

## Churchgoing in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand

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FOR OVER a century New Zealand government censuses have ascertained the nominal religious affiliation of the population. Buried at the back of the census volumes for 1874-1926 there are other religious statistics relating to all the European places of worship in the country. Whereas the British statistics on places of worship, covering a single year, 1851, are famous,<sup>1</sup> these New Zealand ones, covering fifty years, are obscure. They deserve to be better known.

Though the New Zealand place of worship statistics included information about churchgoing, contemporaries showed extraordinarily little interest in them, itself a testimony to the marginal role of organized religion in the new land. Historians, especially of late, have taken more notice, but where acquaintance has been made it has been on the run.<sup>2</sup> Part of the reason for this is a scepticism about their reliability. Professor Oliver, for example, once cited them 'for what they are worth'.<sup>3</sup> In fact they are worth a great deal. They are more complete and probably more reliable than the British religious statistics from the census of 1851. They allow some precise statements about the religiosity of New Zealanders of European origin.<sup>4</sup> They allow comparisons between

1 K. S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XI (1960), 74-86; W. S. F. Pickering, 'The 1851 Religious Census—a Useless Experiment?', *British Journal of Sociology*, XVIII (1967), 382-407; David M. Thompson, 'The 1851 Religious Census-Problems and Possibilities', *British Journal of Sociology*, XVIII (1967), 87-97.

2 Those who have used the statistics include J. J. (Hans) Mol, 'Religion' in A. L. McLeod, ed., *The Pattern of New Zealand Culture*, Ithaca, 1968, pp.158-75; Erik Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in W. H. Oliver, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1981, pp.263-66; Peter J. Lineham, 'A Bible in the Baggage', *Comment*, N. S. No. 13 (1981), 23-27; Colin Brown, *Forty Years On: a History of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand 1941-1981*, Christchurch, 1918, pp. 3-4. One indication of haste is that care has not been taken to test the reliability of the figures; another is that the proportions of attenders in the census years have not been expressed as percentages of the changing proportion of the adult population. Rollo Arnold, 'The Patterns of Denominationalism in Later Victorian New Zealand', in Christopher Nicol and James Veitch, *Religion in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1980, pp.76-110, uses census affiliation data to good effect, but eschews the place of worship statistics.

3 W. H. Oliver, 'Christianity among the New Zealanders', *Landfall*, XX (1966), 6.

4 This article ignores the churchgoing of Maoris. It is unlikely that significant numbers of Maoris were included in the returns of places of worship under the Census Act.

churchgoing in New Zealand and in other countries. And most important of all, they may provide clues as to the causes of that decline in churchgoing which began in various parts of the western world in the 1880s.<sup>5</sup> In this article I will ignore the last question and concentrate on New Zealand churchgoing during its rise and zenith. André Siegfried commented after a visit in 1904: 'No tradition has remained so strong in New Zealand as the religious one.' He also wrote that 'in New Zealand society religious duties form part of life itself, and public opinion suffers no one to lay them aside, or at least to infringe them'.<sup>6</sup> How well do his impressions measure up against the statistics on religious practice?

The Census Act of 1858 provided the legislative basis for all censuses in late nineteenth century New Zealand. Section 14 of this act (21 and 22 Victoria, No.20) empowered, though did not require, the Colonial Secretary, to 'cause inquiries, to be approved by the Governor in Council, to be addressed to the persons having or reputed to have the superintendence of establishments or institutions of the character described in Schedule B'. Persons to whom inquiries were addressed were bound to answer to the best of their knowledge and belief, under pain of a fine not exceeding twenty pounds. Amongst the institutions specified in Schedule B were churches, chapels and other places of worship.

In Britain by 1858 the idea of another religious census had become contentious. One of Horace Mann's findings from the census he supervised in 1851 was that four out of every ten worshippers in England and Wales were Nonconformists.<sup>7</sup> Mann's finding could be and was contested but supporters of the establishment did not want to see another census of worship. Whatever the precise ratio of church to chapelgoers, counting worshippers could only undermine the claim that the Church of England was the church of the English. Did the enactment of section 14 reflect the weaker position of the Church of England in New Zealand? At the 1851 census only one in every two New Zealand settlers claimed even nominal adherence to the Church of England. Or was it that Anglican politicians saw no reason for opposing section 14, since there was no religious establishment that a census of worship might put in jeopardy?

The first inquiry into public worship under the 1858 act was not made until 1874. Why, I do not know. But once constituted the inquiry became a regular feature of each census. The discretionary element was removed by a consolidating act of 1908 and then returned by the Census and Statistics Act of 1926.<sup>8</sup> The 1926 act unlike any of its predecessors made

5 Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1975, p.92.

6 André Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, trs. E. V. Burns, London, 1914, pp. 310, 322.

7 Pickering, '1851 Religious Census', pp.391-2.

8 Statistics Act, 1908 (8 Ed. VII, No. 185), Census and Statistics Act, 1926 (17 Geo. V, No. 3).

no mention of worship. Under the wide powers of section 9 the Minister could have continued to order the collection of religious attendance statistics. But no minister saw fit to do so. When the Census and Statistics Bill was before Parliament in 1926 it was generally agreed that costs of collecting statistical information ought to be reduced.<sup>9</sup> It may be that 'the inquiry into public worship was a casualty of financial stringency. But as the country was richer in 1926 than in 1874 we can only conclude that by the second quarter of the twentieth century religious statistics were less valued by the New Zealand government.

During the half-century when the censuses of public worship were conducted it seems to have been the normal practice for the census enumerators to distribute schedules to each place of worship within their districts. In all there were 704 such places in 1874, 4,283 in 1926. The enumerators forwarded the completed returns to the Registrar-General's office and when the results had been tabulated they were published as an appendix to the census report.<sup>10</sup> The schedules throughout the half-century sought information as to whether the place of worship was temporary or permanent, the number of persons who could be accommodated, and the number of attenders in the month of the census. Between 1874 and 1911 those who completed the schedule—presumably in most cases the ministers—were asked to state those 'usually attending'. Between 1916 and 1926 the schedule asked for the number of persons 'usually present' at the largest attended service of the day.

As time passed more information was collected. At the 1911 census and thereafter details were required about any Sunday school attached to the church, from 1916 the materials from which the church was built, in 1921 and 1926 the number of persons attending services who were within the district served by the church. For the censuses from 1874 to 1886 the only tables published were those for provinces and for denominations. From 1891 there was also a table for individual counties and for the last two censuses for boroughs and for counties exclusive of internal boroughs. I have tried to locate the original schedules but these have almost certainly been deliberately destroyed.

<sup>9</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, CCIX (1926), 927; National Archives, S 1/4/242, newspaper references to Census and Statistics Bill, 1926. The Department of Internal Affairs annual report for 1926-27 stated that the Act had been modified in the interests of efficiency. *Appendices to the Journals of the New Zealand House of Representatives* 1927, 111, H-22, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> During a day and half's search in the National Archives, Wellington, I was unable to locate a set of instructions to the census enumerators regarding places of worship or a schedule. I did see enough, however, to convince me about the role of the enumerators as collectors of the data. The point is important because if collection was done only through the enumerators then officials of the central denominational organizations had no chance to falsify attendances. For further indications that enumerators collected the schedules from the local ministers or officials, see *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1893, p.58, *New Zealand Census, General Report*, 1921, p.223.

Because return of a schedule was mandatory under the Census Act it is probable that the religious statistics in general were reasonably complete, certainly far more so than for the British 1851 census for which there was no sanction. At the 1921 census fewer than one in every hundred returns failed to estimate attenders.

The churchgoing returns should not be treated as more than estimates. It is impossible that the census enumerators should have exercised a close surveillance of how the counting was done, even supposing that they had been instructed to do so. No directions were given to the local officials as to how to arrive at the number of usual attenders, the same defect as had marred the 1851 British religious census. On the other hand there is no reason why the estimates taken as a whole should not provide a guide to trends in denominational churchgoing rates or in the overall level of attendance. Estimates of attenders may sometimes have been over-generous so as to boost denominational totals, but this is unlikely to have occurred on a considerable scale given that the relative strength of the denominations was not a matter of political importance, as in England. There is also no reason why exaggeration, if it occurred, should have done so more in one denomination than another or in any particular census year. Care must be exercised, however, in comparing denominational rates of attendance. The General Report on the 1916 census acknowledged that the figures relating to attendance may have been compiled differently by the denominations.<sup>11</sup> In particular practices may have varied as to the counting of Sunday school children.

In the case of at least one city we can measure the official statistics against a newspaper census. Auckland and suburbs were roughly equivalent to the county of Eden in 1891. According to the Registrar-General's figures in 1891 33 per cent of the population of the county of Eden were usual attenders. The churchgoing census conducted by the *Evening Star* in 1882 found that total *attendances* accounted for 38 per cent of Auckland's population. If we make allowance for those who attended more than once we come close to the Registrar-General's figure.<sup>12</sup>

Annual returns of attendants at Wesleyan Methodist services were published in the denomination's Conference reports. These show a high degree of correlation with the census series. The statistics committee of the northern Presbyterian body reported in 1893 that the census attendance figures were 'approximately accurate'.<sup>13</sup> But the strongest confirmation of the reliability of the official series for the major Protestant bodies is the way they run in parallel. The Church of England attendance series (attenders as a percentage of adherents fifteen and over) correlates positively with that of both the Presbyterian and Methodist series above

11 *New Zealand Census*, Government Statistician's Report, 1916, p.60.

12 M. J. Powell, 'The Church in Auckland Society, 1880-1886', M. A. thesis, Auckland University, 1970, p.215. I have ignored the returns of children's attendances in this newspaper census.

13 *Proceedings Presbyterian Church*, 1893, p.59; 1897, p.79.

the level at which there is a probability of only one in a thousand of the result arising by chance. The Methodist and Presbyterian series also correlate with one another above the level at which there is a probability of only one in a thousand of the result arising by chance.<sup>14</sup> Such high correlation is no guarantee of accuracy. Yet it is reasonable to conclude that the correlation arises from similar movements in the attendance levels of these three denominations and that the statistics are sufficiently accurate to reflect these similar movements.<sup>15</sup>

There is no reason for believing that Catholics were less accurate in their counting. The strong association between the Protestant big three does not exist between any one of the three and the Catholic series, but in view of the distinctiveness of the Irish Catholic religious and cultural tradition the lack of correspondence is not surprising. The minor Protestant series do not show the high correlation of the major ones. But in these small bodies we probably ought to expect larger fluctuations because with them chance factors such as the personality of one man can be decisive. Probably the arrival in New Zealand in 1924 of one dynamic preacher—Lionel Bale Fletcher—was the major reason for the recovery of Congregational attendances in the late 1920s.<sup>16</sup> In sum, there is no reason for disagreeing with the verdict of the Government Statistician in his General Report of 1916: 'the general view of the position' provided by the religious statistics gave 'useful and probably accurate enough information'.<sup>17</sup>

In 1881 the province with the highest level of attendance was Auckland (30.2 per cent of the total population); Taranaki (16.4 per cent) had the lowest. In other census years the margin between extremes was smaller. On the whole regional variations were less pronounced than in Britain. At the 1851 census in proportion to population attendances in Bedfordshire were nearly three times as high as in London, in Huntingdonshire more than twice as high as in Cumberland.<sup>18</sup> Urban-rural differences were also narrower in nineteenth-century New Zealand. In England churchgoing in rural areas in 1851 was about a third as high again as for large towns.<sup>19</sup> In 1891 churchgoers constituted 28 per cent of the New Zealand population; in the counties the population of which was largely

14 The Church of England series correlates with the Presbyterian at 0.96 and with the Methodists at 0.93. The Methodist and Presbyterian series correlate at 0.90. Given the number of items in the series, 1874-1926, a correlation coefficient of  $\pm 0.85$  represents the level at which there is a probability of one in a thousand of the correlation arising by chance.

15 Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, Oxford, 1977, p.17.

16 Hugh Jackson, 'Lionel Bale Fletcher', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, VIII, 17 *New Zealand Census*, General Report, 1916, p.60.

17 Pickering, '1851 Religious Census', p.397.

19 Hugh McLeod, 'Class, Community and Region: the Religious Geography of nineteenth century England', in M. Hill, ed., *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, London, 1973, VI, 35.

constituted by the residents of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin the range was from 28 to 32 per cent.

There was a wider range in attendance levels in the counties than in the provinces. At the 1891 census, for example, 40.9 per cent of the population of Hokianga county were usual attenders, 39.1 per cent in Tauranga, 65.1 per cent in Collingwood, but only 3.2 per cent in Wairoa and 7.9 per cent in Whakatane. Of course when we are dealing with such small units, usually having a couple of thousand people resident in each at most, we should expect some wide variations just by chance. But there is a clear pattern: the more densely settled counties were the ones which got the best attendances. Yet we may not assume that people in the backblocks were irreligious by inclination, for we must reckon with the possibility that they did not have available to them places of worship that could be reached within a reasonable time over primitive roads.<sup>20</sup>

A crude way of ascertaining how well people in a given district were provided with convenient churches is to calculate the proportion of the the population for which there was religious accommodation. The religious censuses from 1891 give for each county the total number of seats in all places of worship. We may thus distinguish between districts with a high provision of seating and those with low and ask the extent to which churchgoing varied according to the provision of seating.

Levels of attendance and accommodation do in fact correlate strongly. Amongst the seventy-seven counties in 1891<sup>21</sup> Wairoa and Whakatane, cited above for their poor attendances, had seating, respectively, for 5.6 and 9.8 per cent of the population. Other examples of inadequate accommodation and low attendance in 1891 are the counties of Mongonui (15.8 per cent accommodation and 7.2 per cent attendance), Ohinemuri (15.2 and 9.2), Patangata (15.7 and 8.8). Kawhia and Sounds were two of the nine counties without attenders and without places of worship. Compare the counties of Taieri and Hutt which took in respectively the populations of Dunedin and Wellington. Taieri had seating for 43.7 per cent of its people and an attendance of 32.3 per cent; Hutt provided seating for 41.5 per cent and had an attendance of 28.2 per cent. The same pattern may be observed amongst the provinces. In 1891 those usually attending a place of worship and those provided with religious accommodation constituted the following percentages of the total populations of the provinces:

20 L. H. Barber, 'The Social Crusader; James Gibb at the Australasian Pastoral Frontier, 1882-1935', Ph.D. thesis, Massey University, 1975, p.181, observes that the Sabbath was not observed in the backblocks, which were without benefit of regular services.

21 The table of statistics by counties in the religious appendix to the 1891 census lists only 69 counties. Nine counties were not included because they were without places of worship and hence had no returns to publish. The other difference between the complete list of counties in the religious appendix is that Waikato and Waipa were treated separately in the latter but not in the former.

	<b>Per cent attending</b>	<b>Per cent with seating</b>
Canterbury	32.5	47.2
Auckland	28.3	49.7
Westland	28.0	42.2
Otago and Southland	28.0	41.9
Wellington	26.2	41.1
Marlborough	26.1	41.6
Nelson	25.5	43.2
Hawkes Bay	24.8	39.6
Taranaki	24.1	38.4

Obviously the variation in churchgoing from county to county and province to province partly depended on the amount of seating.<sup>22</sup> But how large was this dependence? The relationship between accommodation and churchgoing was not always clear cut. In the Bay of Islands, for example, there was a generous provision of seating (52.7 per cent) combined with a low rate of attendance (15.1 per cent).

We may notionally divide the causes of the variation in attendance into two parts, firstly the variation in the provision of seating and secondly other factors. Taking the seventy-seven counties in 1891 the question then is what proportion of the variation in attendance from county to county ought to be attributed to variations in the provision of seating in those counties. Statistically this is the same as asking how good is the fit of the regression line to the data points when we regress attendance upon seating.<sup>23</sup> The answer is that the fit is very good indeed. 88 per cent of the variation in attendance in the counties in 1891 may be attributed to the variation in seating. ( $R=0.94$ ).<sup>24</sup> A word of warning, however, is necessary about this finding, for it may easily lead to an exaggerated importance being attached to the provision of religious accommodation in New Zealand. The relationship between religious accommodation and attendance may in fact be two way. On the one hand the fewer the number of seats in proportion to population the smaller the number of people who will attend; on the other hand the fewer the people who want to attend the less will be the effort to provide seats. We should certainly allow for the latter possibility as well in New Zealand, as we shall see.

If the major denominations had been as unevenly distributed as in the British Isles then there would have been major regional variations in

22 Of course the distribution of seating in a district needs to be taken into account as well as the amount.

23 Roderick Floud, *An Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Historians*, London, 1973, pp.143-52.

24 In deriving R the figures for Waitotara and Wanganui counties were combined. According to the published figures Wanganui county had 4330 seats for 2281 people, while Waitotara had 280 seats for 7266 people. Wanganui borough was a borough of Waitotara county in 1891. I have also treated Waikato and Waipa as one unit: see fn.21 above. Thus the value of R is for 76 counties.

public worship. Methodists in New Zealand went to church much more frequently than Presbyterians and Anglicans. Catholics were only middle rank as church attenders, in contrast to their supremacy for most of this century.

**Church of England, Presbyterian and Methodist usual attenders**

(a) as a percentage of adult adherents (15 years and over)<sup>25</sup> of the respective churches

(b) as a percentage of usual attenders of all churches

	1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896
<b>Church of England</b>						
(a)	26.7	28.4	27.6	29.6	24.5	26.7
(b)	28.8	28.8	27.4	24.6	21.0	22.9
<b>Presbyterian</b>						
(a)	43.7	46.6	44.9	51.7	48.0	47.8
(b)	26.8	25.5	24.8	24.2	23.0	23.2
<b>Methodist</b>						
(a)	101.6	104.3	89.5	90.9	93.5	87.9
(b)	21.7	22.7	20.4	18.0	20.1	19.6

In the nineteenth century it is the hold of the Methodist churches over their adherents which is so impressive. It would be worth investigating how this hold was maintained for so long.

**Catholic usual attenders**

(a) as a percentage of Catholic adult adherents (15 years and over)

(b) as a percentage of usual attenders of all churches

	1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896
(a)	46.4	39.7	48.8	54.7	58.3	57.3
(b)	15.9	13.5	16.5	15.8	17.2	17.2

Attendance rates for the smaller religious groups fluctuated more than for the big four in the last quarter of the century. The Congregational figures were higher than those of the Baptists, again a reversal of the position this century.

**Congregational and Baptist usual attenders**

(a) as a percentage of adult adherents (15 years and over) of the respective churches

(b) as a percentage of usual attenders of all churches

<sup>25</sup> The numbers of adherents 15 and over in the various denominations have been estimated by assuming that in each denomination the proportion 15 and over was the same as in the total population.

	1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896
<b>Congregational</b>						
(a)	35.8	91.1	88.2	104.0	92.3	80.5
(b)	1.7	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.1	1.7
<b>Baptist</b>						
(a)	43.2	43.7	39.2	60.1	56.3	55.3
(b)	2.3	2.3	2.2	3.1	2.8	2.7

During the 1880s there were reports of minor revivals in both small and large denominations.<sup>26</sup> These are confirmed by a sharp rise in the overall level of churchgoing. From 1874 usual attenders as a proportion of the population fifteen years and over had been as follows:

	1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896
	39.4	42.0	41.8	48.3	47.1	46.8

The attendance statistics for 1901 were destroyed in a fire before they had been analysed and the results published. Thus there is no way of knowing whether the barely detectable decline evident from the mid-1880s was accelerating in the late 1890s. Certainly a downward trend was established by 1906 and was never subsequently reversed while statistics were collected.

	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926
	36.2	33.9	33.0	30.5	27.0

It is not easy to discover what happened to churchgoing before 1874. Ecclesiastical returns are available in the blue books from 1842 until self government, but the European population was minuscule then and immigration in the 1850s and 1860s may well have drastically altered the proportion of churchgoers. Also the reliability of these blue book ecclesiastical statistics is suspect: sometimes no returns were made and often the returns were suspiciously rounded. According to the returns, in 1852 churchgoers formed 35 per cent of the population of New Zealand.<sup>27</sup> Professor Sinclair reports that in Auckland in the 1840s 'only a quarter or less' of the population were churchgoers.<sup>28</sup>

The churchgoing of New Zealanders was mediocre by the standards of the British at home.

In making comparisons it is desirable to consider the position in New Zealand after large-scale immigration. There are no comprehensive British statistics of religious practice for the 1880s but early in that

26 John. R. Elder, *The History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1840-1940*, Christchurch, 1940, p.344; Peter J. Lineham, *There We Found Brethren: a History of Assemblies of Brethren in New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1977, ch.4; Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church, New Zealand, *Conference Minutes*, 1881, p.55, 1882, p.67.

27 Blue Books, 1852, New Munster and New Ulster, held in the National Archives, NM 11/4 and G 8/6, 31-75.

28 Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Penguin, 1969, p.105.

decade newspapers conducted censuses of attendances in some of the large towns of England and Scotland. These suggest that there was little change in urban attendances in England between 1851 and the early 1880s,<sup>29</sup> so it is reasonable to compare New Zealand churchgoing in the 1880s with the British pattern as revealed at the 1851 Census. There is no way of knowing just how many English people went to church on census Sunday in 1851 since attendances not attenders were counted. But attendances at the best attended services for each denomination provide the absolute minimum of individual attenders. By this criterion 35 per cent of the population of England and Wales attended public worship in 1851.<sup>30</sup> Usual attenders in 1886 formed 28 per cent of the New Zealand population. Probably the margin between New Zealand and Scotland was even wider. Attendances at morning services alone constituted 33 per cent of the population of Scotland in 1851.<sup>31</sup>

The problem of explaining the lower level of religious practice in New Zealand is sharpened if we bear in mind the denominational composition of the two populations. We can only make the roughest of estimates of the number of adherents of the established church in England. Quite apart from having no census figures on affiliation there is a difficulty of definition: many 'floaters' attended both church and chapel.<sup>32</sup> But there can be no doubt that there were proportionately more Anglicans in England than in New Zealand. In 1885 baptisms according to the rites of the Church of England accounted for 623 out of every 1000 live births in England and Wales.<sup>33</sup> Marriage statistics suggest a higher proportion of the population affiliated with the established church but, as they are a less sensitive indicator, it is safer to stick with the baptismal figures.<sup>34</sup> Since many nominally Anglican parents for one reason or another would not have got their children baptized, we may assume that at least 65 per cent of the English population were nominal adherents of the Church of England in the late nineteenth century. For most of this period around 40 per cent of the New Zealand population were Anglicans.

Horace Mann believed that in England 'out of a given proportion . . . of dissenters, the proportion found attending service on any particular Sunday will be greater than the proportion of churchmen out of a similar number'.<sup>35</sup> This view was supported at Liverpool in 1881 when there was an unofficial census of adherents just before a newspaper census of church attendance. The Nonconformist rate of attendance was more

29 McLeod, 'Class, Community and Religion', p.43.

30 Pickering, '1851 Religious Census', pp.393-4.

31 Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874*, Edinburgh, 1975, p.112.

32 Thompson, '1851 Religious Census', pp.95-6.

33 Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, London, 1972, II, 221.

34 For the marriage series see Currie, *Churches and Churchgoers*, Appendix H.

35 Cited in Pickering, '1851 Religious Census', p.395.

than three times as high as that of the Church of England.<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, Anglicans also had a lower rate of attendance than other denominations in New Zealand. But the evidence suggests that Anglicans were even more perfunctory than at home. This is only inference to be sure but it is a strong inference. Anglican adherents proportionately were at least one and a half times as numerous in England as in New Zealand. Therefore other things being equal New Zealand ought to have had the higher overall rate of attendance. But the reverse was true. Rates of attendance for other denominations may also have been lower in New Zealand.

As to why the churchgoing of the total population was less frequent in New Zealand than at home, I am sceptical of that popular explanation for flagging religiosity, urbanization. New Zealand was not more urbanized than Britain, but less. New Zealand in 1891 had a smaller share of its population living in large towns than did England forty years before.<sup>37</sup> Urbanization may have worked indirectly to pull down churchgoing in New Zealand to a degree, if the settlers had urban backgrounds to a much greater extent than those who stayed at home. But this difference in place of origin has yet to be shown.<sup>38</sup> It also needs to be emphasized that only some English cities had traditions of low levels of religious practice, notably London and the large manufacturing towns.<sup>39</sup> The New Zealand statistics themselves demonstrate that there was no necessary connection between city life and lower levels of religious practice. As we have seen levels of attendance were actually higher in the cities than in the country in New Zealand until the 1890s.

There is more convincing evidence that attendances were lower in New Zealand because of a greater scarcity of places of worship. In 1851 57.0 per cent of the English population was provided with a seat in a place of worship.<sup>40</sup> The percentage of the total population who could be accommodated in New Zealand was as follows:

1874	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896
37.9	38.3	38.6	44.3	44.4	47.6

Obviously religious accommodation was less adequate in New Zealand, even into the 1890s, partly because of the greater physical difficulties in

36 R. B. Walker, 'Religious Change in Nineteenth Century Liverpool', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XIX (1968), 203.

37 At the 1851 census over a third of the population of England and Wales lived in towns of over 20,000, more than a fifth in towns of over 100,000: Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, London, 1969, p.117. Compare Oliver, *Oxford History*, p.254.

38 Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land*, Wellington, 1981, pp.346-47, 102-04, for an argument that in the 1870s rural folk predominated amongst English immigrants.

39 McLeod, 'Class, Community and Region', examines the English statistical evidence regarding the association between urbanization and religious practice.

40 Accommodation by religious group is given in Currie, *Churches and Churchgoers*, Appendix F1.

providing it. All the churches had perforce been built within a couple of generations; indeed the need to start from scratch meant that much religious accommodation had to be makeshift for many years—at the 1886 census one in every three buildings used for public worship was a schoolroom or the like. And the rate of population increase was faster in New Zealand than at home. In the 1870s the number of persons increased by just under a quarter of a million, this in a society of just over a quarter of a million in 1871. But it is highly likely that other forces were also at work, both in sapping the enthusiasm of New Zealanders for building new churches and in diminishing their inclination to use ones that were provided. What follows is only a sketch, an indication of areas in which research needs to be done. I have singled out five influences that probably adversely affected church attendance in the new land in either of the two ways I have mentioned. Research will doubtless add to the list; I suspect the calibre and supply of the ministers will especially repay attention.

The first is the social composition of the settlers. Hugh McLeod has elegantly demonstrated the effect of social class upon churchgoing in London. Using the 1902-03 *Daily News* census of church attendance in London, McLeod calculated that total adult attendance was 11.7 per cent of the adult population in poor areas, 13.2 per cent in the working class, 16.1 per cent in the upper working class, 18.2 per cent in the lower middle class, 22.7 per cent in the middle class. This is about what we would have expected from contemporary comment. Not so expected was his finding that the wealthy were as far above the middle-class in the frequency of their churchgoing as the middle class was above the working class. In wealthy suburban districts of London attendance was 36.8 per cent of population, and in ultra-fashionable West End 33.8 per cent.<sup>41</sup> Of course we know that the wealthy were thinly represented amongst the New Zealand settlers, the 'quality' hardly at all. But it would be good to have a more precise idea of the social composition of the European population. McLeod's evidence suggests that it may have made a significant difference to churchgoing.

A second influence on churchgoing attitudes in New Zealand may have been place of origin within Britain. On the whole city folk went to church less than country ones, and we may suspect that the different habits were to a degree perpetuated in the new land. It may also have mattered whether a person came from a county with a tradition of high or low churchgoing: as we have seen, at the 1851 census levels of attendance varied between rural counties. The work of Hugh McLeod is again suggestive for our purposes. He found that attendances were higher in north-east London than in the south-west of the city, even when class differences had been allowed for. He plausibly accounted for this

<sup>41</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, London, 1974, pp.26-27.

difference by saying that north-east London drew on the population of the immediately adjacent counties which had higher levels of churchgoing than the counties adjacent to south-west London.<sup>42</sup>

Third, the greater social homogeneity of the people in New Zealand weakened religious belonging. At home social divisions went deep and political and religious allegiances reinforced one another. A Tory found it natural to belong to the established church, a chapel-goer to vote for Gladstone, so that attendance at worship was higher than if it had been a more purely religious act.<sup>43</sup> The boundary between the two socio-religious communities became ever less sharply drawn in England from mid-century, but in New Zealand they had had only a vestigial existence from the beginning.

Fourth, the process of migration and resettlement probably attenuated the religious practice of many. The voyage itself warrants study as it was then that the immigrants began their adjustment to a life without familiar associations. It is likely that the habit of churchgoing was weakened by being prized from an accustomed pattern of life. Frequently it was noted that those who had been zealous churchgoers at home ceased to be so in the Australian colonies.<sup>44</sup>

Fifth, we await a study of the effect of physical mobility upon churchgoing in New Zealand.<sup>45</sup> Commenting on church life in Australia in 1869 the Rev. S. C. Kent claimed that change of residence was the rule. 'In a very brief space the face of a congregation becomes so entirely changed that it seems altogether new, whereas in many of our home places of worship the child succeeds the parent in the occupancy of the pew and the son the father in the offices of the church and of the school.' Where churches were incohesive it seems likely that less social pressure could be applied to adherents to encourage their attendance. Also when people moved house there was always the chance that they would be less regular churchgoers in their new place of residence or cease altogether. This effect did not go unnoticed in Australia.<sup>46</sup>

Given the early missions in New Zealand and the less than godly origins of New South Wales we might have expected New Zealand to have had much the higher rate of churchgoing. This was not so. From 1850 until 1904 almost without interruption annual returns were made to

42 McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p.28.

43 Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: a History of the Secularization of Modern Society*, London, 1980, pp.73-76, considers how the overlap of political and religious allegiances helped to maintain the hold of the religious bodies in Britain in the late nineteenth century.

44 Eg. S. C. Kent, *Christian Life in Australia: Its Dangers, Difficulties, and Duties*, Sydney, 1869, pp.7-8; *Australian Christian World*, 30 July 1886, p.281.

45 Kent, *Christian Life*, p.8.

46 Some of the literary and census evidence relating to the impact of physical mobility upon the Congregational churches in Australia is examined in my 'Moving House and Changing Churches: the case of the Melbourne Congregationalists', *Historical Studies*, XIX (1980). 74-85.

the government by the New South Wales denominational authorities. These returns are not as reliable as those of New Zealand and they suffer from the disadvantage of not taking us sufficiently into the twentieth century to allow us to establish a trend of decline. But the New South Wales figures do provide a good rough estimate of the level for churchgoing there in the late nineteenth century. Usual attenders in New South Wales averaged around 45 per cent of the adult population (15 and upwards), a little higher than in New Zealand. At its peak around 1870 adult churchgoing in New South Wales was 58.6 per cent, about ten percentage points above the best New Zealand could manage.<sup>47</sup>

The Victorian statistics on religious practice are probably more defective than these of New South Wales, but again they are sufficiently reliable for comparative purposes. According to the returns made to the government 66 per cent of the adult population of Victoria usually attended church in 1890, 74 per cent in 1900.<sup>48</sup> While these figures are almost certainly inflated Victoria clearly outclassed New Zealand when it came to public worship. South Australia, too, was in another league. There is no comparable South Australian series on church attendance, but we get a guide from the level of accommodation. In the 1880s 60 per cent of the population of South Australia was provided with a seat in a place of worship.<sup>49</sup> If there was as close a relationship between attendance and accommodation in South Australia as we have seen to obtain in New Zealand, then South Australians were even more assiduous churchgoers than the Victorians.

How are we to explain the variations in church attendance between New Zealand, New South Wales and Victoria? Differences in levels of accommodation surely have to be taken into account. That Victoria had accommodation for 59 per cent of its population in 1900 obviously facilitated the very high level of attendance in that year. But why did Victoria generally manage a higher level of accommodation? And anyway the differences in accommodation do not always seem sufficient to account for differences in attendance: compare Victoria in 1890 with 54 per cent of its total population accommodated and 66 per cent of adults attending, with New Zealand in 1891 with 44 per cent accommodated and 47 per cent of adults attending.<sup>50</sup>

Despite variations in overall levels of religious practice and accom-

47 Walter Phillips, 'Religious Profession and Practice in New South Wales, 1850-1901: Some Statistical Evidence', *Historical Studies*, XV (1972), 388. See also his *Defending 'A Christian Country': Churchmen and Society in New South Wales in the 1880s and after*, St Lucia, 1981, ch.1.

48 *ibid.*, p.390.

49 *ibid.*, p.390. D. L. Hilliard, 'The City of Churches: Some Aspects of Religion in Adelaide about 1900', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, VIII (1980), 21, used a newspaper census of evening attendance in Adelaide in 1888 and estimated that around 45 per cent of the total population of the city were regular church attenders in the late nineteenth century.

50 Phillips, 'Religious Profession', p.390.

modation, adherents of the principal religious denominations went to church with much the same frequency whatever their colony. In the other colonies there was the same striking variation *between denominations* that obtained in New Zealand. In New South Wales and Victoria the differences between denominational rates fluctuated more than in New Zealand—incidentally the main reason for thinking the Australian statistics less reliable.<sup>51</sup> Also the religious bodies in New South Wales and Victoria may have collected their figures on a somewhat different basis, just as happened in New Zealand. Thus we may not press the statistics too far in an attempt to establish just how great were the differences between denominational rates across the colonies. But the figures for the three colonies are so similar that we cannot doubt that we are dealing with expressions in different places of the same religious traditions transplanted from the British Isles. The following table is for 1889-91 and gives churchgoers of each denomination as a percentage of adherents.<sup>52</sup>

	New Zealand	New South Wales	Victoria
Church of England	15	16	16
Presbyterian	29	30	44
Methodist	56	49	57
Roman Catholic	35	33	46
Congregational	55	54	—
Baptist	34	35	—

This combination of denominational differences and colonial similarities is suggestive when we consider that there was a different 'mix' of denominations in each colony. New Zealand had a larger share of Anglicans than Victoria and a smaller share of Methodists and Catholics. Have we here the primary explanation of why the New Zealand level of attendance was lower than that of Victoria? Is it possible that the proportionately larger numbers of Anglicans pulled down the overall attendance in New Zealand, and that the smaller number of Catholics and Methodists worked the same way? We know from the censuses precisely how many people were affiliated with each denomination

51 In Victoria according to the returns Presbyterian average attendances at the principal service of the day constituted 55 per cent of adherents in 1881 but 44 per cent in 1889; Methodist attendances were supposedly 74 per cent of adherents in 1881 and 57 per cent in 1889. Geoffrey Serle, *The Rush to Be Rich: a History of the Colony of Victoria, 1883-1889*, Melbourne, 1971, p.152. The Presbyterian decline in Victoria might conceivably be attributed to the Strong case but the Methodist fluctuation is next to impossible. For similarly erratic statistics see the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist church attendance percentages in Phillips, 'Religious Profession', pp.392-3.

52 The N.S.W. figures, which are for 1890, are from Phillips 'Religious Profession', and are of usual attenders. The Victorian figures are for 1889 and are for average attendance at the principal Sunday service. They are from Serle, *Rush to Be Rich*, p.152.

in each colony. In 1891 the percentage proportions were as follows:<sup>53</sup>

	Church of England	Roman Catholic	Presby- terian	Methodist	Congre- gational	Baptist	All others
New Zealand	40.0	13.9	22.6	9.9	1.1	2.4	10
New South Wales	44.8	25.5	9.7	9.8	2.1	1.2	6.9
Victoria	35.2	21.8	14.7	13.0	1.9	2.5	10.9
South Australia	27.9	14.7	5.7	19.0	3.7	5.5	23.5

It is thus possible to calculate an expected overall level of church attendance using the affiliation figures.

To test the likely effect of the denominational mix I assumed that in all four colonies in 1891 the 'all other' category was distributed amongst the specified denominations according to their relative strengths. I also assumed that the New Zealand denominational rates in 1891 applied in the three Australian colonies. If the denominational mix by itself had a substantial effect this ought to be revealed by differences in overall attendance as calculated by this method. The expected attendance levels were as follows (attenders as a proportion of population 15 and over): New Zealand 44.9 per cent, New South Wales 45.4 per cent, Victoria 49.1 per cent, South Australia 55.5 per cent. These figures suggest that the denominational mix did indeed have a primary influence in depressing New Zealand's attendance below that of Victoria. These figures also help to explain why the levels of religious practice in New Zealand and New South Wales were much the same. Further, by these figures South Australia is far ahead, which is what we would have expected of the 'Paradise of Dissent', both in view of its reputation for piety and its high level of seating.

Yet the denominational mix falls short of a complete explanation. According to the official statistics attenders in Victoria constituted 66 per cent of the adult population in 1890; in New Zealand the official figures give attenders as 47 per cent. Thus the margin between the two colonies was wider than can be accounted for solely by the religious composition of their populations. Was attendance lower in New Zealand in part because New Zealanders were more footloose and their communities, being less cohesive, were less able to provide churches and less willing to use them? This seems unlikely when we remember how much physical mobility there was in late nineteenth-century Australia. As late as 1861 a third of the male workforce in Victoria were goldminers<sup>54</sup> and during the 1880s and 1890s there was a phenomenal turnover of population in

<sup>53</sup> T. A. Coghlan, *A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia*, Sydney, 1893, p.142.

<sup>54</sup> Serle, *Rush to Be Rich*, p.2.

Melbourne consequent upon the rapid succession of boom and bust.<sup>55</sup> Were New Zealanders handicapped by the depression of the 1880s in providing places of worship? True, the level of religious accommodation only marginally improved in New Zealand in the late 1880s, but South Australia too endured a depression in the 1880s.

Was the task of church extension more onerous in late nineteenth-century New Zealand because the influx of population was greater relative to the number of settlers about 1850? This does not seem likely, though often the physical difficulties of building churches may have been greater. The population of Victoria increased at a faster rate than did New Zealand's. The population of Victoria in 1851 was almost exactly the same as that of New Zealand in 1861 (97,000 compared with 99,000). In the forty years 1861-1901 New Zealand's European population increased eight times; in the forty years 1851-1891 Victoria's population increased twelve times.

A complete explanation of colonial differences in religious practice will be hard to come by because it will depend on a detailed comparison between the settlers in the various Australasian colonies. We know so little about how the settlers compare both in place of origin within the British isles and in social station—the very factors which English scholars have shown to be so influential upon churchgoing. Yet even the simple matter of noting that there were differences in levels of religious practice has its value. Siegfried may not have been so impressed with New Zealanders' religiosity if he had made a few colonial comparisons.

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<sup>55</sup> Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, Melbourne, 1978, pp.153, 172, 187.