

The 2013 Census and Religion

The three most significant trends identified in the 2013 census:

- (1) **The continuing atrophy of Christian numbers both numerically and proportionally** (down by more than 8% since 2006; those who affiliated with a religion fell 5.5 per cent during the same period).

The 2013 figure for all Christians has fallen to below 50% (to 1.9m), making Christians a minority for the first time (compare the 1956 figure of 90+% Christians). The number of census respondents who indicated “no religion”, or who did not answer the religious affiliation question, was greater than the total number who identified as Christian. This is an important psychological as well as demographical threshold and raises anew the question of national identity and of New Zealand being a “Christian country”.

Roman Catholics, in second place in 2006, with their higher birth rates and the addition of Catholic immigrants to New Zealand, have replaced Anglicans as the largest church in New Zealand at 11.07%. This is unprecedented although Catholics numbers have decreased as a percentage of the population.

The full defection rate from the main Christian denominations is masked by the addition of immigrant Christians (e.g. Presbyterian and Methodist from Korea, and Catholics from the Philippines and the Pacific islands).

The mainstream Protestant churches have further declined (Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists); the only notable Christian growth is among some Pentecostal and independent evangelical churches, albeit from a low base.

The Protestant churches continue to evidence increases in mean age with reduced numbers due more to death and non-replacement with younger members than by conversion to another faith or recording “no religion”.

- (2) **The number of people who indicated “no religion” (“nones”) has increased notably** from 2006 to 2013 (up from 1.297m to 1.635m, or +26%, to 40+% of the population)

This figure is comparatively high and internationally an integral part of our profile, in particularly the under 39 age bands, with “no religion” decreasing in each age band above that. The “nones” add to the religious diversity of New Zealand although overseas studies suggest that amongst “nones” only a minority are atheists while the majority are simply non-religiously affiliated, reflecting a wide variety of religious and spiritual activities and interests. Studies undertaken at Victoria University of Wellington (2013) support this with only 12% of the “nones” being atheists; the majority describing themselves as “spiritual rather than religious”, or “spiritual seekers” who individually construct belief systems and personal spiritual practices, often eclectically. And while, “religiously de-institutionalised”-

often generationally - might be a more accurate designation, the lack of institutional identification reinforces the decline in the public role of the church and other religious bodies in New Zealand (secularisation).

Those who decline to answer indicate that this figure might be even higher.

(3) There has been a notable increase in the numbers of those that identify with a religious tradition other than Christianity.

New Zealand now has sizeable Hindu (c. 89,000+), Buddhist (C. 58,000+), Muslim (c. 45,000+) and Sikh (c. 19,000+) communities all of which have grown significantly from 2006 to 2013. These communities almost exclusively consist of migrants and their families with the exception of the Buddhists who include approximately 25% New Zealand “converts”.

These traditions often entail a public visibility that can make them even more noticeable than the numbers suggest.

There has been a significant increase in those who identify with religions other than Christianity, representing in 2013 more than 6% of the population.

There are two related issues that need to be noted:

- (1) The religious communities above are not monolithic and the intersection of religion and ethnicity provides a context for understanding patterns of migration, places of origin, and the intra-religious diversity of communities (such as New Zealand’s “Muslim community”, which in reality is made up of families from more than 40 countries with a number of waves of migration and finding refuge here).
- (2) So called “migrant religions” are found predominantly but not exclusively in the four large urban centres with a disproportionate number in a small number of Auckland suburbs, so that, perhaps as many as half of all Muslims and Hindus are in Auckland. These numbers have impacted on the religious diversity profile of Auckland. There are, of course, smaller numbers around the country.

There are considerable Implications of likely 2013 Census figures for the management of religious diversity at the local and national levels:

- (1) Education – reflecting the backgrounds of increasingly diverse students will require further efforts and the acrimonious public and media debates about (Christian) religious education in our schools are likely to further intensify with greater numbers of parents who are “nones” or non-Christian.

The new NCEA courses in Religious Studies, under the rubric of Social Studies, are likely to have increased take up and will require additional professional resourcing for teacher training. School organisation, including assemblies will necessitate greater awareness of religious diversity as will food offerings and greater calendric and timetable flexibility. The same issues will increasingly affect tertiary educational establishments too.

Religious affiliation has a bearing on educational achievement and attainment.

- (2) Workplace – the need for policies on “reasonable accommodation” at work will be evident with the increased numbers of “nones”, non-Christians, and the minority of more committed Christians making it difficult to assume a standard, collective workplace culture.

These accommodations include managing different sacred calendars and holydays; dress codes; dietary habits; majority Christian festivities; and diverse moral sensibilities.

The number of enquires and complaints to the Human Rights Commission is steadily increasing as are the number of employment tribunals where religion is a factor. There will be a growing need for training in religious diversity for court officials, lawyers, mediators and others and for resource materials for employers, employees, unions, and policy makers at the local and national levels.

- (3) Health services – the health services are an area where the accommodation of religious diversity could be dramatically improved. Issues include: indigenous and religious conceptions of wellness and illness and their causes; dietary concerns in public hospitals and clinics; communal issues of support for patients; autopsies; and diverse religious notions of privacy and intimacy.

Further guidance and training will be required. There is growing evidence that “reasonable accommodation” of religious diversity by health authorities correlates highly with improved health outcomes.

Religious affiliation has a bearing on physical and mental health (for example, Pentecostal churches, the Latter Day Saints Church and others do not sanction the use of alcohol or drugs).

Mental health is likewise diversely understood in different religious communities and these differences need to be recognised and addressed by religiously trained in religious diversity.

Related to this is aging. Again, there are very different understandings in different religious traditions, and of family responsibilities for aging family members. Different religious traditions have different notions of the provision of statutory welfare raising questions about the best ways to ensure adequate provision. A recent study of the spiritual needs of residential retirement establishments not only reported considerable levels of inadequate provision but recognised that addressing this is made more difficult by the increasing religious diversity of residents, including “nones”.

- (4) Media – complaints about religious reporting are noticeably growing with increased religious diversity and are expected to continue to do so. Training for journalists is needed, as is media training for religious communities.
- (5) Other areas likely to be impacted upon by increased religious diversity are policing and the justice system (including provision for religious diversity in prisons).
- (6) Diverse users of government services at all levels will need to engage with increased and intensified religious diversities, including “nones”.
- (7) The country is increasingly religious diverse with every region having decreased religious populations, except Auckland which had a 1.2% increase in the number of religious residents and was the only region with more religious people in 2013 than in 2006. It also had the highest proportion of people with a religion, at 59.6%, though this fell from 63.5% in 2006. Nationally, 55 per cent of the population had a religious affiliation in 2013. Wellington “nones”, the highest in the country, contrast with the lower figures for our largest city and rural New Zealand.

This regional diversity will require more localised policies and initiatives to address increasing religious diversity.

- (8) Faith-based, mostly Christian, charities play a considerable role in the provision of the country’s welfare services. The dramatic decline in church numbers is already impacting on the levels of support for these charities and raising sufficient funds is becoming more difficult. The decline of these charitable organisations will serve to increase the need for the funding of alternative welfare and social services.

Volunteering too is higher among those with religious affiliations and the lower number of religious people has implications for organisations and charities which currently rely on volunteers.

In conclusion, increased religious pluralism highlights the need for developing policies on the management of religious diversity. We have as yet as a country done very little directly on this front and following the lead of countries like Canada and Australia we need to do much more. We can

also learn selectively what we might do, and what we should not do, by looking at initiatives in Australia, Britain, France, Holland, Germany and the USA.

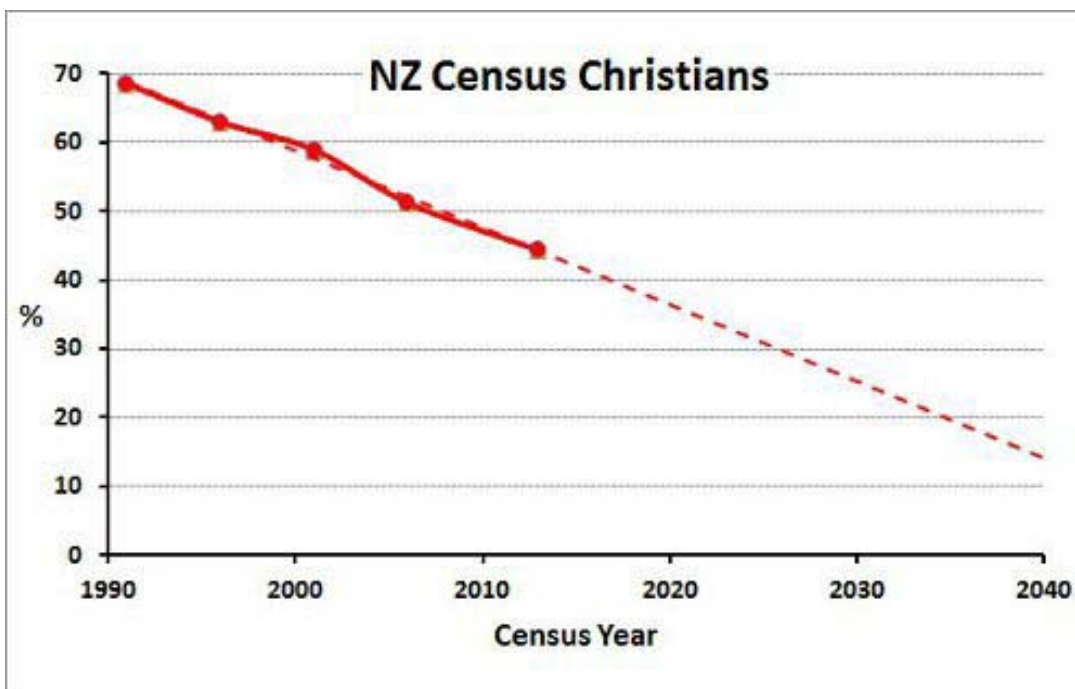
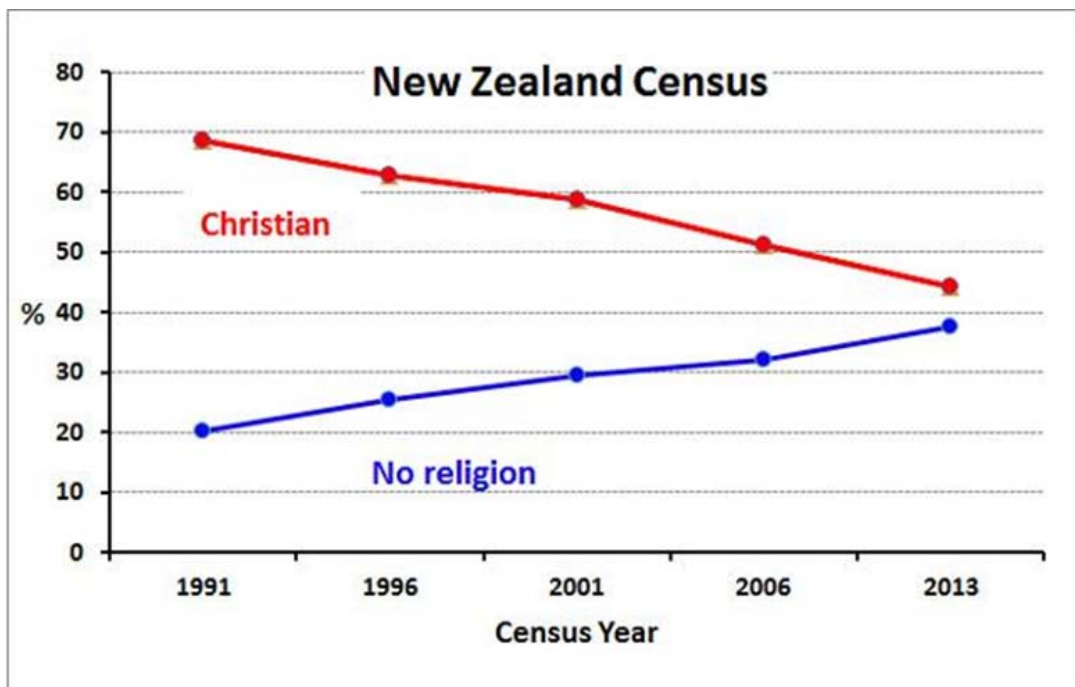
Paul Taylor, Pew Research Centre, in his new book, *The Next America* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), writes of America as a nation that by “mid-century will be majority non-white and our median age will edge above 40 - both unprecedented milestones”, and with a growing number of particularly younger people who do not identify with any religious group. Taylor argues that these demographic changes are the “defining demographic story” of our era and that these changes “will put stress on our politics, families, pocketbooks, entitlement programs and social cohesion”, and will require timely, thoughtful consideration by political parties, government departments, individuals and civil society organizations. These factors are evident in New Zealand too and likewise demand thinking, planning and new policies to address this “demographic seismic shift”. Huge gaps have opened up in our political and social values, our economic well-being, our family structure, our racial and ethnic identity, our gender norms, our religious affiliation, and our technology use.

Increasing diversities also raise concerns about national identity (for example, debates about the National anthem, and flag; the parliamentary prayer; and, shopping on Easter Monday) social cohesion and social inclusivity and the need to consider these in the light of increasing religious differences. In the New Zealand context the often uneasy relationship between biculturalism and religious and cultural diversities requires urgent consideration.

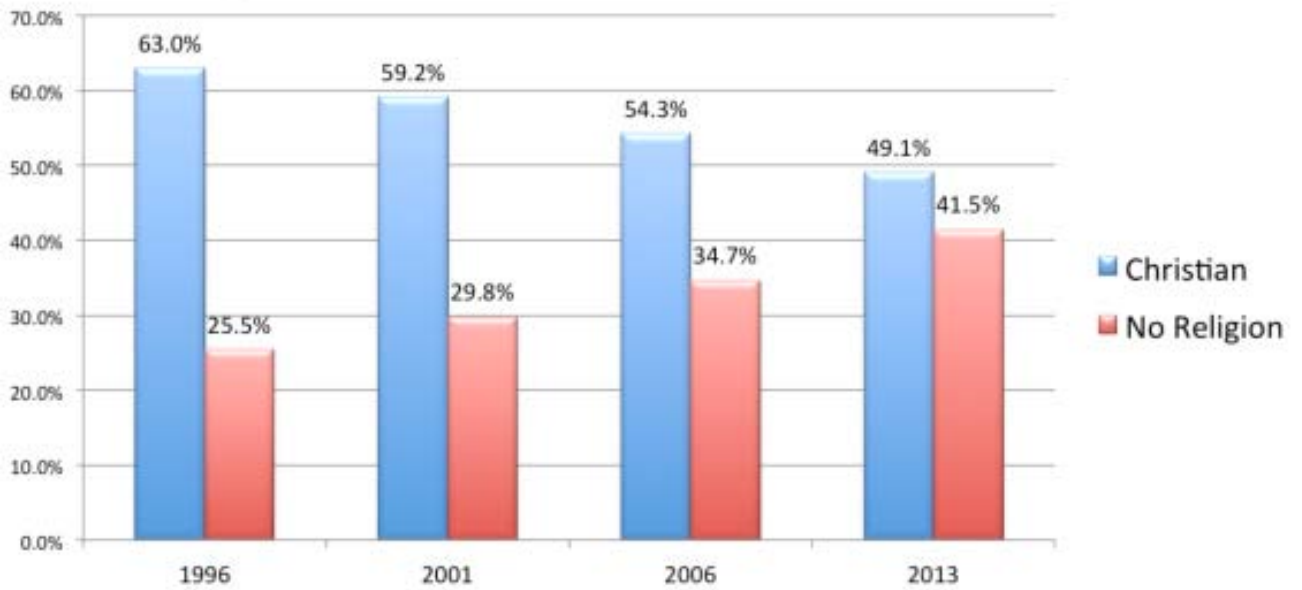
Paul Morris



Charts:



Religious Affiliation in New Zealand, 1996-2013



New Zealand Religious Affiliation by Denomination, 1996-2013

