



# NZ and God

The Difficult Art of Listening Made Simple.

Buzz.ThePeople were surveyed about their attitudes to God and religion. Their responses were used to help make TVNZ's Good Friday program for Close Up.

If you would like to take part in surveys like this in future, and you are not currently a Buzz.ThePeople member, you can read more here: [www.buzzthepeople.co.nz](http://www.buzzthepeople.co.nz)

If you would like to view some of the comments made in the survey, [click here](#).

The members were asked in particular:

- If New Zealand is still a Christian society
- If public holidays based on Christian events should be changed
- About their own beliefs
- If they believed in God
- If religion plays a strong role in their lives.

A total of 3,590 responded giving a sample error of plus or minus 1.6%<sup>[1]</sup>

## 1. Summary of Results

### Do you think New Zealand is still predominantly a Christian society?

We are divided:

- 51.3% agreed that we are a predominantly Christian society
- 45.6% disagreed

**Table 1: Do you think New Zealand is still predominantly a Christian society?**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	1,817	51.3
No	1,613	45.6
Other	109	3.1
Total	3,539	100.0

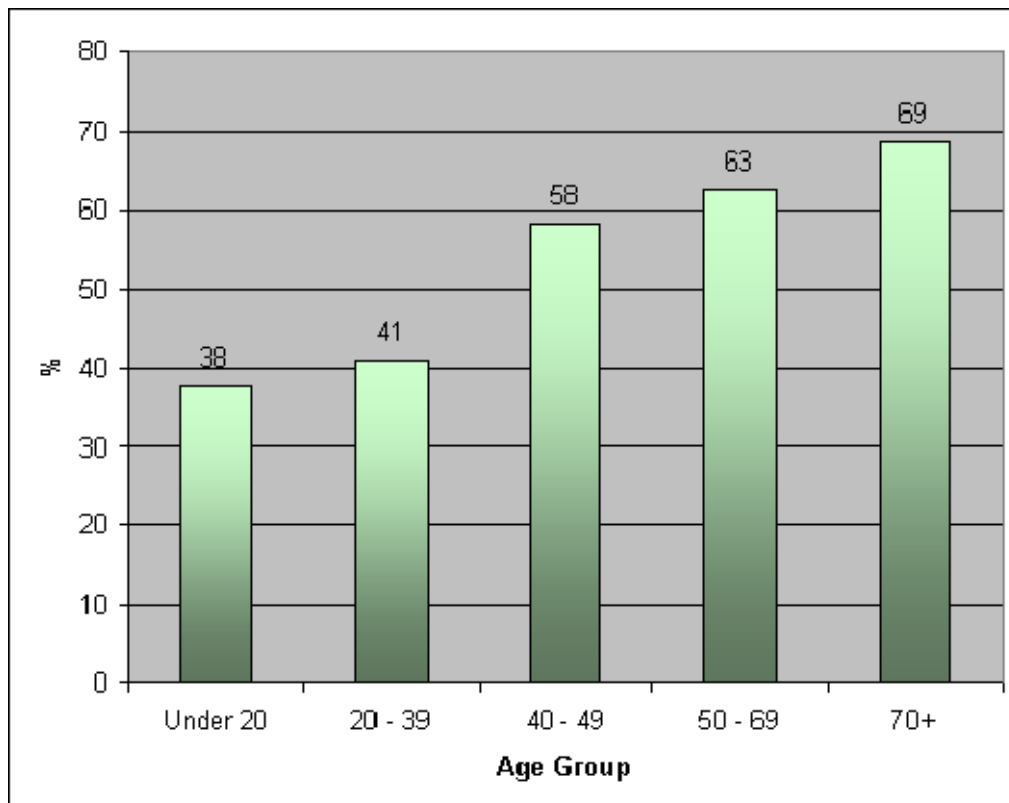
*Interesting points:*

- Christians (57.3) and those from other religions (52.7%) are *more likely* to agree than those who were not religious (43.6%) that we are a predominantly Christian society.\*



- However four in ten (40.6%) Christians *do not agree* that New Zealand is still a predominantly Christian society.\*
- The younger you are the *less likely* you are to agree that NZ is a Christian society\*

**Chart 1: Belief that New Zealand is a Christian Society by Age Group**



**If we are not a Christian society, what are we?**

*(Note: not fully coded)*

There were a wide range of opinions here - e.g.

**Atheist (140)**

- Atheist and undecided. Many people who call themselves Christians call themselves that because it's easier than saying that they don't believe in, and because that's how they were brought up - not because it accurately reflects the beliefs that they act on a day to day basis



- If we aren't atheists for certain, we are on the brink of being non-believers in God. Science has made us think more deeply about 'the great explosion' and why would a God allow such a belligerent society continue to exist. Why the religious wars throughout the ages if we believe in the same God? What is the difference between a Roman Catholic God and a Christian one. Why are Iraqi people so divided when basically they are members of the same religion?

**Agnostic** (145)

- Mainly agnostic and uninterested and use the excuse we are too busy
- Agnostic, consumer driven society following generally the values espoused by the major religions (e.g. respect, family based etc)

**A multi cultural mixture** (260)

- A diverse multicultural society, not a society based on religion
- We are a multi-cultural society with no major dominant religion which determines people's behaviours

**Secular** (200)

- We are only a Christian society out of habit. NZ has far more of a lean towards secular humanism - although probably just 'secular with Christian ethics' would probably be a better way to put it.

Other comments

- I would say we're an anti-Christian society. We tolerate and even encourage almost every other faith, but are generally intolerant of the Christian faith and their views/values. I would say most of NZ is secular, but with a minority (mainly other cultures) being part of a wide range of faiths (Muslim, Buddhist etc).

## Public Holidays

**Do you think that our public holidays that are based largely on Christian religious events e.g. Easter and Christmas, should be changed?**

*(For example: moved to different times of the year or replaced with different celebrations)*

Most (81.1%) did not agree that the public holidays based on Christian religion events should be changed.

**Table 2: Holidays that are based largely on Christian religious events e.g. Easter and Christmas, should be changed**

	Frequency	Percent
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Yes	199	12.0
No	1,346	81.1
Other	115	6.9
Total	1,660	100.0

*Comments included:*

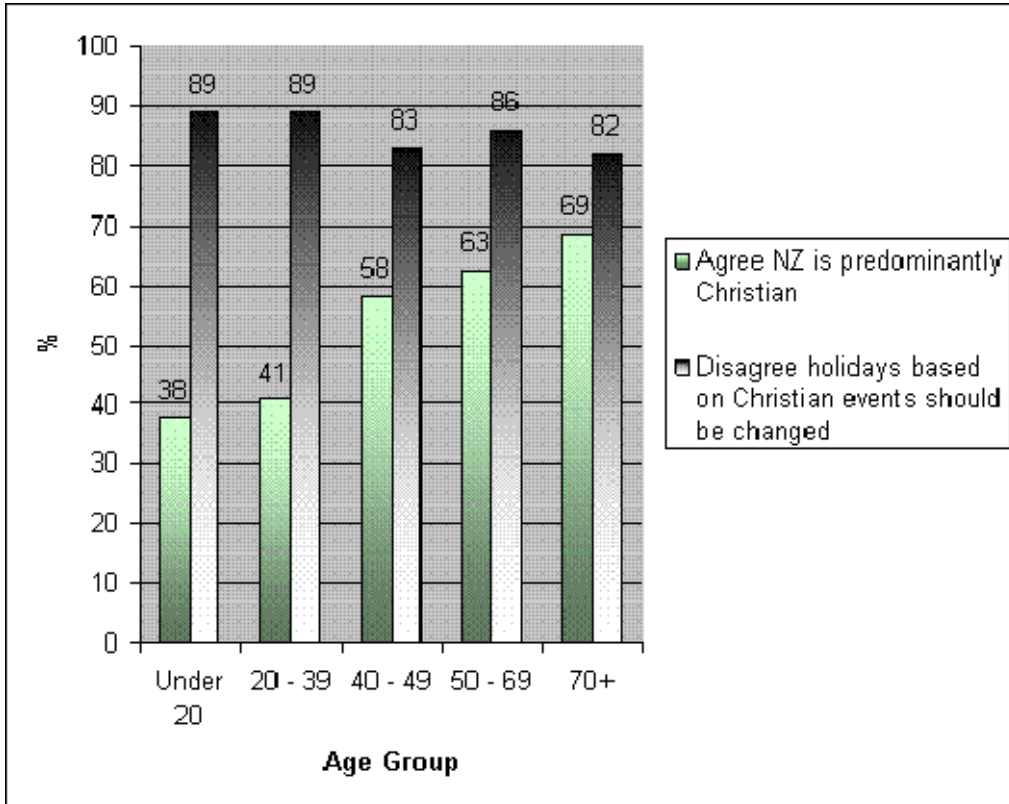
- They are not based on Christian dates but adapted from pagan celebrations anyway.
- They should be removed from being commercially orientated
- Only as long as those who want to keep them as holy days are able to do so - we make allowances for other religions' high holy days (Yom Kippur, Ramadan, Diwali, etc.) now. Christians should be given the same respect.
- Easter is a religious holiday. I'd happily give the holiday up to remove the 'religious' event as I'm not a Christian. People lose meaning of what Easter's about and just want a couple of days off.
- Yes shouldn't be religion based - However 'Xmas' has become somewhat of an institution that is almost unrelated to the 'Christian Christmas'

*Interesting Points:*

- *Despite being less likely to agree that NZ is a predominantly Christian society - younger people are slightly more likely to disagree that holidays based on Christian events should be changed.*

**Chart 2: Should holidays based on Christian events be changed, by age group\***





## Belief in (a) God

### Do you believe in (a) God?

- Over half of us (55.2%) say that we believe in God
- The rest are divided fairly equally between those who do not believe in God (23%) and those who are unsure (22%).
- Pacifica and Maori much more likely to believe in God than those of NZ European descent.\*
- Those aged 20-39 years (25%) are most likely to be unsure whether they believe in God (This compares with 22% across all age groups).\*

Table 3: Do you believe in (a) God?

	Frequency	Percent
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Yes	1,875	55.2
No	766	22.6
Not sure	753	22.2
Total	3,394	100.0

Interesting points:

- Of those who believe in (a) God only one –quarter (27.9%) said that they would see themselves as religious. Most (61.4%) saw themselves as more spiritual than religious.
- Women (58.1%) are slightly more likely to agree that they believe in God than men (49.9%)
- Those aged 40-69 are slightly more likely to believe in God than those in younger or older age groups.\*
- Of those who *do not* believe in God...
- Almost half (42%) still see ourselves as spiritual people
- Half (50%) of us who neither believe in God *nor* are religious *agreed* that religion used to play a stronger part in our lives than it does now.\*

**What part does God play in your every day life?**

Comments range from those for whom God plays no part in their lives – to those who turn to God in tough times and others who believe that 'he is everything' including the reason for our very existence.

- None really.
- Not in everyday life, but when times are tough, or thoughts turn to higher powers and the meaning of life, it's certainly contemplated
- Not a lot and I'm probably a bit of a 'play both sides' person in that I feel there is some sort of supreme being but I can't see him/it in terms of an old gent in flowing robes and a nice beard nor do I think he/it is a solely Christian God
- To tell you the truth I haven't been to church in a very long time I was brought up going to church every Sunday but now I don't go at all, but it doesn't mean I don't think of God everyday sometimes I say prayers and sometimes I talk to him when I'm in need of help.
- God is there everyday to remind me that i am a good person and try to live my life the way i want to be treated
- Moral and ethical backstop/base for decisions and actions
- He helps me through difficult times I believe when I ask for guidance on decisions I need to make I think he provides me with signs or directs me into the path I should be taking
- Most days I spend at least a little time wondering what God is, what the universe is, what this existence is, and sometimes if God, this world and my own self really exist at all. God for me is a subject that only poses questions and doubts, tinged with fear that there might be no life after death, but I really hope there is, although I know that faith would be more reassuring and Christian than hope, and if God does exist and furnished us with a place in Heaven, I think he would appreciate faith more than hope
- He is the very reason that I am alive. God is the source of all life, without His existence and presence, none of us on this earth, universe would be alive



## Religion vs. Spirituality

Interesting Points:

- We are *much more likely* to see ourselves as spiritual (57%) than religious people (16%).
- Overall, Christians (29.8%) are *more likely* than those from other religions (10.4%) to see themselves as religious people.\*
- However, those who identify as Muslim are the most likely group to see themselves as religious (75%)[2]
- Anglicans (37.1%) and Presbyterians (28.9%) are *more likely* to see themselves as religious than either Catholics (21.1%) or Methodists (21.3%)\*

**Table 4: Religion vs. Spirituality**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
I see myself as religious person	543	16.0
I see myself more as a spiritual person than a religious per	1,932	56.8
Other	924	27.2
Total	3,399	100.0

## Attitudes

*For those who indicated that they were religious...[3]*

- Half of us (50.7%) agree that religion used to play a stronger part in our lives than it does now.
- Christians (52.6%) are slightly more likely to agree than those from religions other than Christianity (40.3%)\*
- Almost three-quarters of us (72.8%) agree that when we are going through tough times our faith helps our journey

*Of those who have said that they are not religious.....*

- We agree (95.3%) that although we don't have religion we do have strong values
- Almost half of us (48.7%) agree that religion used to play a part in our lives even if it doesn't now (Note this is a similar percentage to those who indicated that they were religious)
- We are much less likely to turn to our faith in tough times that those who are religious . Only a small percentage of us (13.3%) say that we sometimes return to our old faith when going through tough times.[4]

Overall...



- Half of us (48.7%) believe that New Zealand is *a better place to live* because we have many different religions.
- However- almost half of us (45.9%) believe that New Zealand would be *a better place with less religion*.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Men (51.9%) are more likely than women (42.2%) to feel this way

**Do you want to qualify your opinion or comment on the number of religions we have in NZ and the impact on NZ society?**

Comments include:

- Multicultural is awesome, we just need to have more openness and accepting of the values of others. We are remarkably pragmatic
- Being open to different peoples, cultures and religions is what makes us better humans - I think of the diversity as enriching my life rather than threatening it (which seems to be the case for some people). Although I'm nervous about extremes (of anything really!).
- Having many religions is better because having a single religion is normally accompanied by dogmatism and lack of tolerance. However, some of the many religions are markedly intolerant and fundamentalist, and they in turn spread intolerance by provoking reaction, so the variety is not an unalloyed blessing
- I think the only issue with religion in NZ society is when it infringes on the ability of other New Zealanders to live their lives. I think we have too many religions that are beginning to try to be prescriptive towards other kiwis. What I do should not be affected by what someone else believes. This is a growing problem and I think it is going to get worse as religious conflicts elsewhere escalate.
- We have too many immigrants trying to force their religion on New Zealanders and expect us to follow suit. Sure religion is fine but when you come to a new country you follow the rules (for want of a better word) of that country. I use the Islamic burka as an example.
- Having too many religious philosophies is divisive. In part this is why the govt. has moved to create a secular society whereby God is left out of many areas of NZ life that previously He was not, so as not to offend anyone who has a different belief. This has changed the basis of NZ society as we knew it
- Too many smaller religions seem to have too much power, the older traditional religions didn't appear to impact too heavily on other (different) or non believers but the later arrivals we now have seem to stick to their strict ways and do not assimilate into the NZ way of life and tolerance.
- The number of religions is irrelevant. All formal religions have value sets which when people abide by them tend to normalise society. NZ's problem is that there are too many people with no religious background and they from an increasingly large self-centered society

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[1] This is the theoretical margin of error, plus or minus 1.6 percentage points, 95% of the time, on questions where opinion is evenly split

\*Note: statistics with a \* are statistically significant at the 5 % level



[2] Caution – the numbers are small

\*Significant but the numbers are small.

[3] i.e. they did not indicate that they were not religious.

[4] This compares with 72.8% of those who are religious.

[5] Differences between age groups or income not large

