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POST-CHRISTENDOM NEW ZEALAND

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In *Post-Christendom Studies*, there does not seem to be an agreed-upon meaning for the descriptor. Some use it to mean "Post-Christian" or as an equivalent to "secular." This seems to me a missed opportunity of a useful category. A fine study of the crisis of Christendom in Australia in the 1960s has referred to it as a discursive practice in which the respectable churches had a recognized voice in the public space.[1] Perhaps it also refers to some kind of special status given to a select group of churches by the state and by the community. Post-Christendom, then, would refer to a loss of opportunities and a loss in social status by this group of churches.

It follows that these phenomena will reflect on the nature of the public space and the reputation of those churches in any particular state. Global or Western circumstances may play some role, but there will be a distinctive national narrative. The post-Christendom narrative will be different than the typical secularizing narrative, in which data will always illustrate a decline in levels of religious belief and practice. In contrast, a post-Christendom narrative may reflect a variety of trends in Christian practice. It will be equally different from a post-Christian narrative. Such narratives can helpfully incorporate the rise of other religions and spiritualities, but nevertheless insist upon Christian decline and disaffiliation. Often this interpretation focuses on the "mainstream Protestant" traditions, but does not explain why these phemomena are prevalent in these churches. It is often deeply shaped by the postmodern language about post-enlightenment thinking.

1. Chilton, *Evangelicals and the End of Christendom*.

This is not to say that post-Christendom language is always the best explanation. There are other ways of reading the trends, for example by distinguishing religions by certain ethnic groups or migrants from others, or exploring other larger changes in the state, such as the patterns of voluntary and coercive associations, or of the balance of the private to the public.

The task, then, is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of any historical narrative, and the different aspects of the story which they highlight. New Zealand's place in the secularizing narrative has been highlighted by earlier interpreters. The most persuasive advocate of this interpretation was Professor Lloyd Geering, Principal of the Presbyterian theological college, who was tried for heresy by the Presbyterian Church in 1967 and left it to be the first Professor of Religious Studies at a secular New Zealand university, from which he proclaimed the end of the age of religion.[2] Post-Christian interpreters have also written about the New Zealand religious experience, mostly in the mode of lament.[3] This paper seeks to explore aspects of the story which might be more relevant to a Christendom motif and then looks at a post-Christendom trend.

Christendom and its High Point in New Zealand

The presence of Christendom in New Zealand was weak at the outset of the colonization of the country because the early settlers insisted that the established Church of England would have no privileges in New Zealand. Thus, unlike its near neighbor Australia, there was no phase of Anglican privilege and nor was there a phase, as Australia had after that, where the main Christian denominations were subsidized by the state at least in schooling. Indeed, remarkably, at the time that the British annexed the land by a treaty of annexation (the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi) from its indigenous inhabitants, the Maori, an

2. Geering, "New Zealand Enters the Secular Age," 161–86. See Pelly and Stuart, eds., *A Religious Atheist?*

3. Grimshaw, "Tall Cows, Sacred Poppies and the Fallible Pantheon," 103–10; Riddell, "Beyond Ground Zero," 215–30.

informal "fourth article" provided oral agreement that Maori traditions along with the known missionary religions—Anglican, Wesleyan, and Catholic—would be treated equally and indiscriminately.[4]

Yet there were remnants of Christian advantage in that early era, given that the governors and settler population were from Great Britain, and British legal precedents were the basis of law in the colony. The early Church Missionary Society missionaries had equated the British crown with the conversion of the Maori from Christmas Day in 1814 when Samuel Marsden, chaplain of the New South Wales Convict Colony had preached for the first time under a British Union Jack flag. The first Governor of the Colony had been given instructions from the Colonial Office to support the missionaries, and the missionaries played a critical role in persuading Maori to sign the Treaty of Waitangi. For many years thereafter, settler New Zealand had no established church but there was a special place for Christianity among Maori, with primary schools in Maori run by the Church of England, and each of the large denominations provided with the land to operate secondary schools for the Maori elite.

In the nineteenth century, churches were not given any privileges, which was emphasized by several parliamentary votes: the vote against the subsidies of the stipend Bishop of New Zealand by the Colonial Office being picked up by the settler parliament when the colony became self-governing in 1854. In some of the provinces the churches were strong. The Otago province was in effect a colony sponsored by the newly created Free Church of Scotland, and a significant portion of land sales created a "Church and School Estate," which to this day forms an important source of income for religion in southern New Zealand. A similar if less generous measure was part of the "Anglican" settlement of Christchurch in the province of Canterbury, and its ecclesiastical links were marked by the location of the cathedral in the center of the city, and the names of streets and again the

4. Church and Society Commission, NCC Book Working Group, *The Pakeha and the Treaty*; Low, "Bishop Pompallier and Te Tiriti," 114–27; Gilling, "Karaiti & Culture," 92.

endowment of the church. In other parts of New Zealand, there were governor's pews in key churches (not just Anglican), there were land grants for churches in most settlements, and the church received a certain amount of informal patronage. Sunday was closely protected from the 1870s under the Police Offences Act, prohibiting any commercial activities on that day of the week. Nevertheless, when the provincial governments were abolished in 1876, the Act of the national parliament that decided that education in primary schools should be "free, compulsory and secular" awakened deep debate. Protestants wanted biblical studies and prayer in schools, and Catholics wanted state subsidies for their parochial schools, but sharp differences between Catholics and Protestants forced the secular solution, although Bible in Schools programs then entered the state schools by the back door, in an informal arrangement allowing a religious education programme access to schools during "closed hours" at the beginning of the day. There were chaplains in the military after the British model. The pubs were closed on Sundays from 1917 until 1967.

Other evidence of the deep respect and role which Christianity held in the society can be produced. When the Parliament dispensed with Anglicanism as a state faith in 1854, it nevertheless decided that proceedings in the House would open with a Christian prayer. As what has been called "re-colonization" developed in the late nineteenth century, the status of the churches grew. Newspapers often published sermons and addressed theological issues, and churches had high levels of nominal affiliation, even though levels of religious attendance were relatively low, peaking at 30 percent of adults around 1901.

The religiousness of the empire was inevitably a critical factor in this, since the governors were consistently British aristocrats and Anglicans, and the military forces were part of the imperial contingents.[5] When the monarch called for days of prayer in wartime or other times of need, the New Zealand state followed suit. State funerals generally gravitated to Anglican cathedrals. When the state took over radio broadcasting in 1928,

5. Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*.

religion was carefully nurtured. The once strongly secular educational institutions became more open to religion. The accreditation of theology degrees by Otago University in 1945 marked an important precedent. The formation of the National Council of Churches in 1941 provided a useful instrument for the nurturing of the role of Protestantism in society and extended also to the Catholic Church.

The Decline

There is no consistent pattern to the decline in different jurisdictions, so the patterns of that decline in New Zealand bear close inspection. I want to explore a number of contexts within which "post-Christendom" language helpfully interprets trends. These are selective topics, topics in which status and discourse are critical. It does not need to refer to church adherence and attendance trends, nor of the changing balance within denominations, although these too are changing profoundly.

Chaplaincies

During the 1950s there was a flourishing of chaplaincies, as the state responded to the possibility of working with the churches as a combined group. Industrial chaplaincy also flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, as companies saw the value of pastoral support.[6] These chaplaincies have continued to play an important role, but their relationship to the "sites" of ministry and to the churches has changed significantly in the last forty years. There has been a growing call for greater respect for other religions in the workplace.[7] The military chaplains had moments of crisis in the First World War, when there were disputes between the Anglican Church, seeking to trade on its role in the British Army, and other Protestants. The secular leadership of the army had to step in to enforce coordination. Since then the military has controlled the appointment of the Principal Defence Force Chaplain,

6. Horrill, *Forging a Workplace Mission*. This study has minimal reflection on the "Christendom" aspects of the service and how it changed.

7. Pio, "Religious Diversity in New Zealand Workplaces," 133–38.

although there is a Chaplaincy Defence Advisory Council with representatives of the major denominations. Standard ratios of chaplains were established by three categories: Anglican, Catholic, and Other Denominations. There is as yet no provision for chaplains from other religions.[8] Prison chaplains, established as a state-funded service in 1952 supervised by the National Council of Churches, after a major reorganization in 2000 became the Prison Chaplaincy Service, in a contractual role with the Department of Corrections to supply chaplains to the prisons, with no real association with the churches.[9] Hospital chaplaincies have much closer links with denominations, to whom they look for funding, although managed by regional interdenominational committees. Funding cuts from district health boards under financial pressures have increased these links, as they are not seen as essential by the hospitals themselves.[10] Tertiary chaplains were introduced after the war and are increasingly supported by the state institutions because they provide support for many students and help the institutions to show compliance with the code of pastoral care. But in all these cases the relationship with national churches has sharply diminished, since many clients are often not from the "mainline churches" and many who welcome support are not Christian. Yet chaplaincy is welcome, albeit as a contracted "professional support service," and in effect an alternative contractor could win the contract, which in all cases takes responsibility for the spiritual care of clients of all religions.

Media Profile of Churches

A significant aspect of this decline in New Zealand has been the rapid decline of public media profile of religion. In some respects, this is the most striking in New Zealand, because the churches had established a strong presence, especially in the government-run radio and television service, largely following

8. Tagg, "The 'Jesus Nut,'" 50–62.

9. Mansill, "A Civil and Ecclesiastical Union"; Roberts, "Prison Chaplaincy in New Zealand."

10. Rodgers, *A Place of Springs*. This is the story of one reflective chaplain. The service needs historical analysis. For a call for a non-religious chaplaincy see Woodhouse, "Chaplaincy for the Non-Religious," 31–32.

the cultural ideals of the BBC. Prior to the nationalization of almost all the existing radio stations under the first Labour government, some of the incorporated stations had very strong religious links, and Colin Scrimgeour, the first director of Commercial Broadcasting, was a former Methodist minister who had established the 1ZB station in Auckland, the most popular commercial station, while James Shelley, the director of the YA stations, was deeply influenced by the Reith tradition of British broadcasting.[11]

The churches' role in this broadcasting was mediated from 1938 by the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC), which had representatives of all the churches on it. Sunday services were shared out among the churches, and the denominations decided which churches would be selected to be "on air." The CRAC issued a Radio Hymnbook in 1962 and broadcast services were expected to select their hymns from it.

Then, in 1961 broadcasting was placed in the hands of the semi-independent New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC), which gradually developed a policy for religious broadcasts, especially as it created a "National Program," placing its emphasis on meeting the needs of the broader public rather than church-goers, and they reduced the number of church services broadcast.[12] The larger denominations cooperated with these changes and appointed their own directors of religious broadcasting who liaised closely with the NZBC. The most noted of these was the Rev. George Dallard of the Presbyterian church who had previously served in the BBC. He was succeeded by Michael Jackson-Campbell. Anglicans used Fr. Austin Charles and then Fr. Charles Harrison, and Catholics Fr. John Coleman. There was general support for the aim to make religious broadcasts more topical. Television broadcasts commenced in 1960, and the National Council of Churches' "Churches Television Commission" (with informal Catholic support) arranged a program of Sunday religious broadcasts, again more topical.[13]

11. See Day, *The Radio Years*, 177–79 and passim.
12. Day, *Voice and Vision*, 148.
13. Dallard, *The "God Slot."*

In 1971, the NZBC replaced the CRAC with a body with reduced advisory status. Producers of Religious Programs were appointed. The breakup of the NZBC and creation of Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and Radio New Zealand directly influenced religious broadcasting. TVNZ was increasingly governed by the need to attract commercial revenue, and once advertisements were allowed on all days of the week there was a disincentive for religious broadcasting. In 1987, the Rev. Chris Nichol was appointed in charge of a small religious broadcasting unit for television, although this was a part-time role, and latterly solely produced an early morning hymn program. The small Religion Unit in Radio New Zealand continued the emphasis on topicality. Maureen Garing (a Presbyterian and academic) was appointed as its producer in 1993. In 1996, religious broadcasting was reduced to a half-hour hymns session (later transferred to the Concert Program) and a half-hour topical news session on Sunday afternoon, "A Question of Religion," later called "Spiritual Outlook." Garing was not replaced when she died in 2011, and the unit merged into the spoken features section.[14] Thus the state radio and television programming today have a very narrow range of religious programs. Christmas and Easter services are broadcast, but there is virtually no voice for the churches on the state media.

At the heart of the programming of the state media lies their legislative responsibilities. Radio New Zealand is guided by its charter which was set by legislation in 1995 and amended in 2016. This places an emphasis on national identity and "promoting ethnic, cultural, and artistic diversity and expression." There is brief reference to a duty to "contribute towards intellectual and spiritual development."[15] As for TVNZ, the legal requirement to provide religious content was changed to a requirement to provide cultural content and even this requirement was removed

14. *Dominion Post*, 13 December 1996, 7.

15. Radio New Zealand Limited, "Briefing to Incoming Ministers," October 2017.

when the Charter was revoked by the government of the day in 2008.[16]

The contrast with the state-owned broadcasters in similar countries is significant. In Australia, for example, the religious broadcasting of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation carefully encompasses all religions, but offers a fine documentation of the full gamut of voices that are only ever noticed in New Zealand if they are "badly behaved."

At the same time, religious programs are often seen and heard on the private media, which developed after 1966. Religious groups are able to purchase time on television stations. Those that do so are almost all marginal sectarian groups or Pentecostal mega churches, and sometimes other world religions. Since 1978, there has been a Christian radio station, Radio Rhema which now has several frequencies addressed to different audiences. And more recently there have been up to three Christian television stations, two of them Adventist (broadcasting fairly abysmal American content) and one Pentecostal program, Shine TV. Furthermore, the Christian Broadcasting Association has for fifty years provided Easter programming for one of the main private radio stations; an astounding reminder of a story which is far from one of general decline.[17]

Public Ritual

The state rituals of New Zealand included the rituals associated with the Governor General, the rituals of courts and parliament, and state commemorative events. In New Zealand and Australia there was a certain uniqueness in the commemoration of ANZAC Day, rather than Armistice Day, to commemorate the war dead from the First World War. This has awakened intense public interest, as a context for civil religion. The protocols for it were established at the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings in 1915. It served as a memorial service in lieu of funerals for the many victims, and initially every church held services, followed

16. I am grateful to Paul Bushnell of Radio New Zealand for his advice on this section.

17. Hawkesby and Cowan, *Talking on Water*.

by a civic service led by prominent Protestant clergy and local dignitaries. The dawn service was first introduced in Australia, but became the major event, and during the late 1930s the Returned Services Association took control of the protocol of the services, and its self-selected chaplains conducted the religious aspect of the service—the prayers in particular. The service is now controlled by a standard ritual, including a hymn ("Abide with me"), a recitation ("in Flanders field") and an incantation ("they shall grow not old as we who are left grow old").

There has been intense debate over the power of this ritual and its religious significance. New Zealanders have few other occasions in the year when they manifest any ritual dignity, as society has become more casual. Yet ANZAC Day attendance has grown immensely in recent years, and it is perhaps the only invocation of national pride (albeit commemorating a defeat). The Christian language of the ritual is unmistakeable, yet the churches have nothing to do with it and even the state struggles to amend the rituals. Some see it as a classic example of civil religion, and other deny it.[18] Whatever we may think, it is not really a compelling example of cooperation between church and state, although it has other features of Christendom discourse.

Rituals associated with other state events became increasingly secular. There was some public discussion when Helen Clark decided that the state banquet for the visit of Queen Elizabeth II would not commence with Grace.[19] The indigenous Maori people have shown some concern at these trends. In this respect Maori retained a more respected role in New Zealand society than did almost any other displaced indigenous people (albeit with gross prejudice as well). As their political status rose, they expected respect for *wahi tapu*, sacred sites, and increasingly the law enshrined this concern.[20]

18. Billings, "Is Anzac Day an Incidence of 'Displaced Christianity'?" 229–42; Pickering, "The Insubstantial Pageant"; Sharpe, "Anzac Day in New Zealand 1916–39," 97–114; and Davis, "Anzac Day Meanings and Memories."

19. See Ahdar, "Reflections on the Path of Religion-State Relations in New Zealand," 642.

20. Turner, "Environmental Law," 82–87; Wheeler, "Resources and Life Forces."

Yet in parallel with this secularization went a new move towards what was in effect religious ritual, as Maori were given a new status, as honoring the people of the land became a state protocol. Frequently the rituals followed were in fact Christian rituals. Grace at meals, karakia (prayers) to open every occasion, were somehow acceptable when given in the Maori language. (Some of us who are competent in Maori and "religious" have been called upon to give prayers, even prayers in English, because Maori protocol demands it.) Yet from the point of view of the state, there is a truly New Zealand ritual required for the opening of buildings for example, and these dawn ceremonies, with prayers and water rituals.[21]

In many cases these use familiar Christian language, although sometimes they evoke the old gods and take traditional Maori views of the noa and the ritually untouchable. In the eyes of the state it does not particularly matter; the ritual is performative. It is also not Christian in the sense that it is not defined in these terms.

The Visits and Ceremonial Events Office (VCO) of the Department of Internal Affairs takes responsibility for official occasions. Its policy guidelines make no reference to religion.[22] Yet religious elements frequently emerge. Thus, for example, the state funeral of Sir Edmund Hillary was held in Holy Trinity Cathedral in Auckland with a lying-in state in the old Cathedral building, and many remarked on the religious tone of this significant event for a not particularly religious national hero. But on other occasions, at the discretion of the VCO, the protocol is non-religious. A Maori element is today expected at public events. Official visits by heads of state are specified as including,

> The visitor is greeted by the Governor-General's Official Secretary, Kaumātua and Kuia on arrival. The Māori ceremonial comprises a Wero (challenge) by the warrior party, Karanga (call of welcome),

21. Ahdar, "Indigenous Spiritual Concerns and the Secular State," 611–37; Kolig, "Coming through the Back Door?" 183–204; Fraser, "Secular Schools, Spirituality and Maori Values," 87–95.

22. See: https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-Other-Services-Visits-and-Ceremonial-Events.

> Haka Pōwhiri (Dance of Welcome) and hongi. The military ceremonial comprises a Royal Guard of Honour, Royal Salute and Artillery Salute, playing of National Anthems, parading of The Queen's and Regimental Colours and inspection of the Royal Tri-Service Guard of Honour.[23]

This secularity nevertheless is overridden by Maori sensitivity, and the Resource Management Act requires all users to be sensitive to and respect Maori cultural protocol especially for their sacred places. But this is justified as respect for culture.[24] This spirituality shows a significant reflection of a Christian background, but it is the indigenous element which gives it authority and status.

Blasphemy Law

Blasphemy remains on the lawbook under the Crimes act 1961 section 123. Leave has to be provided by the Attorney General before cases may be brought, and this leave has not been granted since 1921. Leave was sought in 1998 to bring a private prosecution against the display in the state museum, Te Papa of the British artistic piece "Virgin in a Condom" by Tania Kovats, but the Solicitor General would not acknowledge that an offence had been committed or permit a private prosecution. Similarly, no leave was granted in the case of the showing of the satirical program South Park on a private TV channel.[25] It has been suggested in other jurisdictions that the blasphemy law could be extended to other religions and thus protect Muslim sensibilities, but this has not even been discussed in New Zealand.[26] A private member's bill in 2017 made moves to remove blasphemy from the Crimes Act but it was not in the end pursued after government caution.[27] There remain some concerns over appropriate

23. VCO Operational Policy Guidelines (October 2019), 18.3.

24. Van der Krogt, "New Zealand," 68–91.

25. Ahdar, "The Right to Protection of Religious Feelings," 629–56.

26. See Ahdar, "Reflections on the Path of Religion-State Relations in New Zealand," 619–60.

27. Boston, "Banishing Blasphemy," 2. For the New Zealand detail see Weekes, "Blasphemy Law Set to be Ditched," *Nelson Mail*, 10 May 2017, 4; and "Blasphemy Still Against the Law," *Dominion Post*, 25 May 2017, 2.

language in broadcasting and these standards are protected by the Broadcasting Standards Authority, but its decisions are in effect final.[28]

Official Secularity

In Parliament, the prayer was challenged several times under Labour administrations in particular. There were changing patterns of those swearing allegiance on the Bible and those making a declaration, and this rose sharply after 2000.

There is, moreover, much evidence that the Bill of Rights and a parliament uneasy about religious arguments have sought to exclude religion from the public sphere. Chris Van der Krogt notes the remnants of the public holidays on Christmas day, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, but also notes how people of other religions may transfer these days to days sacred to them.[29] Churches and other religions were permitted to maintain their traditions in the private context including restrictions that in other contexts would offend against the rights of the individual. But individuals showed increasing insistence that their secularity should be protected by the state.[30]

Much of this was reinforced by the Statement of Religious Diversity prepared by the Clark Labour Government after some controversies in 2007 and finalized in 2009 under the name of the Human Rights Commissioner. This Statement, used as a guide to police and state bodies and intended to provide reassurance after the tensions of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, was intended to be an example to the world as to how to reduce religious tension. There was a significant debate over this within the Christian world, and the language was supported by the traditional Protestant churches, while Catholics were concerned at the use of the term "secular" to force religions into the private sphere, while Pentecostals insisted that New Zealand was Christian

28. See Lealand, "Attitudes to Acceptable Standards of Language," Broadcasting Standards Authority, 1990.

29. Van der Krogt, "New Zealand," 68–91.

30. Cook, "Spirituality, Pakeha and No Religion in Aotearoa/New Zealand."

country, oblivious to the way in which that tradition had historically penalized sectarian groups![31]

The Impact on Churches

These are only examples. The roles of religion in education, in censorship, and in rates and tax exemptions could equally have been explored. In some cases religious bodies are in a stronger place today than they were, but in each case there is a different language they need to observe in the public sphere. Thus the new era has an effect on the religious institutions themselves. In New Zealand, Anglicanism or Presbyterianism were the only two religious groups that ever had a potential to be a quasi-establishment. Unlike Australia, the Catholic Church was nowhere in the majority, although it was a significant minority in areas where goldminers had populated the country. Thus one could identify the forms of religion in this part of Christendom with reference to the British motif of established church (Anglican or Presbyterian), former established church (Catholic) and the Protestant Dissenters (Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, etc.). The term "Dissenting churches" or "Nonconformists" was eschewed by those churches, for the last thing they wanted to recognize was Anglican status. Consequently, the model of "mainstream" or "mainline" churches was used in New Zealand as it was in the USA and it essentially embraced the "big four" (Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Methodist).

It was the one-time mainstream Protestant churches that were most seriously affected by the changed status. They were in effect "Christendom" or its beneficiaries. And it is precisely they that have been required to make the largest adjustments in recent years.

31. Pratt, "Secular New Zealand and Religious Diversity," 52–64; Lineham, *Destiny*, 184–88; Griffiths, "Defining the Secular in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Era," 497–524.

Reflections on Models

So it is evident that the Christendom model is a useful tool. It explains how the reduction of the status of the churches is not simply a consequence of declining adherence. It explains the ways in which loss of status operates. Nevertheless, it is not fully effective as an explanatory factor, since there clearly are other independent factors in operation for the ways in which in some locations or contexts Christendom is followed by a move to patronise all religions, and in other cases all religions are excluded or reduced to cultural or ethnic factors. In his book on Australian religious change in the 1960s, Hugh Chilton relates the particular pattern of decline there to the parallel decline in imperial links in Australia, bringing as it did, endorsement for status-based religion. The decline of religious status has, however, shown somewhat different trends in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, especially in New South Wales, the Catholic Church was a strong anti-imperial force, in a way that was unthinkable in New Zealand, and the proportions of Orthodox and Lutheran meant that Christianity was much more diverse in many parts of the island continent. Even in New Zealand there are varying circumstances in different parts of the country. But in general, "mainstream Protestantism" has no status as a source of discourse, and alternative Christianities have little sense of the public space, although they occupy some spheres very successfully.

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