.d.=12.23$, $n=1612$, $p<.001$), which suggests a generational effect, possibly related to belief in God, noted above.

We asked to what extent participants had found their religious tradition a difficulty (at the 1 end of the scale) or a support (at the 7 end of the scale). Men ($M=3.5$, $s.d.=1.45$, $p<.001$) were significantly more likely than women ($M=3.9$, $s.d.=1.45$) to find religion a difficulty rather than a support, although both men and women scored the item below a neutral 4.0, indicating that their religious tradition had been a difficulty for respondents. However, current Christians found religion significantly more a difficulty ($M=3.2$, $s.d.=1.76$, $n=325$, $p<.001$) than No Religion respondents ($M=3.6$, $s.d.=1.30$, $n=1,577$). This difference was even more apparent in respondents who were raised Christian. Respondents who were raised Christian were significantly more likely to report that their religion was a difficulty ($M=3.5$, $s.d.=1.50$, $n=1,598$, $p<.001$) than those who were raised with no religion ($M=4.2$, $s.d.=1.06$, $n=479$).

There was a significant difference between the two groups on the extent to which the respondent felt support from their families of origin: current No Religion respondents experienced significantly more support from their families ($M=5.1$, $s.d.=1.81$, where 1=lowest support and 7=greatest possible support) than current Christians ($M=4.9$, $s.d.=1.81$, $p=.033$). Likewise, although there was no significant difference between the two groups on the extent to which families of origin included the respondent in major family gatherings, there was a difference in whether families of origin included the respondent's same-sex partner: the significantly higher mean in the current No Religion ($M=5.4$, $s.d.=2.04$), compared with current Christians ($M=5.1$, $s.d.=2.15$, $p=.016$) indicates that respondents with No Religion felt that their families are more likely to include their same sex partners than are current Christians.

Qualitative responses

The unprompted qualitative data on religion, spirituality and sexual identity echo, and in some ways explicate, the quantitative data, and some are cited here at some length. In most cases the responses relate a history of difficulty with organised religion, and usually specifically Christianity. The experiences of respondents with religion almost universally expressed difficulties, hurt, disappointment, alienation from families and social networks, and a lack of support from religious faiths. No respondents expressed an unreservedly positive view of religion. (Comments have been excerpted in some instances, or edited for length or relevance; edits are indicated by [...])

- The hardest thing that I have found about becoming a lesbian was acceptance by my family & friends who were very religious. We were given a very hard time - excommunicated from the church and from a lot of the family for a long time. They have slowly come to accept it but still don't like it. We feel we are 'tolerated'.
- I think that NZ is a great place for gay/lesbian and transgender people to live. [...] Everyday things like banks, car companies, flats etc.[...] are very accommodating, referring to my relationship as partners and it works well [...] It would be great though if religion played a lesser part in all this. I have found that Christians force their beliefs upon our community, basically judging us before getting to know us [...] How many more lives need to be messed up by religion[?] [T]hat's why I don't practice religion at all. [...]
- [...] I left the church in which I was brought up because the leaders did not support homosexuality. I left the church when I was 16/17 years old [...]
- As a [lesbian] daughter of a Samoan father I have found it extremely difficult to come to terms with what I believe to be commonly held prejudice and discrimination against gay and lesbian people in the Samoan Christian community. There is a belief that gay people have demons inside them and need to be saved by Christianity; which is largely accepted and even promoted within my Polynesian family. Because of such beliefs I will probably never tell my father that I love a woman, even if I commit to my partner for life. This makes me very sad [...]
- [...] I have had nothing but a positive coming out experience, supported by all family members (immediate and extended), friends and workmates. Until I came out I was a practising Christian, and while my faith in God remains, I cannot continue to attend regular worship because the church and the congregation would not blindly accept me as a full member of the church, rather they would 'tolerate' me.

- [Religion] is the only area in my life [...] where I have exp[er]ienced significant difficulty and distress; i.e., in my previous role as a minister I was vilified, received hate mail/ phone calls etc and lost my job
- Coming out was the hardest decision I have ever had to make in my life to date. Due to my religious upbringing it meant losing contact with much of my family and friends. Yet it was the best decision I could have made, now I live a life true to myself, and in the process my family has grown to be a little more accepting.
- Raised in a strong Catholic family, my coming out was traumatic and frightening. 10 years on my father spoke to me for the first time just two weeks ago. This made me hesitant to be honest with people for a very long time. I am now completely comfortable with my sexuality and don't care what others think [...]
- I thought I was straight until about 4 years ago at the age of 54 [...] I attend a Presbyterian Church which used to have a lesbian minister [...] The parish is supposedly gay- friendly but I have outed myself to only 1 person, whose daughter is gay. There is an anti-gay undercurrent which I hear as they don't know I am one too [...]
- [...] My partner is an example where culture and religion deeply [a]ffects families' abilities to cope with a gay son, hence he is not out, and there is a part of his life where I am not allowed and in fact invisible, I don't exist. This has been a new experience for me, and having lived all my life openly and honestly, I do not understand how individuals can live their life in the shadows. This hurts me to the core and makes me angry with the discrimination and hurt that is still out there in our society.
- My same-sex journey arose out of meeting my best friend at the age of 47, after spending 30 years in a marriage and farming partnership and raising four wonderful children. My friend/now partner and I came together out of a deep emotional, spiritual and empathetic need - we just 'clicked'. We are deeply in love but the journey has been a huge roller coaster of finding out just who we are. There has been unspeakable joy and wrenching pain. Our relationship with our God is an integral part of our lives and this has enabled us to cope with (sometimes) extraordinary judgementalism from within the established Church, though we have also found there deep, accepting love and compassion. We are a very 'new' couple and so are still finding out a lot about ourselves and society's reaction to us. Some people who have always been gay or lesbian have no doubt experienced difficulties and persecution from an early age - we have not necessarily. Our main concerns are for our 8 wonderful children, with whom we strive, daily, to pick up the threads of a new, mature relationship - quite different from that which we had with them as youngsters.
- Although I do identify as a Christian, I go to a Gay church and as a Maori, I want to make the point that there is a difference between spirituality and religion [...]

- I am an ordained minister in a mainstream Christian denomination. I was working as such when I came out to myself and my family and formed a relationship with my partner. Some people and the structure of the church have made this an incredibly costly journey. I have never doubted the rightness of my choice to be lesbian. I have struggled with having to defend this right in my chosen career which I am now moving away from.
- I have experienced difficulty at times and others times it has been okay. It has been a most difficult time when some of the Christian community of AOG, etc have tried to exorcise my 'demons' and that was a very painful experience indeed. I have lost jobs and places where I lived because I am both Jewish and Lesbian. I have been abused and hurt deeply, but I have survived to live and fight another day. In fact I might even say it has made me stronger than before.
- I have been in a lesbian relationship for over 4 years. I can honestly say that my partner and I connect on so many levels. Yes I was brought up with strong Catholic values in the beginning I did think I was going against everything I was taught and what I believed in. I've never been more happy and secure with one person. [...]

In every case where a respondent was forced to make a choice between their religious tradition and their sexual identity the respondent chose sexual identity. Some respondents chose to maintain a negotiated, but ambiguous relationship with a religious tradition based on concealment or misdirection. It is also apparent that a number of respondents do not view 'tolerance' as a positive or sufficient attitude. In many instances, however, a respondent made it clear that they were able to separate their relationship with God from their relationship with their religious tradition. This negotiated faith has become a cornerstone in the spiritual constructs of respondents.

Discussion

The data suggest that LGBs struggle deeply with religion and spirituality. Women are more likely to believe in a spiritual force than men, and older respondents more than younger ones. In general, participants found religion to be more a difficulty than a support, although men found it even more a difficulty than did women. Many lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians (in particular) of a variety of ethnicities are struggling with their religious traditions. LGBs appear to be disaffiliating with Christianity at 2.37 times the rate of the general New Zealand population. LGBs with no religious tradition experienced more support from their families for themselves and their partners than those who were raised Christian. In a very general and unspecified way, necessitated by the very broad level of the questions in such a large study, Christians seem to be struggling more with reconciling their religious beliefs and their sexual identities. This struggle is consistent with the literature.

Christian (and other) religions by and large have apparently done an excellent job in communicating that belonging to a Christian faith and a homosexual identity are incompatible, or at least very difficult to reconcile. A large number of raised Christians appear have resolved the dissonance between their identities and their religion by leaving their religion. Some continue to struggle to reconcile the two. Faith traditions can also influence the way families and faith communities do or do not include or welcome the LGB person and their partners. LI data suggest that many LGBs do not feel welcomed into those communities. If Christian religious traditions

want to keep LGBs out of their communities, then what they are doing is working; if through negative messages they want LGBs to change their identities or “lifestyles”, that is not happening, because most LGBs appear more likely to abandon their religious traditions than their identities. There remains a core number of LGBs, however, who are apparently committed to living the tension between identity and religious tradition creatively and reconciling their individual experience of identity with their faith. While substantive conclusions cannot be drawn from the LI data on how this reconciliation happens, this is clearly an area that will be useful to continue to explore further.

Human rights groups and agencies are generally reluctant to step into the religious arena, possibly because there is a belief that the views and teachings of religious organisations are essentially private matters that are beyond the public’s legislative scope, and in part because religious organisations are assumed to be voluntary, and that members can leave at any time. International human rights organisations express shock that two men in their twenties who have allegedly engaged in same sex sexual activity can be hanged by under Sharia law in Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2005), yet the continuing, perhaps more subtle, persecution of LGBs by some religious groups in Western countries remains either below regular monitoring, or has been accepted as a social norm. Yet the literature has demonstrated an association between religion/spirituality and mental health; what LI data suggest is that the influence of religious organisations on LGB individuals is profound, and in some cases creates a lifelong struggle to achieve an integrated identity. Belonging to a particular religious organisation is not a public ‘right’ to be sure, but the ability to live freely in a fair and just society is a right. Access to good mental health, and freedom from forces that negatively impact mental health, including religious bullying, is a right in New Zealand. While LI respondents seem to suggest that mere tolerance is not enough, intolerance is entirely unacceptable. Where religious organisations teach intolerance in the public arena and make pronouncements that affect the dignity, equality and security of LGBs is the place where they have placed themselves in the public arena, and may therefore be within the scope of human rights interests. Despite their fraught relationship with faith communities, however, some LGBs have remained faithful to their religious traditions and their God. That this can happen is a testimony to their resilience and their unwillingness to abandon faith traditions that have in many instances abandoned them.

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Table 1: Belief in spiritual force, god or gods by gender and age

	Men (n=1229)	Women (n=1017)	<40 years (n=1177)	40 and older (n=1044)
Yes	55.5*	64.9*	56.8**	63.3**
No	41.4	32.7	41.2	33.1
Not sure	3.1	2.4	2.0	3.5
	100	100	100	100

*p<.001 **p<.001

Table 2: Raised and current religious membership, all respondents

	Raised (%) n=2245	Current (%) n=2237
No Religion	506 (22.5)	1636 (73.1)
Christian (any)	1635 (72.8)	330 (14.8)
Hindu	5 (0.2)	8 (0.4)
Islam	6 (0.3)	2 (0.1)
Buddhist	25 (1.1)	49 (2.2)
Jewish	16 (0.7)	9 (0.4)
Other	39 (1.7)	175 (7.8)
Decline to answer	13 (0.6)	28 (1.3)
Total	2245 (100)	2256 (100)

Dancing with Others

Lance D. Laird

I stood tense on the dance floor, a straight guy in a gay bar in Seattle, trying to feel the beat of the country-western music. "It's a two-step," he said, "1-and-2, 1-and-2, 1-and-2; just follow me." "I'm rhythmically challenged," I laughed, to excuse my hesitation. As he whirled me around the room, with the muscular grace of a ballet dancer, it was both exhilarating and unnerving. "I bet this makes you feel uncomfortable," he said. I was trying to get the steps right, to avoid tripping or stepping on his toes; more grateful for his amazing agility as the lead than uncomfortable in this formal embrace with another man.

"Keep the tension between you," dance instructors would say to me, "hold the frame." My wife is quite an elegant ballroom dancer. I frequently struggle with the fear of public humiliation to be able to dance with her. In the past decade, I have co-taught college religion courses with dancers and experimented with improvisational movement. This awkward, stumbling journey to free myself from my head, and to be present in my dancing body, mirrors the larger journey of "holding the frame" and "keeping the tension" in my dance as a Baptist Christian with Muslim partners. For many in my extended biological and faith families, Muslims are no less dangerous than gay men as dance partners. And this "dancing with Others" has changed the way I dance alone and with my Christian partners.

The eldest son of two ministers—one ordained; the other, female—I grew up in a large Southern Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia where we divided the world into saved and the unsaved, lost and found. Foreign missionaries were my culture heroes, their slide shows and sermons whetting my appetite for adventure in exotic

places, wrestling with demonic forces and ignorance of the gospel. In my church training, I imbibed the conquest narrative of "Bold Mission Thrust," an effort to "Win Our World" with the gospel of Jesus' saving power—by the turn of the new millennium. I set out to save my Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic friends who were not really Christian yet, "like me."

I was a teenager of the Cold War era, awed and fascinated by the "evil Empire," "the Russians," and the anti-Christian forces behind the "Iron Curtain"—in other words, by "the Others." Muslims crossed my radar screen in 1979. Black-clad students in Teheran burned effigies of Jimmy Carter, that Baptist advocate for human rights and decency from my home state! "Terrorists" had taken hostages in the US Embassy and had overthrown "our friend, the Shah of Iran." The anger, vengeance, and fear of this new force of violence and disorder were palpable around me. When I "represented" Iran at a state "high-school model UN" conference, we staged a violent takeover with the PLO!

In order to serve God-and-country, I accepted a Navy scholarship to the University of Virginia to study international relations. I wanted to be a fighter pilot, “shoot Russians out of the sky,” and then work for the State Department to keep the “Others” in check. A clear path, a calling—or so I thought. I studied Russian, physics, naval weaponry, and atheist philosophy my first year. I had a freshman “faith crisis” for a few weeks, then re-accepted Jesus and returned to the evangelical para-church organizations with zeal, ready to lead the fight.

The first shy encounter with those across the dance floor came when our fast frigate docked in Manama, Bahrain. As we left the ship, the commanding officer warned us to avoid talking with people, because they were “Arabs, Muslims and potential PLO operatives” (then labeled the leading terrorist organization of the 1980s). Partly because I had issues with authority, and partly because it was my first trip alone outside the US, I talked to people anyway. And they were friendly, hospitable, fascinating. I peered into a mosque to see if people were making bombs (my hunch), and a guy tapped me on the shoulder and asked if he could help.

Startled, I stammered, “Yeah, uh, what are they doing in there?”

He explained that they were praying.

“To whom?” I asked, summoning up my Sunday school images of pagan idol worshippers.

“To God,” he replied, matter-of-factly.

Not to be outsmarted, I asked, “To which God?” as some are false, you know, like the missionary slides of Hindu “gods.”

“To the only God, the same one you do!”

Humbled by my own ignorance, intrigued by the humanity and generosity of the encounter, afraid of this whole other world, I needed to know. An Islamic history course exposed me to whole civilizations missing from my high school history books. I learned about the rapid expansion of Islam in contemporary Europe, Africa, and even North America in the past half-century. My response was, “Oh my God, they’re taking over the world! And they need Jesus. Here am I, Lord, send me!”

If I was going to be a missionary, I needed to know more about whatever made the lost not only lost but also “hostile” to the “gospel.” I took my first religious studies course in Islam, taught by a Shi`ite scholar from Tanzania who had studied in Iran. I found him both attractive and frightening. I thought he would be my first convert, so I waltzed into his office regularly.

Aziz Sachedina was one of the most humble, loving, and devout men I had ever known. He prayed five times a day, often making me wait outside his office while he did so. I informed him that he would go to hell if he didn’t believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He told me that God had some special work to do in me. One day, as I sat in my white Navy uniform beside his desk, launching another evangelistic assault on his faith, he looked at me square in the face and said, “Go home, Lance. You have not prayed today, and you need to read your Bible. Then come talk to me.” He knew me, and I was scared. An uncomfortable dance unfolded.

I took every class that Sachedina taught. He helped me discern that I needed to get out of ROTC, and I finally declared a major in religious studies, with a Middle East studies minor. And this professor’s consistent openness and concern for me—that I read my Bible and pray, that I remember God and find God’s will for my life—these violated my stereotypes and scared me to death! I condemned him

repeatedly to hell for over two years, and he would usually say, “Lance, I love Jesus more than you think I do. And I’m not sure you know Jesus as well as you think you do.” I was offended, and motivated!

This gentle, graceful, and firm response to my awkward jabs sent me full into the battle. I signed on for a summer mission experience in Cairo with an evangelical agency whose slogan was, “Muslims, it’s their turn!” I was inspired by the radical discipleship of raise-your-own-support missionaries who risked their lives as undercover evangelists behind “the enemy’s” (Satan’s) lines in the Muslim world. Armed with a quick training in the script of “why Islam is wrong, and why the Christian gospel (our version) is right,” we went out two-by-two on the streets of Cairo.

After Egyptian students politely listened to my script for a couple weeks and denied recognizing the “Islam” I was talking about, I got frustrated. I started asking questions about what they meant by “submit to God’s will.” I said less and listened more. After four hours of listening to one young man’s struggle with the demands of his family, his education, his culture, and his honest questions about how to live his faith, he asked, “what do you believe?”

Dancing to his music, he had given me new vocabulary and new questions for talking about and wrestling with my own faith. I had doubts, too, even though I wasn’t supposed to. I had no idea why, though I spoke of God’s love in Christ as the essence of Christianity, Christians had launched Crusades and colonial conquests throughout the Mediterranean world. I knew little about the history of Christianity in the Middle East, only that it was different and inadequate for salvation.

I returned from the summer changed, with new questions and perspectives on my own life and “tradition.” My senior thesis on “the problem of sin in

Islam and Christianity” wrestled with the issue of how Muslims could agree that sins were a major human problem, and still reject the need for a “redeemer.” I began to see my narrow theological assumptions from someone else’s perspective; to realize that how you define the problems of human experience makes a big difference in where you search for solutions. The dance floor began to fill with Muslims, with Catholic and Orthodox Christians, as well as the unfamiliar gods, gurus, buddhas, and shamans I could not yet recognize.

A decade ago, I sat in a living room of a Palestinian imam in Bethlehem, with several local teachers of Qur’an and shari`ah. For several hours, they questioned me about the Trinity, incarnation, salvation, and the reliability of scripture in Christian tradition. They aired stereotyped notions of Christian doctrine and practice, learned from polemical da`wah manuals for sharing Islam with Christians. I tried hard to shift the vocabulary and the debate, to see how our different understandings of God might illumine each others’ lives and traditions. They found me strange and “unorthodox,” but we shared more than a meal and much laughter. Ten years before this encounter, a young missionary in Cairo, I was converted—not to Islam, but to Muslims, and to the necessity of dialogue for the working out of my own faith.

I had wanted to do a masters degree in Islamic studies directly after college. My mentor told me, “No. I will not write your recommendation.” I protested, and he replied, “You will never understand my tradition until you understand yours better than you do now.” So he recommended me for study at a Southern Baptist seminary. I used to joke that everyone else in seminary was sent by God, but I was sent by a Muslim. Actually, what I mean is that God guided me through the wisdom of a Muslim friend.

I set out to know how Christians throughout church history had responded to Islam, whether Christians had ever loved God in such amazing ways as the Sufi “friends of God” I had encountered in my studies. My dance with Islam opened up a whole new world of Christian devotion, the world of ascetics, of love and light mysticism, of Christian spiritual discipline, of Orthodox and Catholic liturgies, and the uniting of body and soul in incarnational worship. I practiced my own faith differently, in partnership and in dialogue with a range of Christian brothers and sisters whom I had previously dismissed as “less than Christian.”

Encountering Muslims changed my view of politics. I was raised in a profoundly apolitical Southern Baptist tradition. We spoke of the “Lordship of Christ,” by which we meant discerning God’s will for your life and making moral choices to reject alcohol, sex, lying, cheating, stealing, and dancing. We wanted individuals to “get saved” and to do good (nice) things for other people. When I encountered the Qur’an and the life of Muhammad, I saw a passion for justice, prophetic condemnations of unfair market practices, tribal feuds, and of the unjust treatment of widows, orphans, and the poor. The Prophet Muhammad’s vocation was not merely to save souls but to remind people of God and God’s plan for how they ought to live in the world. He strove to transform the ways people operated in the economic, political, and social system of seventh century Arabia. And as I reread the Christian gospels, there was Jesus, acting like a prophet and talking economics and politics!

Uncomfortable with the cultural and theological sameness of seminarians raised in the Southeastern US, with homogeneous experiences of church, I spent my third year in Switzerland at an international Baptist seminary. There I found Baptists dancing with Italian communists, Brazilian liberation theologians, Burmese and Naga political

dissidents, German political and feminist theologians, Australians fighting apartheid in South Africa and reconciling with the stolen generation at home.

Reading Muslim feminists’ writings opened me to receive the feminist critiques of the Bible and Christian tradition that I encountered in seminary. To practice God’s justice and Christ’s Lordship is to struggle to make the whole social order reflect the will of God, not just in terms of personal morality, but in terms of structures that nurture full humanity for all people. Christians and Muslims, throughout our histories, have tended to accept and bless whatever social order and power structure is currently regnant. US Christians can vote for candidates who represent “moral values” of opposition to abortion and gay marriage, and leave in place the social and economic structures that foster poverty, inadequate health care and education, and an ideology of militarism and domination. US Christian support for invasion, colonization, extermination, and the violation of human rights is not new; it’s just repackaged today. And many Muslims remember that.

After seminary, my newfound interest in liberation theology and social justice, and my yearning to return to the study of Islam, landed me in the interfaith relations office of the Presbyterian Church (USA), just as the 1991 “Gulf War” confrontation was heating up. My responsibilities included visiting Muslim and Arab leaders throughout the country to discuss the effects of this war on their communities, to explore how the church could help. We produced resources and initiated programs to educate Presbyterian pastors about their Arab and Muslim neighbors, in order to defuse the hatred, discrimination, and isolation produced by the rhetoric and practice of war.

This experience began to knit together those earlier “callings” from God. I saw an opportunity to understand the

meaning of doing everyday theology on the ground in the struggle of Palestinian Christians and Muslims to defuse and resist military occupation. In a circuitous way, I felt God (contra the commanding officer) calling me to enter into intimate dialogue with “Arabs, Muslims, and potential PLO operatives.”

I found a new way of seeing religious traditions in relationship to each other. People, myself included, make choices to read, do, believe certain parts of their tradition more than other parts—under different conditions and at different times in their lives. Contrary to Latin American, South African, and American black theologians’ reading of the Exodus story to show a liberating God in solidarity with the oppressed, many Palestinian Christians found this and Joshua’s conquest narrative being used as theological justification for their dispossession. They had to make different choices. I figured that the presence of Muslims, with whom Palestinian Christians have lived for centuries, and with whom they share the experience of occupation, may shape those choices. What is it that happens in the relationship “between” religious communities and individuals? I found in these spaces of “interreligion,” as scholar Steven Wasserstrom calls them, a sharing of symbols and stories across boundaries. Muslims could borrow the story of Jesus’ crucifixion to describe their own oppression; Christians borrowed the Muslim language of martyrdom to make sense of the loss of Christian youth in the intifadah; Christians and Muslims venerated two saints, the Christian Saint George and the Muslim Khidr, as one figure, who heals, protects, even fights off the enemy. The complexity of these borrowings, the contexts in which people shared them, and the relationships they expressed—these fascinated me. Witnessing this Palestinian folk dance further liberated my understanding of what being and becoming Christian means. Our

bodies feel the music around us, and they improvise new dances with traditional forms and flights of invention.

When I finished my doctoral work in comparative religion at Harvard Divinity School, a bastion of traditional scholarship, I began teaching at the alternative Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington; with no grades, no majors, no departments—free range education! I was privileged to team-teach with faculty in several fields, to engage students in interdisciplinary exploration of important questions, to explore with my community the political and personal struggles in which we lived. I realized that my soul had been starved by the years of intellectual discipline to analyze and critique, that my training in religion was still very much focused on “essential texts and doctrines,” and that my emotional and physical life had atrophied.

A friend invited me to a “play group” for adults, introducing me to improvisational movement, storytelling, and song; and there was no “right way” to do it. I knew somewhere deep inside that I needed to explore this embodied spirit. My last two years at the college, I taught in interdisciplinary programs with a dancer and an animator (on ritual, gesture, and movement), and a dancer and psychologist (on body, mind, soul). My colleagues in dance showed me how students can “know” with their bodies what they may not “know” in their essays. One of my most satisfying teaching experiences was watching students dance their own choreographed versions of an “illness narrative” they had collected through ethnographic interviews with relatives.

When my wife was called to pastor a small Baptist church in Boston, we moved our family back east. I found temporary work doing medical anthropology research on Muslim communities in Boston. I remembered how my ethnographic work on Muslim organizations in New England had

added life to the textual and theological investigations of my graduate work. I found that the regular exposure to ordinary believers—still figuring out their path, or trying to convert me, or creating innovative responses to the needs of immigrants, prisoners, the plight of Muslims abroad and the poor at home—compelled me to question, not only Islamic studies scholarship, but also my own faith. It had been the dance with Muslims, without knowing I was dancing, that kept much of my spirit alive. And dancing is more fun when you do not realize you are dancing—then you are just living.

So this is my vocation. In so many ways, it is this dance with others—of another race (like my adopted children), of another language, of another religion, of another country, of another sexual orientation—that has given life and breath to my journey of faith. I know my own tradition, for good and ill, through the witness of these “others.” I struggle with who should be “leading” in more formal encounters, with how much to improvise. But it is the mutual witness of partners in this very human dance through suffering and sadness, joy and liberation that keeps me swinging, shaping, hanging, and thrusting in the arms of a dancing God.

Lance Laird received his BA in religious studies with a focus on Islam from the University of Virginia in 1986. He studied Christian theology at Baptist seminaries in Kentucky and Switzerland, earning an MDiv in 1989. Dr. Laird completed his ThD in comparative religion at the Harvard Divinity School in 1998. Dr. Laird's main research focus has been religion and nationalism as well as Islamic identities in the US. Dr. Laird has also worked with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Church Council of Greater Seattle on interfaith dialogue and research efforts as well as with the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. He lives in Jamaica Plain with his wife and three children.

Kiwis on the straight path: Muslim conversion in NZ

Ruqayya Sulaiman-Hill

Muslims are everywhere these days, at least that's the impression you might get from media reports which regularly seem to focus on the latest scandal, perceived injustice or apparently unreasonable demands of Muslim migrants, sparking calls from 'mainstream' Kiwi's to 'fit in, or go back home'. The stereotypical image of Muslims portrayed in these articles reflects a common perception that the majority hail from rigidly segregated, paternalistic, Middle Eastern countries whose burqa-clad women are treated as second class citizens. Add to this the ongoing rhetoric of the war against terror where, at least in the eyes of the general public, terrorists (read Muslim) are depicted as 'hating those who love freedom' and who are hell bent on imposing their own norms and behaviours onto others. Of course there may be some truth in this perception, but the vast majority of Muslims here are content to just get on with their lives and maintain cordial relations with their fellow New Zealanders.

Kiwis in general are tolerant, embracing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity; but there will always be a small minority that enjoy harassing those who stand out or look different. I'm sure most Muslim women wearing hijab will have experienced minor forms of abuse; it's even happened to me and my family near a mosque, when a car full of rowdy hooligans shouted obscenities and told us to "go back where you came from", except in rather more colourful language! The only problem is that this is where we come from. Some of us are fifth or sixth generation New Zealanders, of white European or Maori descent. Yes, we may be perceived as a bit of an oddity but we are not

alone, as Islam is currently acknowledged as the fastest growing religion in the world. This was already the case before the September 11 attacks and statistics suggest that interest in Islam has grown considerably since that time.

So what is the appeal in Islam? Why do some Pakeha and Maori apparently reject those 'typical Kiwi values' in favour of this seemingly militant, misogynistic and intolerant religion? Christmas hams, award winning NZ wines, a day out at the races, beer with your mates after the rugby and don't forget lotto on Saturday night. Isn't that what being a good kiwi is all about? Why would anyone willingly choose to restrict

their eating options, fast for a whole month every year, adhere to a different dress code, suffer possible rejection from friends and family and enjoy spending time in contemplation and prayer? Well the fact is that this is a reality for a growing number of Muslim converts in this country. Some are overtly Muslim while others prefer to keep their beliefs more private, even in some cases from friends and family. In this article I want to briefly consider the phenomenon of religious conversion and then share some of the results of a study undertaken prior to the terrorist attacks in 2001 with a group of thirty one Kiwi Muslim converts.

A significant body of literature exists, detailing sociological, psychological and theological influences on conversion, the majority embedded within a Christian framework although many of the underlying principles can be equally applied to non-Christian conversion. Various paradigms have been proposed which consider it as rapidation of growth, unification of the divided self, as a change of direction, an act of surrender or programmed conversions in the context of revivalist meetings³³. The entire conversion process is complex and multifactorial with various characteristics assuming relevance for different individuals. Three types of conversion can be identified³⁴. At one end of the scale is an increasing religious awareness from a position of disbelief or uncertainty to one of religious devotion. There may also be enhanced devotion within one religious tradition (intra-faith) or a complete change from one religion to another (inter-faith). A general trend towards enhanced spirituality and renewal of religious commitment around the world can be seen within many traditions. Many writers have attempted to

define the phenomenon as either a gradual or sudden process during which a divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy self, becomes unified, consciously right, superior and happy³⁵. The term conversion is frequently used to refer to “an abrupt change toward an enthusiastic religious attitude, with ... highly emotional features being conspicuously evident”³⁶. Thouless describes intellectual, moral and social conversions³⁷ and this definition probably fits best into an Islamic framework. From the findings of this study conversion to Islam is neither abrupt nor highly emotional; on the contrary it is usually the result of a gradual change in beliefs and attitudes, often over several years. The highly emotional features sometimes associated with Christian revivalist meetings are conspicuously absent. Most converts comment that there was a gradual shift in attitudes with many believing they were already Muslim in their souls and there is often a deep sense of returning to Islam associated with feelings of inner peace. From an Islamic perspective the term reversion is preferred, based on the concept of fitrah, which considers the innate nature of all beings to be Muslim, in the purest definition of the term. Those who submit to the will of God, find peace. Within a secular framework this could be equated with conforming to the laws of nature. Haeri explains that:

All human beings in fact are born in submission to natural reality and therefore in Islam. It is the society and the parents who often corrupt that innate Islamic state. There are people all over the world who discover Islam in themselves during some period of their lives, and not as a result of having come across the conventional religion of Islam. Rather it is an echo of something far

³³ (Oates, 1978) Conversion as rapidation of growth is based on Starbuck's view that conversion hastens normal development during adolescence (p.153-4), unification of a divided self (p.153-4), change of direction (p.158), act of surrender (p.160) and programmed conversion (p.163).

³⁴ (Kose, 1996a)

³⁵ (James, 1978)

³⁶ (Oates, 1978)

³⁷ (Thouless, 1978)

deeper and precreational, which is centred in the hearts of all human beings.³⁸

It is the pacification of the soul, the *nafs al-mutma'inna* mentioned in the Qur'an (89:27-30) which becomes the means to salvation³⁹. This concept corresponds with the experiences of many converts, particularly the feeling of always being Muslim at heart and the strong sense of returning to a previous state of inner peace and feeling 'at home' once they accepted Islam.

There are numerous religious and spiritualist movements, so the question of 'why select Islam?' remains. New Zealand is small and geographically isolated and although we are enthusiastic travellers, few Kiwis have had little direct knowledge or experience of Islam. Some of the motivational factors that prompted these people to convert, how they first developed an interest in Islam and some of their experiences since becoming Muslim were examined as part of the study. Thirty one participants, twenty males and eleven females were surveyed, with the time since conversion ranging from less than one year to fifty years. The average age at conversion was thirty two, with females tending to be younger than males. These findings have been supported by similar studies overseas⁴⁰ and provide a point of contrast with Christianity. Starbuck in his classic and frequently cited book considered "conversion to be a distinctively adolescent phenomenon, belonging almost exclusively to the years between 10 and 25".⁴¹ He suggested that if it had not occurred before the age of twenty the chances were small that it would ever be experienced. Adolescence is often considered the most susceptible time for Christian conversion as

the psychological and social traumas experienced by young people of this age prompts them to question and explore their own worldview and belief systems. These variables seem to be less important in an Islamic context, which is often the end point of a long, gradual and carefully reasoned process.

Throughout this article I have inevitably drawn comparisons between Islam and Christianity, mainly because the majority of Muslim converts (70% in this study) had either been practicing Christians or had significant exposure to this tradition. The remainder had no specified religion or described themselves as "free thinkers". Only twelve people described their previous religious experience as exclusively Christian, the rest had obviously been searching for other spiritual meaning in their lives with several people 'sampling' a range of alternative religions. The non-Christian religion most commonly explored was Buddhism, followed by various Hindu inspired philosophies including the Hare Krishna movement.

Popular perceptions of Islam as a patriarchal religion are often reinforced by media images. Poston who conducted a similar study in the United States suggests "the stereotypical image of the Muslim male emphasises his virility and masculinity, and this may well be a source of appeal to Western men".⁴² He discusses issues of veiling and seclusion of women, their exclusion from official positions of leadership and the fact that their attendance is not required at mosque functions, to justify his claim. Certainly research conducted amongst Muslim converts confirms men are attracted to Islam⁴³, which has often been contrasted with the appeal of Christianity to women. While some of these factors may help explain the attraction for men, it is inappropriate to

³⁸ (Haeri, 1997)

³⁹ (Ernst, 1997)

⁴⁰(Khan, 1978);(Kose, 1996b);(Poston, 1991)

⁴¹ (Starbuck, 1908)

⁴² (Poston, 1991)

⁴³ (Kose, 1996a);(Poston, 1991);(Khan, 1978)

confuse cultural practices with misunderstood religious expectations. Women's rights and issues of equality were important considerations for most New Zealand women converts and several made a point of emphasising the difference between the practices of some Muslims and Islam, the religion. One young female convert observed that the image of a Muslim woman embodies the essence of femininity and maternal ideals that are often perceived as lacking in Western female role models. While females may appear submissive to outsiders, this would certainly not fit their own perception as confident, articulate, independent women who frequently occupy positions of authority within the community. Although sixty-four percent of the NZ sample group was male, the majority of recent conversions have been women. A similar trend has been reported in both the US and Britain, where women converts are purported to significantly outnumber men.⁴⁴ In general however, Islam appears to have a universal appeal regardless of gender or ethnicity.

Marriage is frequently cited as a motivational factor and it is a commonly held assumption that most men only convert in order to marry a Muslim woman. While this is certainly true for some individuals, among the study group only thirty percent were introduced to Islam through contact with a potential spouse and for many of these people the eventual decision to become Muslim was motivated more by theological than legal concerns. The single most important factor which stimulated an interest in the religion was meeting Muslims, often neighbours, fellow students, a future partner or through travel. Reading or study was also influential but often this was also sparked by personal contacts.

An open question was used to discover what particular aspects of Islam had the most appeal, resulting in over seventy responses.

These were broadly arranged into four distinct categories: practical aspects/guidance for life, theological, sociological and moral/ethical considerations. The number in each group was totalled and calculated to give percentage significance for the category. Thirty-five percent reflected practical issues and guidance, including simplicity and common sense, obligations and discipline such as adherence to the fundamental pillars of Islam i.e. prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and charity. Sociological aspects, including fellowship, women's rights, the importance of family values, abhorrence of chemical addictions, intoxicants, gambling and other social considerations were influential in twenty-five percent of responses, with theological arguments viewing Islamic teachings as an answer to their questions being equally important. Many of these can be seen as a counterpoint to Christian teachings, particularly the emphasis on strict monotheism and non-acceptance of the Trinity, rejection of the concept of original sin and acknowledgement that the Prophet Muhammad was only a man. Many liked the idea of Jesus as a Muslim prophet as this helped to link their earlier Christian beliefs with Islam and allowed them to retain many of the elements of Christianity that they were happy with. Several people felt Islam actually reinforced their original devotion to the core fundamentals of Christianity which they believed had been eroded over the centuries. Moral and ethical factors, including respect, justice, fairness, strength, truth, morals and responsibility were also influential.

As a logical extension to the previous question, participants were asked to list their main reasons for finally deciding to embrace Islam. Theological reasons were cited by over seventy percent of respondents. These included the emphasis on strict monotheism, submission to a creator, guidance found in the Qur'an and Sunnah and some elements of

44 (Koya, 2000)

predestination. Several people indicated that there was no choice because they were already Muslim in their souls. Sociological motives mentioned by the remaining thirty percent included marriage requirements, providing a solution to life crises and societal problems, social values and a sense of community. All answers related to the individual's perception and none reflected external or politically inspired motives.

On a personal basis the impact of conversion can be mixed as relationships with friends and family are frequently placed under strain. Interfamilial tensions, particularly if family members are themselves religious, can encompass feelings of betrayal through rejection of long-held beliefs. Although females were more likely to receive encouragement and support in their decision than males, one recurring theme mentioned by young female converts highlights the concerns parents may have about their daughters marrying Muslim immigrants. Popular movies and books fuel fears that impressionable young wives will be 'forced' to wear Islamic clothing or move overseas to live in a 'repressive' Muslim society, however sensationalising these issues can add to the difficulties new Muslims face. Islamic norms of behaviour are also often in direct conflict with Kiwi culture effectively alienating converts from their previous social contacts. There is a tendency to socially ostracise those who choose not to drink, but most people anticipated this and felt the 'sacrifice' was worth it. On a positive note it is encouraging to learn that the majority of people did not report any issues of discrimination although half the group experienced some intolerance at times, particularly women wearing scarves. The general impression was that this was directed at Muslims in general rather than converts in particular. Some women felt wearing hijab can act as a barrier which stops people interacting with them and the consensus opinion was that most prejudice came from other women. It is

certainly evident from even a brief review of media interviews that issues of veiling and headscarves dominate any discussion with or about Muslim women.

I have briefly described some of the most common challenges facing converts in their relationships with fellow New Zealanders, but what about their relationship with other Muslims, the majority of whom are migrants? Most participants in the study love the cultural diversity and feel welcomed, however a small number have difficulty integrating and can feel isolated, mainly because of language barriers and confusion between cultural practices and religious requirements. Overall the response to the question of whether they had ever had any regrets since becoming Muslim was a resounding, No! Four people did express some reservations relating to social difficulties, the attitudes of some Muslims and the image of Islam in the West, but none to Islam itself.

As we have seen the appeal of Islam as a universal faith is gradually taking root in New Zealand as the steady stream of kiwi conversions indicates. Typically converts are around the age of thirty and tend to be better educated than the general population. They usually have a Christian background but have often studied other religions, sometimes at university. The decision to convert takes time; it is well considered and usually extensively researched. Islam has a strong intellectual appeal that fits well into a Judeo-Christian framework. The strong monotheism is important for many people who may be uncomfortable with Christian concepts of the Trinity and divinity of Jesus. The idea that Muhammad, the Messenger of God was a human, like earlier prophets and messengers, is appealing to many. Similarly, simplicity of belief and practice, with no intermediary between the worshipper and God is often emphasised. For some people social guidance is central, the importance of family values, women's rights, egalitarian

fellowship and rejection of all forms of intoxicants and gambling provide a well-structured and clearly defined pattern for life. An increasing number of New Zealanders are discovering that Islam provides a spiritually fulfilling and socially satisfying option. With converts found in all areas of society it may now be time to acknowledge that conventional Muslim stereotypes no longer apply.

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Faith-wrestling

Larry Stillman

I've tried to figure out just what is my religious, cultural, and ethnic identity for over thirty years. I think it's a work in progress, so I'm going to present a set of episodes as an exploration of the complexities of identity. What it does show, I think that as a person matures, so does one's thinking. I don't think that I have any right answers, but then I stand outside any notions of religious orthodoxy. Obvious stuff perhaps, but certainly not obvious at the time they are written. And it also shows that so much of my life has been a strange relationship with the city of Jerusalem where I lived for more than four years and I have been back to a number of times since, as recently as October 2006.

My early years were traditionally European-Australian. When I was twelve there was the Six-Day War, and I remember sitting in the classroom, and we were discussing the war. I knew then that we as Jews, even in far-away Australia, were threatened by the Arabs. I think that it was at a Habonim youth-camp (a Zionist youth group that we were asked to establish where our loyalties would lie if there was a war between Israel and Australia-- the answer, to the Zionists, was obvious.

If you can accept that around the age of twelve the Jewish community, religion, the synagogue, Jewish holidays and family were the parameters of my world, I would like to go back even further, to when I must have only been two or three, because my earliest memories seem to centre on the same sorts of activities. I suppose that all children's lives are centred on such restricted areas, but I think that already at a very young age

there was a picture of US and THEM-- the "Australians". Most of my older relatives--that is the ones who survived the Holocaust-- were Yiddish speakers, and even those a few years older than me had a good knowledge of Yiddish. I remember seeing serial numbers tattooed on many people's arms and plenty of memorial books, with gruesome photos.

When I was very little, we would often visit my father's parents in Melbourne, Carlton, when it seemed that everyone there was Jewish, and not the exclusive area of Italians and the affluent young urbanites as it now appears to have become. I can remember crawling around on the floor of the synagogue where there is now a high-rise housing estate, and going to the kosher butcher's on Nicholson Street. I must have understood Yiddish then, since my grandmother used this language with all her Jewish shop-keepers. My father's mother used to delight me by blowing down the

necks of chickens to make them whistle—I have not tried that since I was little, so I'm unsure if it was a trick or my imagination. She would lay meat on a marble block in the backyard off Rathdowne Street, to let the blood drain off, in accordance with the laws of kashrut. I enjoyed seeing the blowflies settle on the netting laid over the meat.

But my life wasn't exclusively urban. We also spend summers when I was small in a country town in Victoria. Shepparton, was, and still is, the centre of the fruit-growing industry in Victoria. In Shepparton, however, there was a community of Jews large enough to support its own synagogue, and to have left some very strong memories with me. The Feiglin family, I know, had been settled there for a long time, and there was another group of Jews with a very particular agricultural orientation.

The Hachsharah prepared young agriculturists for resettlement in Israel, according to the doctrines of Zionism. I have no idea now of how many people actually undertook the training course, but there are probably some kibbutzim in the Galilee co-founded by Australians who received their training in the Goulburn Valley forty or more years ago. It certainly made a great impression on me, to sit on a tractor and bump down the back roads of Lemnos. The Alpesteins were another family who had lived in Shepparton for a long time. They were quite religious, and though I can still hear Mrs. Alpesteins nasal Australian drawl, their kitchen was strictly kosher, divided into milk and meat sections, with cupboards segregated by colour. Blue for dairy foods, red for meat, I think. I got them muddled up as a kid. Such was their adherence to religious law that they lost a crop one year to frost, rather than violate some Holy Day.

I went to a Jewish school for a couple of years in Melbourne, then, for financial reasons, to a state school. Three or four times a week I attended what still called 'Heder' (Hebrew for 'room'), traditional

religious instruction at the synagogue. It wasn't very good, but I learnt ritual prayers by heart, was given further instruction by my religious grandfather, and by the time I was 13, was going to synagogue almost everyday and wearing phylacteries during prayer. This was pretty traditional stuff, but by the time I was 14, it was more or less abandoned. I certainly had to great Jewish learning, no Talmud, no sense of theology. Melbourne had its strictly orthodox Lubavitch movement, which followed the messianic teachings of its rabbi in New York, and there was liberal or reform Judaism, but nothing appeared attractive to an inquisitive mind. By the time I was a teenager, it was completely rejected and certainly so at university as an undergraduate where I had virtually nothing to do with the various Jewish youth groups, particularly because of their zealous Zionism at a time when my universalist leftist politics weren't particularly sympathetic to such strident ethnocentrism.

Israel

Yet, when I was 23 in 1976, I went and spent more than four years in Israel, doing a Master's degree, partly out of an easy way to escape a stultifying home environment, and because it was very cheap. My mother's side of the family had lived there in the 1920s and on another side, we went back to the time of the pre-World War One Turks, so there was a sense of roots, but not homecoming. I certainly noted that in my diary at that time. And I wasn't particularly Zionist either, and I was quite, quite secular. In fact, I continued being a left partisan, and continued to see the flaw in the Zionist dream with the oppression of Palestinians at that time, the rise of Jewish religious and nationalist fundamentalism, and what seemed to be the overall poverty of religion. I probably bore much in common with many on the Israeli left as well. I was also very hostile to what is known as the 'negation of the diaspora' in much Zionist thinking, which gives life outside of Israel no credence. At

that time, it was a very strong ideology, but it did not stop a willingness to accept overseas money either.

Those four years had a profound, and I can now say a positive experience despite the ongoing political disaster that I see. It gave me the Hebrew language, which I regard as key to understanding so much in Jewish history and experience. I specialised in the study of the ancient Near East, so I got a thorough grounding in the historical background to the three major religions while (rather immaturely) not studying religion itself. I was so ideological (and wrong) that I did not take any subjects in Jewish studies or Bible, something I now regret, but I did study several years of Arabic.

I rejected any possibility that religious ritual meant anything, and refused to go to synagogue, or even participate with friends in religious events. Again, I was like a lot of other radical Israelis of the time, seeking to forge another identity that was post-holocaust and post religion. This was also the 1970s, and Jerusalem, like many other places, was buzzing with countercultural lifestyles and attitudes, all upon reflection, embedded in the most exotic of cultural and religious locations, with the sounds of the mosque, church, or synagogue always available.

Thus Israel was my first experience of living as a young adult in a truly cosmopolitan and mixed culture, something that Australia was just coming to terms with. While I continually struggled with the negative side of Zionism, time in Israel did begin to educate me enormously about the richness and amazing diversity of Jewish culture (and something of local Palestinian life when the divisions were not quite so deep) –the very first person I spoke to in Israel outside the airport was a policeman—a black Indian Jew. I lived in a dormitory with mostly descendents Yemenite Jews, who at the same time, were blatantly racist and forced a number of Palestinian students out of the

dorm to find their accommodation elsewhere. I also met Palestinians who passed themselves off as Jews. I certainly did not identify with a muscular secular Israeli identity found in elements of the kibbutz movement that was more or less blind to whose land they occupied and whose labour they sought to use. The contradictions of Israeli life, particularly when Menahem Begin was in government, and lunatic settlers were given free-reign on the west bank were all most too much for me by the end of my stay, and I left the country with some bitterness.

The US

But I also left because I had another opportunity, this time a scholarship to study in the United States, an opportunity that was beyond my wildest dreams, where I further specialised in the study of ancient Mesopotamia. I had too much knowledge of the origins of the Jewish religion to take it too seriously, and orthodoxy, with its emphasis upon ritual minutiae seemed at times as shamanistic as any other ancient faith. I had read the Sumerian and Babylonian stories of the flood—after that, the Hebrew Bible just seemed to be a book of mythology, allegory and historical accounts with a particular ideology to justify a particular form of religious practice as determined by the rabbis in the era after the destruction of the First and Second Temple and Exile. Any question of a personal god seemed right out of the question. I had read too many Babylonian texts dealing with the Job-like questions to think that Jews had a monopoly on the big questions or their answers. It seemed to me that many of the questions posed about human existence could be just as well dealt with out of a particular religious framework. It was only at that time in fact, that I began to once again, get interested in 'religion'. Perhaps it was an effect of once again being in the Diaspora, or I might have been maturing. I am not quite sure.

By the mid-1980s I was starting to read quite widely in what is known as modern Jewish thought and theology. I experienced something of the wonderful religious richness which exists in the United States, and the freedom to experiment. I still found religious ritual very hard to deal with, though I attended what is known as 'conservative' synagogue services and took a wonderful Talmud class. But it seemed to me that there was a 'problem' with being a knowledgeable and questioning Jew, because the pursuit of Jewish learning with its never ending quest for a technical minutiae and exactitude could at the same time serve to alienate one from broader questions of religion. If you couldn't justify the existence of God, or the covenant with God and the historical destiny of the Jewish people, then you were in big trouble in justifying traditional religion. And of course, this is the case when you take any religious-normative system seriously.

By that time it was very clear to me that if I had any religion, it did not involve a personal god. Though I was profoundly impressed by writers such as Rabbi Arthur Washkow who wrote about God-wrestling--the struggle with Jewish tradition combined with a social justice perspective or Rabbi Michael Lerner and his Jewish renewal movement, the 'religion' thing just never stuck with me. Other writers (usually Rabbis from different Jewish streams) such as Emile Fackenheim, Richard Rubenstein, or Arthur Cohen all challenged me to think about the relationship between God/Non-God and humankind, even from a non-religious perspective. Where was our ethical centre in an unjust world? I was also influenced by the writings of Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of what is called the 'Reconstructionist' stream in Judaism, with its emphasis on religious naturalism.

Kaplan's work had been very influential amongst many American Jewish thinkers, but his own version of the daily prayer book

had been banned and burned by some orthodox rabbis in 1945, making headlines in the New York Times. Kaplan did not see the issue as being one of a personal god, or divine election of the Jews in a more democratic and universalist world. The Torah (the Five Books of Moses), as well as traditional commentary (the Talmud and other works), are not viewed as complete, but emergent. Religion is always changing. The saving idea of Torah is that it is a key to a new Jewish ethnic 'which should encompass every phase in Jewish life and thought', from the standpoint of what has been the main point of Torah--namely the salvation of man (!). This is the Jewish messianic ideal that needs no messiah. Kaplan believed that he could reignite in the Jewish community (and this was the large American community after nearly a century of mass migration) a conscious sense of community and piety in 'sancta': "the events, the heroes, the writings and the occasions...giving concreteness to the values deemed essential by the people to its existence.'

But I could also not commit myself to ritual, which was part of the Reconstructionist practice of Judaism. I was also alienated by what I saw as the self-satisfied comfort of much of the Jewish community that has lost its connection with its earlier age of migration and struggles for social justice. That sort of suburban religion that turned upon celebrating itself while paying lip service to others was not for me.

I consequently found that I was drawn to what is known as 'religious humanism' in the States, a long-standing tradition that rejects traditional atheism and rationalism. Yes, life is sacred, yes, we might need some ritual, but no, we don't need God. In the late 1870s, Felix Adler had left behind his reform Judaism in the US and founded the Ethical Culture Society and this movement, which still has adherents today, had attracted many Jews who rejected religious

particularism for a movement centred around a higher ethical ideal. Adler's movement out of traditional religion was not unusual in the 19th century, and indeed, he reflected the religious radicalism which emerged in American reform Judaism at that time, the sort of religious radicalism which quite antipathetic to the reintroduction of traditional religious practice in reform Judaism today. I became a member of the Ethical Culture society until the mid-1990s and while I only attended one or two of its 'services', found the movement's writings and engagement in social change very inspirational, and continue to do so.

I also became involved with the Society for Humanistic Judaism based in Detroit. Rather than going down Adler's pathway, under Rabbi Sherwin Wine, it formed humanistic non-theistic congregations in the 1960s. It can be considered for better or worse, as a humanistic outcrop of traditional reform Judaism, strongly influenced by rationalist and democratic ideals. It has several rabbis who are affiliated, a journal, and a variety of events. For the first time, I felt I had met people I could be 'normal' with. There was a sense of community, and even humanistic prayers.

For a number of years I was very happy in this sort of environment and I tried to practice something in my own way. In fact when my wife and I returned to Australia in the early 1990s, I tried to form a similar group here, but typical of any community group with strong difference of opinion, it didn't last. What I would have really liked in fact was openness from the liberal Jewish congregations, and support from rabbinical leaderships for us to experiment, but that was not the case. However, a small non-traditional 'Hebrew School' was formed, and this continued through the efforts of many people for about a decade. For many Jews on the fringe of the community, the group that we tried to form and the school were one place they could affiliate and be open

about their identity without feeling stigmatised as having 'married out' or being 'non-traditional'. Our son, as with many other children, took part in a group, rather than individual bar mitzvah ceremony.

In our personal life, we have our occasional Shabbat meal—at which I use the inclusive Reconstructionist Sabbath prayer—and the Passover Seder meal, as a symbol of the struggle for freedom, is a highlight of our 'religious' year. On a public level, during the early 1990s, I did some writing on religious issues for the Australian Jewish News. Nowadays, but I am a frequent letter writer to the Jewish News in Melbourne as a member of the tiny Jewish left, trying to present the most critical views of current Israeli politics without falling into ignorant ultra-leftism. The fact is that there is an Israeli state. It is in a crisis, and it has to change. There is a looming issue that challenges any traditional conception of Israel as a "Jewish" state. It needs democratic, non-military answers to accommodate its future Israeli-Arab majority, and its neighbouring state of Palestine. I despair of a solution outside of the rise of someone like Nelson Mandela to lead both communities. Maybe—of all people—it will be the Pope, even though religion is not the answer, the symbolism is powerful to all communities.

However, I still find it difficult to sit through a synagogue service, even though I can read and understand the liturgy and sing many of the hymns. However, what I have found (is this a sign of maturity), or something more dangerous, I love visiting churches in Europe, or mosques in Turkey. I am not embarrassed to say that I find the cult of the virgin Mary—at least as expressed in Byzantine and Renaissance art appealing. I can stand for hours in front of an altar screen by Duccio. I suppose it is because there is nothing quite like the miracle of birth and a babe. And I had a sort of theophany in the Church of Heavenly Peace in Istanbul

looking at a Byzantine cross in the dome, while beautiful music was playing in the background. But I don't see any true religious meaning in such emotional experience. It all goes back to Canaanite and Iron Age times, and beyond that to our earlier ancestors—look at any good archaeology book about ancient Palestine and you will see horned altars, statuettes of women, and tiny iron calves. And I can't resist statues that the Romans made of little angels. These are the stories and psychological archetypes that we can't escape from and with which we continue to struggle. And these angles and temples float with me all the time.

In fact, I was in Jerusalem in October and I go into a sort automatic drive, going to places that I frequently dream about, and here are some edited abstracts of my blog.

My brain knows exactly where to get my feet going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, so I avoided the gangs of Arab youths hanging around Nablus Road spoiling for a confrontation with the police and headed to Damascus gate (I did see a gunship copter overhead, however). I would have like to have taken some photos of them but it would have been much too provocative.

I stepped into the gloom of the Holy Sepulchre. A group of Franciscans were singing to organ accompaniment around the Sepulchre and Calvary, accompanied by an organ and billows of incense from a censer-waving deacon. It was nearing dusk, so the church was getting dark, and lit up by the candles they were holding (on little sort of bookmarks or held in their fingers as they held up their lectionaries which I noticed, had the music in medieval type staves, not modern transcriptions. Pilgrims followed them around. A number were getting all teary being so close to the suspected tomb of Jesus. I walked around the rest of the church, which has the tomb chapel in the middle of a rotund.

It has been cleaned up a lot in recent years, so it really is quite beautiful in the gloom. But because of the feuds between the dozen or more church sects that have custody, some things never change. One chapel that was burned out years ago is still burned out, and a ladder that hangs precariously on a ledge is still there, because there is an argument about the ledge. And the religious weirdness continues. Vigorously praying at the Sepulchre was an orthodox Jew in a skullcap. This is about the most heretical think a Jew can do, but obviously, he had found his own pathway, and joined the congregation on his knees etc, swinging back and forth. I went down steps into the Armenian part of the church to look at a mosaic that I remember being restored and was bright and sparkling. Now it needs a clean.

Prior to the Church I was in the Ecole Biblique seeing a priest friend. The Ecole is on Nablus Road. My friend is a great and highly respected scholar. He is now 67—and I realise that I got to know him first when he was younger than me, in his mid 40s. He is now retired, but of course that means even more teaching for him, and he is at home here and hope's that 'they' don't send him back to Europe where he comes from.

That is the funny thing about being here for me. It is so much part of my youth so my mind is sort of stuck there, yet people are ageing, buildings that I once thought of as new are falling apart, and worst of all, many of the views of Jerusalem I loved are blocked because the trees have grown!! There was a doctoral defence starting at 4pm at the Ecole and a number of Dominicans were in the cassocks, there were a number of heavy-duty biblical studies academics from Oxford, Freiburg and elsewhere in Europe on the platform and the poor victim, a Korean priest was there delivering his defence in French. All very formal and terrifying. My friend is pretty depressed about the state of community relations, including the

breakdown of social order in the Arab community. The kids just do what they want and the quality of education has completely nose dived. He also is depressed about religious extremism. Funny hearing all of that from a Dominican who were not the most tolerant several hundred years ago. And he was also very amused to know that I bought a pair of purple cardinal's socks at the papal tailor in Rome.

I noticed have various new religious nuances. Clothes have always had great symbolism in Israel and you could identify a person by how he /she dressed, the type of skullcap the men wore etc. Traditionally, orthodox Jewish women have dressed very conservatively, with wigs or dark scarves or hats. There is a new trend for younger women to cover most, not all their hair with colourful scarves and god forbid! some even wear slacks with skirts over them (which Arab women have done for a long time). Some even wear skirts to below the knee, instead of to the ankle! I saw groups of them at the university. You even see couples of very religious looking men with hippyish clothes and their women in this sort of hippy look. We spotted one at lunchtime who even exposed her hair. They even have a new name for this religious trend which as an acronym means 'mustard', but translates is something like 'extra-observant nationalist religious'. I find it quite striking, and it is also striking that they, and other orthodox Jews also spend a lot of time glued to their mobile phones. There are even new age Jewish spiritualist bookshops.

Apparently, mobile phones and internet are having a strong effect on the ultra orthodox young as it is harder to keep them isolated from the rest of the world. However, there are special mobile phones which block access to secular services. In general however, there are far more religious people in Jerusalem than there were before and there are many more shops selling all sorts of religious articles. Being punctilious about

religious practice has become a big thing. There were a group of women in the bus station selling all sorts of religious goods.

I also saw groups of Arab students at Hebrew U but aside from the fact that they were speaking Arabic, they look much like Israelis. They looked a lot different years ago, in daggy clothes, though I saw a few hijabs as well. There hasn't been much time for politics, except my friend was on the one hand, going to vote for the communist party in the last elections, and on the other hand, she thought there was no alternative to the war in Lebanon. On the other hand, another academic agrees that it has been a complete disaster. From a visit to Haifa I met a number of PhD students who were opposed to the invasion, but they felt powerless to find a solution.

Security is tight. There are bag inspections everywhere—just down the road some months back the coffee shop was blown up, and the bus I take was attacked twice some years back. There are plaques in Hebrew to explosions everywhere. Soldiers are stationed outside public buildings and of course, there are soldiers with their guns everywhere—just shopping or going home. That is 'normal'. I noticed lots of young black soldiers, men and women. They are the children of the Ethiopian Jews who arrived here in the 80s and 90s. The racial diversity of Jews is something that the rest of the world doesn't really know of and knowing more of it might prevent some of the stereotyping. There are also lots of foreign workers, including Filipina carers, some who have been here many years and have families. Normalising their status is a big challenge to Israel. And on the subject of soldiers, my friend's son who started uni yesterday, spent two years in Gaza doing inspection of workers coming into Israel. He hated every minute of it. Several friends were killed.

At dinner last night, I heard about how distressing it is for progressive parents to

have their sons go off into the army to witness horrible things. There is a culture of never whistle-blowing, and the kids get incredibly cut up at the humiliations they are forced to put upon Palestinians. But the bigger question, getting to ask why 'we have failed and what to do next', is not asked. I spoke to another old acquaintance, and there is a similar alienation and distrust of the political process. The question of how to step outside the situation and encourage something different is not seen as possible. That is the tragedy. And there is so little contact with the other, the Palestinians, even though they are yards away, literally. The blindness is pervasive. Emek Refaim (an upscale Jerusalem neighbourhood) is full of Arab houses, but I doubt people care to know, or want to know the pre-1948 history of the area and what might be done for reconciliation.

You can see the separation wall down the road from my friend's house, but she had never realized this. We tried to get to drive to it but she was a bit apprehensive and there was traffic on the way, so we turned back.

People are aware of the dehumanisation of Palestinian society, but it is rationalized as an outcome of the need to prevent terror. Today we had a lovely brunch at the Scottish Hospice—what an expensive treat—and I picked up a copy of Palestine Today. I was amazed to see the signs of at least a middle class society in a tourism magazine, but I am sure many Israelis would not believe it possible or that it was all a conspiracy of some sort.

And it is raining, that amazing mountain rain and the smell of the pine trees, and it is getting cold, that Jerusalem cold that I often dream of. And on my desk is the orthodox Hebrew prayer book. I often look at it.

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God's Men: The Red Mosque/Golden Temple

Fuad Khan Baloch

I am originally from Pakistan and have been living here in New Zealand for the past 5 years. I currently work full time as a Systems Engineer on Auckland's North Shore and am writing my thesis for a masters of Computing degree at Unitec. I wrote this poem in the aftermath of the Red Mosque storming by the Army in Islamabad this July- following a stand off between the military establishment and religious hardliners. Being the son of a retired religious Colonel in Pakistan Army and a member of a devout, by-far tolerant Pakistani society, this is a personal reflection on the conflicts within the current society.

The year's 07, the scenes from 84,
'twas golden then, now the red glow.
bearded men with their Godly pursuits-
all i see is their blood still flow.
A general rules with rules unheard
in a land liberated now his foe.
Holed up fighters in a house of God,
do away with teachings that they know.

Soldiers strut with military galore,
the fighters with their martyrdom glow.
ah soldiers and fighters in irony so,
face the same kaabah as they bow!

What of us with hearts that bleed?
You're our brothers, none our foe!
A woman cries for her son in rank
another for her husband, sadly woes..

Come hither, make a stand with me-
unite! To the world we might show;
We have to live and love each other;
as temples or mosques, tanks don't know.

The Concept of Faith: From the Perspective of a Practicing Sikh

Verpal Singh

Antoine Lavoisier, the French Chemist, is a rather unusual starting point for a write-up on Faith. What qualifies him to be part of a discussion on faith is that he is regarded as the founder of Chemistry. It does not mean that before Lavoisier there is no history of human experimentation with chemicals.⁴⁵ On the contrary, chemicals have been used by humanity for thousands of years. From the miracles performed by priests and oracles to the perfumed unguents used by Egyptians 5000 years ago⁴⁶ chemicals have played a role in making people happy or frightening them out of their wits. However, what Lavoisier changed was the methodology applied in the use of chemicals. Rather than make use of chemicals through knowledge gained by rote, Lavoisier used empirical methodology to study the behaviour of chemicals, thereby enabling us to have prior inkling of what to expect when chemical A was put in the company of chemical B.

⁴⁵ In his 50 years of life (B. 1743 – D. 1794.) Lavoisier was able to discredit elemental theories that had held sway for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, all his accomplishments in the field of Chemistry did not help save him from the guillotine in the final days of Terror. He may be seen as one of the original victims of Terrorism, when that particular term was applicable only to governmental behaviour.

⁴⁶ 1st Dynasty of Egypt (about 3100-2907 BC) is the earliest known user of cosmetics. The Egyptians seem to have used perfumed oils to moisturize their skin and keep it unwrinkled in the dry heat. The art of decorating the eyes by applying dark green colour to the lower lid and blackening the lashes and the upper lid with kohl (made from antimony or soot) is also known to have been developed by the Egyptian women.

A direct impact of this change was realisation of limits of what the chemicals can do. For instance, alchemy had for centuries been pursuing the mirage of philosopher's stone. Whether the alchemists came from Greek, Arabian, Medieval Christian, Hindu or Chinese traditions, this pursuit was common to all these different alchemical traditions.⁴⁷ The pursuit of philosopher's stone combined spiritual elements with material ones as what they were observing was God in action and they invoked God (or devil, according to their inclination) through secret words, chants, prayers, holy water to enable them to change base metals to precious ones at will. This "at will" part of the equation seems to have come from the religion's promise that it can provide the tools necessary to invoke God in one's favour whenever necessary.

When Lavoisier replaced faith with logic, our knowledge of elements increased by leaps and bounds. It was as if some sort of barrier had been broken that enabled us to analyze our observations logically without faith skewing the results. As logic took primacy, we not only started to realize the limitations under which elements work, but also the vastness of the undiscovered world of elemental knowledge and the benefits this ever growing knowledge bank could bring to humanity. From then on pursuits like philosopher's stone lost all shine.

Something similar is happening in the realm of religion, where faith though still holding sway is increasingly seeking the help of science to authenticate the scriptural statements. However, it is still the norm that more unquestioning one's belief, more pious is one perceived to be. Religion, in fact,

⁴⁷ The reason for this commonality seems to flow from the observation that gold occurs in nature in the company of many metals which probably made the alchemists conclude that some process was turning these base metals into precious ones, and if this process could be duplicated they would have discovered the philosopher's stone. Existence of compounds like electrum seemed to bear this out as probably did the recovery of silver in processing of gold.

demands faith from its followers and promises "the heaven" to those who believe unquestioningly. For those who question a religion's take on some issue using scientific observation, religion seeks to follow a contrary view.⁴⁸

If a contrary view is not possible, it seeks to cite those scientific observations which authenticate some scriptural revelation. The aim usually is to show to the faithful that what the scriptures revealed "hundreds of years ago", science is discovering only now. By implication, the faithful should not lose their faith if science says something that is contrary to the scriptures, for science is lagging "hundreds of years behind" the scriptures when it comes to knowledge of God's creation. For the faithful this can be a very effective argument – after all scriptures are direct revelations from God and who can know more about His⁴⁹ creation than God Himself!

With advances in our collective knowledge and the methods of collating this knowledge, it is my view that organized religion is fighting a losing battle with other two contenders as the sole repository of knowledge of how God's creation works and towards what end. The reason for this may be quite obvious – while claiming to have answers to all our questions, religion demands that we ask no questions.

On the contrary, the two other contenders, philosophy and science, encourage people to question everything. Questioning is seen as the starting point of

⁴⁸ An example may be the advocacy of "Creationism" as an alternative theory to Darwin's theory of evolution explaining how this world, this universe, came into being.

⁴⁹ The attribution of male gender to God is contrary to the Sikh theological principles where God is seen as above and beyond gender. It should be seen as a limitation of language that we use male address for God. An alternative to this might be using "He/She" "Him/Her" which is rather cumbersome. Perhaps with time a gender-neutral alternative exclusive to God might become acceptable.

reasoning, leading to ever greater insights and opening up of new vistas. Questioning a scriptural statement, on the other hand, is seen as an indication of heretical behaviour. Thus, even though science and philosophy do not seek to consciously undermine religion, these two contending seekers of greater understanding of how and why of God's creation, are seen by religion as doing exactly that.

It must be accepted though that virtually all of the modern-day strides made by us in greater understanding of this world and beyond have been made possible primarily by the development of a scientific outlook. This, however, is not to say that religion has no longer anything to offer humanity. On the contrary, religion is still relevant in resolving problems created by unfettered application of science.

The importance of religion (or religious outlook) was illustrated recently during a seminar organised by Auckland Inter-faith Council in collaboration with Auckland City Council.⁵⁰ There were presentations from Zen Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Hindu and Mormon traditions on how birth of a child is perceived. Most of the presenters sought to cite scientific evidence authenticating their scriptural statements or religious practices revolving around the phenomenon of birth of a child. The general observation was that all religions see the new born baby as a gift from God. It made one wonder that there is no scientific evidence which proves or disproves that a child is a gift from God. Science can explain every stage of development beginning from the moment a sperm combines with an ovum to the moment when the baby makes the first sound and beyond, but it has no framework

⁵⁰ It was the second in a series of seminars termed "Life Cycle Seminars", dealing with how various religions perceive various stages of life. First seminar was on death and the second on birth. I am not sure why the topic of death was seen as a beginning by the organisers of these seminars.

to tackle the question whether a child is a gift from God or not.

Also, science seems to have perfected the mechanism for garnering knowledge, but it has not been able to integrate into that mechanism, guidelines which would show whether the garnered knowledge is being applied wisely or unwisely – or, to employ religious terminology, righteously or unrighteously. It is religion that can answer this question.

Where religion is lacking is in its insistence on knowledge being static – that what has once been revealed must remain unchallenged throughout time.

Philosophy on the other hand is weak in practicality. Much of philosophy seems to be focused on pondering abstract concepts rather than issues of practical importance to humanity.⁵¹

Thus we have three approaches to understanding the same thing – God's creation, how it works and towards what end. From the fact that even religious discourse is increasingly citing scientific evidence in support of scriptural statements, one might conclude that science has taken a pre-eminent position in providing answers to our questions.

Is this state of affairs good for the general well-being of humanity?

My view is that science is making the same mistake that religion did – it seems to presume that it has answers to all the questions. Or to put it another way –

⁵¹ Plato argued that philosophical contemplation of the unseen world of forms is the highest goal of human life. He postulated the existence of a world of unchanging and invisible "forms", or ideas about which it is possible to have exact and certain knowledge. The things one sees and touches are imperfect manifestations of the pure forms of mathematics and philosophy and only the abstract reasoning of these disciplines would yield genuine knowledge, while reliance on sense perception, he claimed, would produce vague and inconsistent opinions.

humanity is repeating its mistakes by thinking that science can provide answers to all its questions. Scientists, it would seem, are the new clergy – or the new prophets.⁵²

If we consider religion, science and philosophy as three rivers, then rather than look for answers in one or all of these rivers, we would be best served by looking for answers in the “sea” – where all three combine, as do many other streams.⁵³ However, we also need to understand that a fish can never hope to fully fathom the sea. In the Sikh discourse, the analogy of fish’s relationship with sea (or river or simply water) is used at numerous places to illustrate man’s relationship with God.⁵⁴ Man is equated with fish and God with water. Man’s state of being unaware of God’s presence is equated with a fish out of water.

“O Almighty! You are like an all-knowing all-seeing river and I am just a fish – how can I find Your measure? Wherever I look, I see only You. The moment I am separated from You, I am in pain and die. I do not know of the fisherman, and I do not know of the fishnet. But when the pain comes, I call upon You.

52 In a way, this may not be so far from truth if we accept that there is only one source of knowledge – God. We believe that person to be a prophet to whom, say, God revealed that “the crops of the Jews are failing because they are robbing God by not rendering the full tithes required by the Law and that if they give full tithe God will remove his curse and send rich harvests.” [Malachi in the last prophetic book of Old Testament; fifth prophecy (3:6-12)] Should we not consider, say, Newton as a prophet to whom God revealed the Law that governs motion of objects, big and small?!

53 Our understanding of God’s creation and the place we occupy in the bigger scheme of things is enhanced in their own ways by disciplines like anthropology, social sciences, creative arts, etc. A full discussion of this contribution of “other” disciplines is beyond the scope of this paper.

54 Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, see pages 23, 25, 55, 439, 481, 605, 928 amongst others. Guru Granth Sahib is written in Gurmukhi alphabet and in verse form. Its translations, whether in verse or prose, should be seen as only approximations.

“You are present everywhere while I had assumed You to be far away. Whatever I do, I do in Your presence.

“You see all my actions, and yet I continue to deny them. I have not worked for You, nor have I remembered Your Name. Whatever You give me, that is what I consume. There is no other giver – unto which door should I go and knock? Nanak offers this one prayer: this body is Your gift as is this soul. These exist only because You make them.

“God Himself is near everyone, and He Himself is far away; He Himself is in-between too. He Himself takes care of everything, and He Himself listens to everyone’s prayers. By His own power, He brought this world into being. O Nanak, beings should follow the order that meets His approval.”⁵⁵

A fish needs to be intimately aware of that part of the sea where it ventures day in and day out, and be always on the look out for even minor changes in its surroundings in order to live its life. Sea was there before fish came into being and it will be there when fish dies. Sea’s existence isn’t dependent on fish while fish cannot exist without the sea. While sea sustains numerous entities along with the fish, fish has a set role in not upsetting this regime of sustenance and contributing to it positively. What if the fish starts to think that the sea and everything within exists to serve it (the fish)? The thought seems such a ludicrous one. However, superimpose it on humanity.

We need to be fully aware of our surroundings – worldly wise – in order to live a “successful” life. More worldly wise we are better our chances of success. But most of us seem to think that this world and everything within exists to serve us.⁵⁶ In a

55 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 25

56 Book of Genesis has played no small part in the evolution of this worldview.

way, clergy's main role seems to be to promise humanity that it (the clergy) can invoke God in its favour.⁵⁷ This promise seems to prompt one to think in terms of trying to influence events to fit one's own goals.⁵⁸ Thus, we consider ourselves as the centre-of-the-universe – that not only the whole world but even other humans exist to serve our purposes. This lays the ground for seeking commonality of agendas – dividing humanity in clusters according to common agendas, with each cluster trying to influence events in furtherance of its particular agenda. Religion and wealth seem to be the most common binding factors in the construction of these clusters. It does make one wonder why those acting as guardians of religion (the clergy) or wealth (the rich)⁵⁹ feel so threatened.

One effect existence of these varied groups has is the suppression of intra-group discussion of beliefs. As every group sees itself at odds with all or most others,⁶⁰ it becomes a prerequisite of survival that each group ridicule the belief/agenda of others in order to prove to its adherents its superiority over these others. It is by this mechanism that the “flock” is sought to be kept together. More vulnerable a belief system is to questioning by others, more repressive its approach towards those of its members who

seek an intra-group discussion of these beliefs.⁶¹

The result of this repression, however, is never one intended. It might take time for the questions raised within and without a group to take effect, but sooner or later every question must get its answer. A question once raised lingers on till it elicits a satisfactory answer.⁶² Thus, even though religion claims revelation to be timeless (or static), religious beliefs keep evolving with time.

What we are witnessing today is a growing acceptance of scientific outlook over religious or philosophical one. This may be seen as a weakening of faith's hold over humanity. If one is to predict the defining feature of the 21st century, it will most likely be the gradual diminishing of the concept of faith.

Faith, in fact, has always been questioned, from within as well as without. The concept of revelation, as prevalent amongst the Semitic religions, made it necessary that those who questioned faith either had the credentials to be accepted as prophets (with the new revelation or

57 For instance, Hindus have the concept of chanting of mantras and donations to relevant god(s) in order to “force the hand” of god(s) to influence some outcome in one's favour. Christians have the concept of praying to particular Saints for achieving a favourable outcome in some situation.

58 It can be argued that this possibility of influencing god, give and take, is similar to the concept of bribery – those who believe that god may be influenced through chants, prayers and donations, need take only a small step to see that “donations” should be able to influence men as well to act in one's favour.

59 It can be shown that the wealthy act in a very similar manner to that of clergy – feeling it their duty to safeguard the legacy of their forefathers for the future generations while seeing those without wealth (akin to the “unbelievers”) as in need of accepting their superiority.

60 It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the dynamics of changing group alliances, e.g., fundamentalist Jews and Christians being at loggerheads for centuries, now combining against Islam.

61 Amongst these repressive measures may be cited the refusal of some Christian priests in America to grant communion to those politicians in their congregation who were pro-choice (on the issue of abortion laws) in their public statements.

62 The recent publication of a document titled *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised* may be cited as an example. The Vatican's explanation for the publication, which virtually discards the concept of Limbo, was that “People find it increasingly difficult to accept that God is just and merciful if He excludes infants, who have no personal sins, from eternal happiness, whether they are Christian or non-Christian.” Something that is being downplayed in this whole issue is that a question mark has been put on the concept of Original Sin, an abhorrence to an increasing number of people; for Baptism is preached as a prerequisite of entry to heaven, as it rids oneself of Original Sin. Now that the Church has accepted that non-baptised infants are also eligible to enter heaven, it can only be seen as a negation of the concept of Original Sin. It may also be seen as acceptance by the Catholic Church (to a certain degree) of the Anabaptists' view of baptism.

prophecy superseding the earlier one) or end up being banished or executed.⁶³

In order to understand the absurdity of this situation, consider for a moment a hypothetical scenario:

The 17th century accepted Newton as a prophet through whom God had revealed the Laws of Motion to mankind. When Einstein questioned some of Newton's statements in the 20th century, some of Newton's more staunch followers started accusing Einstein of heresy. Einstein was subjected to death threats and other forms of persecution which prompted his followers to protest against atrocities being committed by Newton's followers. Today, Newtonians continue to argue the infallibility of their prophet's revelation while Einsteinians have quietly convinced some governments to support their prophet's revelation over any other.

This in a nutshell is the crux of the problem inherent in the concept of faith. Knowledge is fluid and it is ever growing. To claim that everything that was said two or three thousand years ago is the truth when all the evidence suggests otherwise, may only be termed rather unreal. This does not mean that one is arguing that everything that was written two-three thousand years ago has become irrelevant, rather that some parts may have become superseded with new knowledge and insights that humanity has gained over this period. Just as without

Newton's discoveries Einstein would not have been able to postulate his Special Theory of Relativity, it is a given that a big gap would be left in what little we know about the how and why of God's creation if even one of the revered religious figures' contribution is negated.

Our knowledge may be equated to a wall of bricks, with the present being seen as the top of that ever-growing wall. What we know today has been built over time brick by brick. A centuries old belief that we may now know to be untrue or irrational still contributed to humanity's understanding by providing a contrast to what we now know to be true or rational. And what we know today to be "true" may be challenged tomorrow.

It is the proposition of this paper that faith-based religion that we know today has its days numbered. Humanity as a whole has become more reliant on reason rather than faith. Religion too must start depending on reason, as opposed to faith, in its discourse with humanity.⁶⁴

This is possible only when religion becomes non-denominational.⁶⁵ For it is only in a non-denominational environment that the apparent irrationalities may be discarded without any need for the arrival of a new messiah to do so.

63 One may conjecture that if Jesus (who was addressed as Rabbi but didn't fulfil the requirements to be universally accepted as one) had come from a rabbinical family, his teachings would probably have been added after Malachi's and the centuries of Jewish-Christian strife may never have occurred.

64 Sikhism is one religion that demands from its followers that they continuously ponder and analyze and depend on their intellect (the non-egotistic kind) while dealing with mundane and spiritual matters. "It is intellect that tells us how to remember God; it is intellect that earns us honour; it is intellect that makes us understand what we read; and it is intellect that should guide even our philanthropy. Nanak says, 'This is the only way. If someone claims to know another way, they are being less than truthful.'" [Guru Granth Sahib, page 1245]

65 Many philosophers have tackled the issues seen as the domain of religion, in a non-denominational manner. The works of Spinoza readily come to mind. The fact that there are some uncanny similarities between Spinoza's propositions and Sikh weltanschauung may be seen as an indicator that Sikhism, in its approach, is closer to what West sees as philosophy rather than what it sees to be a religion. In fact, it may be shown that Sikhism combines the philosophical thinking with scientific outlook to chart a path of life that aims to bring contentedness to those who walk it.

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story Writing, and traditional Punjabi embroidery art of Phulkari. He is an active participant in the ongoing inter-faith dialogue amongst various faith communities of New Zealand. Verpal Singh is a keen student of history, especially religious history.

The 21st century spirituality revolution: Are there implications for migrants?

John Raeburn

According to some pundits, the West is in the throes of a 'spirituality revolution'. Certainly, over the past 40 years, there have been dramatic declines in attendances at places of worship, and also in those claiming any sort of religious affiliation.

Regular attendance is typically defined as weekly. Most Western countries are down to under 10% of the population who are regulars, compared with figures up to 90% in previous decades. Sweden is allegedly down to 2% and Australia, New Zealand and the UK are all around 7 to 8%. Canada is an exception at 18%, with primarily Catholic Quebec going from 88% in the 1950s to 20% today.⁶⁶ The US supposedly is supposedly bucking the trends, with most opinion surveys still showing 40% regular attendance. However, the American attendance rates are generally thought to be overstated in surveys (as are self-reported number of sexual partners and amounts given to charity), and the real figures are probably more like 20%.⁶⁷ Regardless of the actual figures, there have been major declines almost everywhere in the West from the 1950s and 60s, and these declines have accelerated markedly since the 1990s.

66 Catholicism in Canada: Church attendance. CBC News Online, October 2, 2003.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/catholicism/churchattendance>

67 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_United_States. They cite evidence from Religious Tolerance.org to support these figures, and also a 2006 Harris poll, which gave a figure of 26% weekly attendance. (Downloaded 3 March, 2007)

The numbers of those giving a religious affiliation (when, say, asked in a census) are declining more slowly – people tend to provide their 'natal religion' more or less out of habit. Also, stopping going to church, synagogue, temple, mosque, etc does not mean someone has rejected their religion – just that it has become less important, or is practiced outside the formal institutions. Whatever, 'old time religion' in the West is in major change and decline. One expert has predicted the demise of Christianity in the UK by 2030⁶⁸. In New Zealand, a leading theologian recently asked if we were heading towards a 'churchless' society.⁶⁹

Some say these declines are being offset by a growth in fundamentalism. However, we tend to be misled by the disproportionate publicity given to fundamentalists. At least in the West, their overall numbers are small (maybe 5% or so in most populations) and any growth is relatively modest.

What is perhaps surprising is the collapse of religion in most of the West is not more

68 Bruce, S (2001) Christianity in Britain: RIP. *Sociology of religion*, 62, 32-46

69 Ward, K (2004) Is New Zealand's future churchless? Inaugural Lecture on 23 February, 2004, Knox College, Otago University, Dunedin.

widely discussed and studied. Its implications for society are potentially profound. After all, religion has been a driver of Western society and history for centuries. Striking remnants of this legacy remain, as with the decision to invade Iraq by the religiously motivated George Bush and Tony Blair. Intellectuals like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett continue to attack organized religion. But as far as the West is concerned, it is a spent force, with the possible exception of the US, and there it seems to be in decline too. What is more interesting is what might be taking its place. This is what I believe we should be studying. However, it is a topic still largely neglected.

The default position for most social scientists who try to find reasons for the decline in religion has been something called 'secularization', usually ascribed to something vaguely called 'modernisation'. That is, with the general growth in materialism and consumerism in the West, and also the dominance of science and technology in providing 'meaning' in the world for many people, old-fashioned religion just does not cut it any more. This is also seen to have a social dimension, given that the church has provided 'community' and 'identity' to many in the past. For example, the decline in 'churched religion' has been allied to Robert Putnam's concept of a 'decline in social capital' – the overall loss of people participating in community and civic activities⁷⁰. But recent writings suggest that these various explanations may not be the whole story, and indeed, could be off the mark in important respects.

For example, the term 'secularization' implies that people no longer have any religious or spiritual interest at all, and that we are all turning into materialists, atheists, agnostics, rationalists, humanists, etc, and away from God, supernatural beliefs,

⁷⁰ Putnam, RD (2000) *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster

spirituality, and so on. But the current evidence is that this simply is not so. In the USA, although at least a fifth of the population do not go to church at all, and perhaps 60-80% do not attend with any regularity, polls show that over 90% of Americans still believe in God⁷¹. In New Zealand, where it seems that 93% of us do not go to a place of worship with any regularity, and that 45% claim no religious affiliation at all, research cited by the Presbyterian church⁷² showed that 65% of us still believe in God, and another 20% in some Higher Power – that is, 85% believe in Something of a divine or supernatural nature. The 2005 New Zealand Values Study⁷³ showed that 61% of kiwis felt spirituality was more important than religion, and a 2007 TVNZ panel survey⁷⁴ had 56% saying 'I see myself more as a spiritual person than a religious person'. (Only 16% said 'I see myself as a religious person').

What seems to be happening is that while people are rejecting 'old time religion' in the package served up to us over the past centuries – and in the largely Christian West, that has usually taken the form of 'going to church' – they are not necessarily rejecting religion or spirituality as such. Church is often seen as boring, and out of touch with people's real lives. Also, increasing democracy and self-determination mean that people no longer want to be told what to do by priests and others, especially as many are seen as inept or even corrupt. (As I was writing this, I heard on the news that the Catholic Church in Los Angeles had just paid \$660m to 500 people relating to priestly sexual abuse). So, churches are out, but

⁷¹ Gallup, G (1999) *The next American spirituality: Finding God in the twenty-first century*. Colorado Springs: Victor

⁷² www.presbyterian.org.nz/3359.0.html

⁷³ Rose, E, Huakau, J, Sweetsur, P and Casswell, S (2005) *Social values. A report from the New Zealand Values Study, 2005*. Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation & Te Ropu Whariki. Auckland: Massey University.

⁷⁴ Buzz the People Close Up (TV1) Easter survey 2007.

what is called 'the new spirituality' seems to be in. Indeed, the arrival of this 'new spirituality' is on such a scale, and so fast, that some are calling it a 'revolution'.

Is it a revolution? Although historically there have been signs of loss of the influence of traditional religion at least since the era of The Enlightenment in the 18th century, the really big decline in church-going in the West has been over the past 40 years, and most markedly over only the past 10 to 20 years. Given its speed and scale, this recent decline could probably be called 'revolutionary'. But what is probably more revolutionary is the huge growth in what is taking its place – what has been called 'the new spirituality'. Unfortunately, because this has largely been ignored by the powers that be, including most researchers, it is difficult at this stage to be too certain about the parameters of this, since it has not yet been sufficiently studied.

Some of the 'new spirituality' is simply people continuing a version of the existing religion outside the church, although as we have seen, most (at least in New Zealand) no longer want to be called 'religious'. Some of it is the adoption by the West of Eastern and other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. (Islam is the fastest growing religion in the US, although this may be a reflection of migration rather than conversion. There are almost a million Euro-American Buddhist 'converts' in the US⁷⁵, and in New Zealand, there are an estimated 15,000 Buddhists among non-migrant Kiwis⁷⁶). But mainly, it is neither of these things. Rather, it appears to be a broad array of different spiritual, holistic health, body, personal development, self-help,

metaphysical, astrological, occult, and other items to which it is difficult to give a single all-encompassing label. These are sometimes referred to collectively as 'New Age' (possibly a reference to the astrological assertion that we are now in the Age of Aquarius), but most people engaged in these activities do not like or use this term themselves. The best I can come up with for the moment is 'alternative spirituality', or perhaps the 'body-mind-spirit' (BMS) sector.

Certainly, it is hard to overestimate the sheer power and force of the BMS sector from a commercial point of view. We are constantly told that we are quintessentially a consumer society, and there is no doubt that the BMS industry is thriving. Indeed, it assails us at every turn – in bookshops, in chemist shops, in supermarkets, in a myriad of specialty shops, and even in schools and doctors' surgeries. People like Oprah Winfrey are part of this whole new phenomenon, together with the gigantic self-help movement. In the US, in 2003 there were over 3,500 new self-help book titles, with the value of this industry in the US predicted to rise to \$12 billion by 2008⁷⁷. One American commentator says that bookstores such as Borders are now the most important centres of unchurched spirituality, and that they are 'the virtual synagogues of spiritual instruction'.⁷⁸

This huge BMS beast seems largely to focus on personal wellbeing. Here, there are issues about whether this is a good thing – at least the old churches (at their best) had a strong orientation to the public good, and to doing one's duty to society and others. Now the focus is much more on me, and my welfare. This is not to say that this is the only form that the new spirituality takes. No doubt there are many who are choosing to take their own path to enlightenment and

75 Fuller, RC (2001) *Spiritual but not religious: Understanding unchurched America*. New York: Oxford University Press

76 Walker, V (2007) *The Buddha boom*. *Canvas* (New Zealand Weekend Herald magazine) July 21, 2007, 8-11

77 Salerno, S (2006) *SHAM: Self-Help and Actualization Movement: How the gurus of the self-help movement make us helpless*. Boston: Nicholas Brealey

78 Fuller (2001) *op cit*, p155

salvation, following 'serious' spiritual practices that require discipline and effort, but we still have yet to find out properly what is going on, especially in New Zealand. The presence of a strong sense of spirituality in the Maori world in Aotearoa is a major factor in making our own situation unique here. There are also other unique kiwi factors, like an historically low rate of church-going compared with other Western countries, and the overall 'newness' of New Zealand society in international terms.

Notwithstanding our relative lack of knowledge, it does seem that there is a major change going on in New Zealand and in Western society generally with regard to religion and spirituality. It may even be a revolution! It is hard to know where it will end, but my prediction is that for many decades, the spirituality sector will take the form of a very wide variety of self-determined activities and beliefs, and these are unlikely to be under the aegis of institutions like churches. Much of it is likely to be driven by what is available commercially and through the media and internet, which in turn drive the commercial dimension in a self-perpetuating cycle. In terms of its social dimensions, most of it is likely to take place on an individual basis, or in the context of small groups. Already, American research suggests that 40% of Americans meet in small groups to discuss important life issues, mainly religious and spiritual in nature (this includes both church and 'unchurched' groups), which inevitably are less formal and more personal than full-congregation events⁷⁹. Many BMS activities of the self-help, personal development and healing variety also take place in small groups. (This suggests that 'social capital' may not be disappearing in this sector – rather, it is taking on new forms).

There is no doubt that various gurus, popular movements and best-selling books will continue to attract large numbers and to influence the cultural trends in spirituality. The significant crowds that the Dalai Lama can reliably attract in New Zealand show that new bigger groupings could easily coalesce in the future – maybe even becoming new 'churches' of a sort.

The role of the internet and other new communication technologies could also influence the social and cultural dimension of what is going on. Internet chat groups, YouTube and other such phenomena are powerful mechanisms for the exchange of new ideas, forms of socialising and cultural trends. There is now the opportunity for rapidly forming global networks around spiritual ideas, and some of these could well survive over the years, and grow into cyber-institutions. In due course, I would not be surprised to see actual spiritualities emerge based on IT-type concepts, since spiritual traditions and religions have always reflected the cultural and technological zeitgeist in which they are embedded.

I hope I have said enough to show that religion and spirituality in Western society are undergoing radical and probably irreversible change. It is not rocket science to figure out that this is going to have an impact on migrants coming to Western countries. So I am going to spend the rest of this article on this aspect.

This is not an area to which I have yet given much thought, so what I say here are just a few ideas. But I think it is an important matter to address. Significant migration is a major fact of life in New Zealand, and will continue to be for many years. Migrants come from almost every possible cultural background, including many from non-Western backgrounds. China and South Korea are among our biggest migration sources, and the rest of South East Asia, plus India, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe all contribute significant

⁷⁹ Wuthnow, R (1996) *Sharing the journey: Support groups and America's new quest for a community*. London: The Free Press

numbers of new entrants to this country. Many of these are places where traditional religion is strong. Some of these, as in China and ex-Communist Europe, have been where religion was suppressed for a time, but where it is now undergoing a renaissance. Probably most of whatever growth there is in religions in New Zealand is largely attributable to migration. This is most evident for religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the modest growth in evangelical Christianity may also be partly fuelled by migration. (Although Christianity is in decline in the Western world, it is on the increase in other places, especially in Africa and China, with evangelical/pentecostal religions especially growing). But it is not only these 'new' sources of immigrants who have an impact on the New Zealand church-going scene. The Pacific continues to provide many migrants to New Zealand who are keen supporters of their churches. While Pacific Christian churches are theoretically similar to traditional churches in New Zealand, they tend to take on their own unique Pacific flavour. They appear much more highly regarded than their mainstream counterparts, and better attended, and have clearly played a central role in the success of Pacific migration to New Zealand. Consequently, they are likely to maintain or even grow their numbers for quite a while yet.

For many migrants, religion is a core source of cultural identity, and is taken very seriously. There is no doubt that in the stress of migration, many hold firmly to their religion of origin. At the same time, pressures from the mainstream culture can often run counter to the maintenance of traditional values and practices. In particular, there is often likely to be tension between parents and their children around religious and spiritual matters, just as there is for traditional food⁸⁰. The parents typically want to stay traditional; the kids

typically just want to blend in with kiwi society. And just as the availability of fast foods and soft drinks can undermine healthy eating, it follows that the presence of the ubiquitous and highly marketed BMS sector in New Zealand, plus the overall decline of interest in conventional religion in the wider society, is going to pose new challenges for migrants.

Most research shows that the most successful migrants in terms of being happiest and most mentally healthy are those who get the balance right between their traditional culture and the new mainstream. One suspects that religion may well be a component of traditional culture that is very resistant to change. Striking the right balance between their traditional religion and the new world of spirituality they encounter in New Zealand will continue to be interesting for many migrants over the years to come, especially since it is not clear where the 'spirituality revolution' is actually going. One reaction could be to retreat into conservatism, and have a 'not change at any price' mentality. Another could be to continue to embrace the old systems, while allowing them to modify gradually in the light of present realities. The more successful Christian churches appear to be those who have bought into the BMS philosophy (of subjective wellbeing and valuing personal experience) to at least some extent. How the traditional religions of migrant groups are going to deal with these pressures remains to be seen. Certainly, the evidence is that although first generation migrants tend to be more religious than the people of the country to which they migrate, the second generation are less religious than their parents.⁸¹ Much of what happens will hinge on how well the parent country is felt to accommodate the needs and culture of its new arrivals, and how well the migrants

⁸⁰ Feroughian, S (2006) From kebab and kofta to fish and chips. Masters thesis, University of Auckland.

⁸¹ e.g. for Australia, see NCLS Research <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid+22>
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themselves do in terms of material and educational success in the new country. It is axiomatic that the happier people are, the less likely it is that there will be social and personal problems.

In the meantime, the current reality will prevail. The domestic mainstream religious scene will continue to morph into some new and as yet undetermined state, although the signs are that it will continue to be more self-determined and less institutionalised than ever. Migrants will continue to arrive in large numbers, bringing their own religions with them, often holding fast to them, at least initially. One can only reiterate the value that most of us hold for honouring diversity and difference. The way ahead for maximal wellbeing and success for the whole society is to ensure that everyone feels included, has an adequate income and housing, gains a good education, and basically feels that they are living in a just, safe and welcoming society. If any of these is in short supply, religion and every other cultural and social issue will suffer, and we could be in for deep trouble. So let us be committed to respecting and celebrating diversity, and to ensuring that this is a prosperous, participatory and equitable society where everyone benefits according to his or her own capacity. Religion is about the big issues of life (and death). What will happen in this domain in the future New Zealand is not certain. But we have to be aware of what is going on, and to acknowledge that religion and spirituality are issues which we have to take account along with all the other important matters that make up an increasingly 'rainbow' society like ours.

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