

# **Christianity and the media**

*Which themes emerge when the New Zealand media reports on  
Christianity?*

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**A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication Studies  
(MCS)**

**2010**

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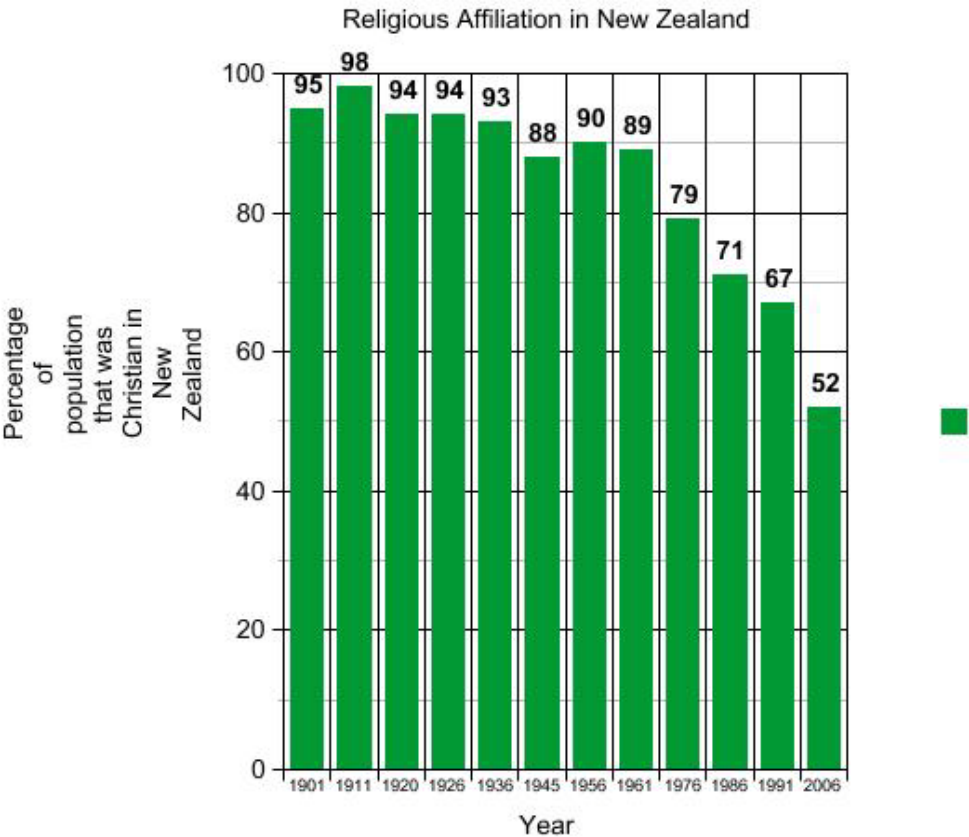
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Figure 1: Graph of Religious Affiliation in New Zealand



Compiled with the assistance of:

Von Dadelszen & Seddon (1992), Ward (1912), Fraser (1920, 1930), Butcher (1942), Wood (1950), Baker (1960), Lewn, (1970), Kuzmicich (1984, 1990), Macaskill (2000), & Pink (2006).

## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Olivia Christine Walker

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have achieved the same results without the help of the supervisors that consulted on it. Thank you to Brad Mercer, Felicity Brown, Dr. Frances Nelson and Dr. Rosser Johnson who have all contributed to this research and encouraged me throughout this process.

Thank you to Tania Kovats, Michael Field and Cardinal Williams for submitting to interviews and providing insight on the topics explored in this thesis.

This thesis is dedicated to my dear friend Kristen Selwood who was unwavering in her support of me during this time.

## Abstract

This thesis explores how the media reports on Christianity in New Zealand. It examines framing in the media to discover if the media uses Christian themes when reporting on Christian issues. This study will draw from the work of Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) who have both conducted studies of this nature in the United States of America. Silk has contended that the media reflects Christian themes by using them as a framework for reporting. He asserted the media did this to report these issues in a context relatable to the audience. Moore suggested that Silk failed to see the flexibility of Christian themes and that Christian themes can be used in a way that removes the religious dimension.

In this study thematic analysis is used to develop a code of Christian themes. This is a methodology developed by Boyatzis (1998) and is chosen as it deals specifically with themes. This code is applied to two case studies to extract significant Christian themes throughout the coverage of the story. The first case study deals with the reaction to the controversial artwork *The Virgin in a Condom*, exhibited at Te Papa Museum in 1998. The second case study, *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*, follows the media coverage of the deaths of 6 students and 1 teacher from Elim Christian College at the Mangatepopo gorge in 2008. These case studies were chosen due to the high levels of media coverage they received and the very different nature of the events. The implications of this research are that the New Zealand media could be less secular than perceived and there could be a latent Christian culture in New Zealand newsrooms.



# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **Introduction**

Christianity in New Zealand is in a state of demise. This is demonstrated in the falling numbers of people who identify themselves as Christian in this country. Christianity used to be an influence on moral issues in New Zealand. As the number of adherents decline the question of who will influence New Zealand's moral decisions remains. The media is also an institution that influences societal beliefs by creating a forum for discussion on moral issues and holding to account people who behave amorally. Hall (1982) contends that the news affects social values by framing stories to create a general consensus within the public sphere (Hall, Chritcher, Jefferson & Clarke in Cohen & Young, 1982). The aim of this research project is to determine if the media will uphold Christian themes in reporting and endeavour to be a moral enforcer of these values.

This project relies heavily on an understanding of Christian values as well as the news values used in the print media. As there have been no in depth studies of this specific nature conducted in New Zealand this project has relied on the influences from overseas studies of this nature. In particular, the work of Silk (1998) and Moore (2003), who have both conducted studies on the media and Christianity in the United States of America (USA), provide a theoretical framework for this study. As the USA has a vastly different religious climate to New Zealand, it is important that adjustments are made to these theories in order to apply them towards Christianity and the New Zealand media.

### **2.1 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this research is to better understand the complex relationship between the media and Christianity, and to learn more about how the media uses themes in reporting. The original research of this thesis consists of two case studies analysing the themes that emerge from the New Zealand media

reporting on Christianity. Latent themes have been analysed using thematic analysis to determine Christian values apparent in the coverage of the case studies. A latent theme, also known as subtext, is defined in Webster's Desk Dictionary (1993) as 'present but not visible, actualised or active' (Steinmetz, 1993, p.257). Through examining the Christian themes that appear in these stories it becomes apparent whether or not the New Zealand media condones Christian values.

## **2.2 Background justification of the problem**

Christianity in New Zealand is facing a crisis in terms of practising Christians. The number of people identifying as Christian in New Zealand is steadily declining. According to the Statistics New Zealand website in the 2006 census 51.2% of people in New Zealand identified themselves as Christian. Figure 1 (refer to p. v) indicates the percentage of New Zealanders identifying as Christian from 1901 until 2006.

It can be seen from the information presented in Figure 1 that from 1961 there has been a steady decline in Christian affiliation in New Zealand. If this trend continues the number in the next census will drop below the 50% mark. This is significant in that it would be the first time that Christianity in New Zealand has fallen below 50%. In politics and also in legal matters New Zealand is emancipating itself from Christianity. A draft statement prepared for the Human Rights Commission (on religious diversity) crafted in 2006, stated that 'New Zealand has no state religion. The state treats all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law' ("Denying state religion", 2007). This is indicative of a decline in the role of Christianity in defining societal roles. It is time for New Zealanders to assess what Christian values mean to contemporary New Zealand life.

This study aims to discover whether the media does use Christian themes in reporting and whether this indicates a latent Christian culture in newsrooms. The media has been chosen to test Christian values as it reflects social values. Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) have both conducted similar studies on the role of Christianity in the media of the USA. Silk (1998) conducted a study to discover how Christian values related to the media using Christian themes. One of the themes he reported on was 'tolerance'. He did this through a case study on the presidential elections in America, 1960. At the time a wide-spread prejudice against John F Kennedy, spread by his opponents, suggested that electing a Roman Catholic President would cause the Roman Catholic Church to permeate the American government. Silk (1998) found that once Kennedy had dismissed this allegation the American press accepted this and accused the people who believed these rumours as being 'bigoted' (Silk, 1998, p.67). In doing so, Silk (1998) argued that the American press was supportive of the Christian theme of 'tolerance'. Silk's study is important as it is one of the first studies to suggest that the media utilizes Christian themes. The original research in his study became the basis for other studies on Christianity and the media.

Moore (2003) extended Silk's work through a case study analysing the Christian theme of 'hypocrisy'. Moore (2003) examined the media coverage of Reverend Jesse Jackson who was discovered to have an illegitimate child to his mistress. This was viewed as hypocritical by the media as Reverend Jesse Jackson had been Bill Clinton's moral counsel in dealing with the repercussions of his affair with Monica Lewinsky. Using Silk's framework this would have been viewed as the American media reinforcing religious beliefs. However, Moore (2003) argued that 'Silk failed to see the flexibility of topoi' (Moore, 2003, p.50) and that the values defining Christian themes could be used in other contexts than Christian. He argued that the issue of paternity was more important to the media than adultery on this occasion, and that this was a political rather than a moral issue. He concluded that 'the overriding finding

here is that a topos may have some roots in a religious tradition and yet be used in a way that calls into question traditional religious practices'. (Moore, 2003, p.63). This study will apply the work of both Moore (2003) and Silk (1998) as a theoretical framework.

Moore (2003) and Silk (1998) limited themselves to analysing one Christian theme through each study with little or no discussion of other emergent themes. This study will use thematic analysis as a method, as outlined by Boyatzis (1998), to create a code for analysing both case studies. Twelve Christian themes will be applied to each case study in this research project. This provides a detailed analysis of the themes of each story. This study focuses on the New Zealand media which is very different from that of the United States of America and therefore involves different attitudes towards religion than that found in the American media. Moore (2003) was correct in his assertion that topoi is not exclusive to Christianity. However, his focus on the impact on Christianity was on the view of Christians rather than of Christian values. I will therefore assert that the focus of this study is on the reflection of Christian themes in the media rather than on Christians themselves.

### **2.3 Research Context**

This research is conducted under the premise that New Zealand used to be a Christian country. Christianity's influence on New Zealand will be further explored in Chapter Two of this study. Christianity has played an important role in the forming of New Zealand life (Sinclair, 1986). Missionaries were among the first settlers to arrive in New Zealand. They played a significant role in educating Maori in agriculture, trade and spirituality as well as developing an understanding of Maori culture and traditions (King, 2003). Christianity's role in New Zealand was further consolidated by the action of the New Zealand Company forming settlements according to religious affiliation (Trotter, 2007). The context for this research is that views on Christianity are changing in New

Zealand. As indicated earlier, the number of Christian adherents in New Zealand is declining and a draft statement has identified that New Zealand has no state religion.

The decline in Christian values can be seen in current trends in New Zealand society. A news story on TV One news which was aired at 6pm on 4 May 2010 and cited on the TVNZ website on 5 May 2010 discussed the growing divorce rate in New Zealand. It stated that there were 21,600 marriages in 2009 and 8,700 divorces thus indicating that the divorce rate in New Zealand is 40.27 %. The article also stipulated that one third of New Zealanders who married in 1984 had divorced prior to their silver wedding anniversary (TVNZ, 2010). The New Zealand abortion ratio has risen from 105 in 1980 to 218 in 2009 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010), however, this is significantly down from its highest in 2002 of 247. Women aged 20 to 24 years of age had the highest rate of abortions (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). These trends may be seen as a decline in Christian values in New Zealand as many branches of Christianity believe in marriage for life and are pro-life on the issue of abortion. The growth in these trends may be applicable to many countries in response to the growing needs of modern society; however, they are still a cause for concern.

This decline in values may not be exclusively Christian, however, the values outlined (divorce, abortion) are issues that Christians have strong beliefs about. Some would interpret this decline in Christian values as a positive change in New Zealand society. This study does not attempt to determine whether the decline of Christian values is positive or negative; it does stress that this trend calls for reflection on New Zealand attitudes towards Christianity and what values define contemporary New Zealand culture.

## 2.4 Research Question

The premise for this thesis began when a religious official was lamenting on how the media portrays religion. He said that the media falls back on to stereotypes and caricatures. This has prompted me to investigate this matter further. My research question is '*Which themes emerge when the New Zealand media reports on Christianity?*' I will conduct two case studies that cover the subject of Christianity. The first case study is *The Virgin in a condom*, a controversial piece of artwork that was displayed at Te Papa museum in 1998 as part of the 'Pictura Britannica Exhibition'. This case study was chosen due to the high volume of news coverage this event had and the duration of the coverage. This artwork caused great alarm to some Christians in New Zealand and in particular to a group called 'Catholic Action'. The second case study, *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*, covers a canyoning accident during a school trip. Six students and one teacher died in a flash flood while canyoning at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre. This case study was chosen as it presented Christians in a different situation from the *The Virgin in a Condom* and also shared a high volume of news coverage.

The case studies are limited to mainstream media, and I have chosen mainstream print media as it extends to the widest audience. I did not want to focus on specialised media as Christianity is a universal subject that is worth studying on a large scale. I have restricted the type of media studied to print media. This is due to the print media being more favourable to conducting thematic analysis, the methodology I have chosen. The case studies will follow the coverage of five New Zealand newspapers. These newspapers are *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion Post*, *The Press*, *The Evening Post* and *The Sunday Star Times*. I have used thematic analysis to deconstruct the themes that emerge from these case studies. I have chosen these papers as they have the widest circulation in New Zealand and geographically cover a diverse readership. I have chosen to use thematic analysis as this research project deals

specifically with themes which makes a theme- based methodology an appropriate research method. It was apparent through previous studies of a similar nature conducted in America by Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) that this methodology could be applied with some success in New Zealand.

## **2.5 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter Two will review the background research in preparation for this study. It will discuss the origins of Christianity and its impact on the rest of the Western world. It will discuss the beliefs of Catholicism and Protestantism and its effect on the colonisation and early life in New Zealand. Specifically the impact missionaries had on Maori and their role in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and the New Zealand Company's subsequent role in creating land settlements in Christchurch and Otago, organised according to faith. The second section of this chapter discusses other studies that have been conducted on the media and religion; analysing their methods and reviews their findings. Finally, this chapter deliberates the role of the media in society and the processes used to create news. News values and framing are reviewed as they relate specifically to how the media construct themes and this directly relates to my research.

Chapter Three explains the theory behind the methods used in this study and describes how they are implemented in my own research. It begins with determining the research paradigms used. Qualitative methods will be used as the research question lends itself to an open-ended research approach. Thematic analysis is the primary method used in this study. I will deliberate different theories on thematic analysis, using Boyatzis (1998) as a main theorist on this subject. I will discuss the process of thematic analysis and describe the research method chosen for this study, and continue with a discussion on topoi used by Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) in their studies on Christianity in the media and their application as theoretical framework for this study.



Chapter Four examines a highly controversial artwork, *The Virgin in a Condom*, a seven centimetre statue of the Virgin Mary shrouded in a condom. This work was highly inflammatory to Christians and particularly offensive to the group 'Catholic Action' which held protests over the statue to discourage people to view the work. Counter protests were held from people who believed that the statue encouraged freedom of expression and debate about Christianity and women. There was a high level of debate surrounding the statue, raising issues about freedom of expression, the role of Christianity in New Zealand, the policies of the Catholic Church on intercourse, the traditions of the Church in comparison with how society operates today and the role of women in the Church. I will apply thematic analysis to this case study to extract the main themes from these articles.

Chapter Five examines the *Elim Christian College Tragedy* in which six students and one teacher were drowned in a canyoning accident at Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre in 2008. The articles cover the funerals of the students and teacher. As Elim Christian College is a Christian school the way this matter was covered dealt with Christian themes. This case study presents the media reporting in a different context from *The Virgin in a Condom* case study, a situation of grief and tragedy. The themes explored are supernatural belief, happiness in the face of adversity, tolerance and compassion. I will apply thematic analysis to these articles to ascertain which themes are present when the media covers Christianity in this context.

Chapter Six summarizes the information found in this thesis. It will review the relevance of the literature review to the findings of this study. It discusses the overall success of the methods used, concludes with the results of the case studies and reflects on what they say about Christianity and the media in New Zealand. There will be recommendations for further studies on this subject.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how the media reports on Christianity and to create a more comprehensive view of the relationship between these two institutions. Specifically, the focus is to discover which themes emerge when they are reported on by mainstream media in New Zealand. My contention is that as Christianity represents the values of 51.2 % of New Zealand society and has been of historical influence in the development of New Zealand culture and values (Berger, 1969), the media should cover this subject objectively. My research concept emerged when I was talking with a religious official in New Zealand who was lamenting the narrow-minded way the New Zealand print media reported on Christianity. He explained that the media would choose extremists or radicals when reporting on religious views as they are perceived more newsworthy, and that this left the view of Christianity in New Zealand unbalanced. This impelled me to investigate the portrayal of Christianity in the media.

The first section of this chapter explores Christian values adhered to by different branches of Western Christianity. Christianity (Bainton, 1964) is more than a dimension of society; it defined, united and in some cases divided a society. This is why it is important, regardless of faith, to reflect on faith and religious values and their place in New Zealand society. The origins of these branches of Christianity and the evolution of Christian values will serve to establish the importance of Christian values in New Zealand society as both Protestantism and Catholicism were pivotal in the development of New Zealand. I will outline the origins of these denominations and discuss the nature of their values. The values of Catholicism will be discussed with specific reference to the New Testament and the Christian themes that emerge in the writings of St. Matthew. Protestant values will be discussed in conjunction with the origins of the Reformation, including the development of Lutherism and Calvinism. I will outline Calvinist values and their relation to capitalist values

in reference to Western society. This Chapter will discuss the impact of Anglicans being the first missionaries to settle in New Zealand and its lasting effect on Christianity in New Zealand. Anglican values, however, are not discussed in this thesis as its values were heavily influenced from Catholic and Protestant values (Zahl, 1998). This chapter examines the general literature on the media and Christianity and its relevance to this study. It will detail the previous studies by Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) which provide the theoretical framework for this thesis. This study aims at understanding and extending this knowledge base and encouraging more research on this topic. The final section of this chapter discusses the relevance of media to this study. It will discuss the role of the media in society and how the media manufactures the news with particular attention to news values.

### **3.1 Christian Values**

This thesis deals with the analysis of Christian themes using thematic analysis in its methodological approach. It is therefore important to determine what Christian themes are. In this section I will examine the origins of Christianity and the themes it has established. Christianity can be divided into three branches; Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox (Wenner & Harkim, 2009). I have limited this study to Western Christianity as the case studies in this research deal specifically with Western strands of Christianity. This study will focus on Protestant and Catholic values as they were the branches of Christianity that settlers to New Zealand subscribed to and are more likely have influenced New Zealand's understanding of Christian values. Catholicism is particularly pertinent to this study as Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* focuses on the perceived violation of Catholic beliefs. I will also examine Pentecostal origins and values as they specifically relate to Case Study Two: *Elim Christian College Tragedy*, as the people central to this study are of Pentecostal faith.

### 3.2 Origins of the Catholic Church

The origins of Western Christianity lie in the Catholic Church. Matthew 16 describes how Peter became the founding rock of the Church when Jesus said to Peter ‘and I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosed on earth will be lost in heaven’(Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p. 25). After Jesus died Peter became the head of the Church in Rome and other apostles travelled to foreign countries to inform the inhabitants about Christianity. The Church that Peter built was strengthened in 383 AD when Emperor Constantine decreed Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire (Odahl, 2004). After the fall of the Roman Empire the Catholic Church continued to establish monasteries and churches throughout Europe. Conflict with Islam led to the sacking of many of these monasteries. This was followed by a number of schisms in the Church; first between Eastern and Western Christianity (Fortescue, 1912) and later the Western schism between the papacy in Italy (Bainton, 1964, p. 236-7).

The church and its traditions have endured; however, the 20th Century has seen the Catholic Church make concessions to Western culture, some of which have been made through the Vatican II Council formed in 1962. The Vatican II Council has made changes such as replacing Latin with English in the Mass and crafting a more modern interpretation of scriptures (Flannery, 1982). One of the central figures of Catholicism that sets Christianity apart from other religion is the Virgin Mary (Hamington, 1995). She is revered in her role as the Mother of Jesus Christ and the symbol of purity in the Immaculate Conception. This difference is important in Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* as the subject matter involves a statue of the Virgin Mary. The fundamental values of the early Catholic Church are as follows:

### *Faith/ Obedience*

Faith is a fundamental belief in Christianity because it relies on belief in God who can't be seen. The Webster's Desk Dictionary defines faith as 'belief in God' (Steinmetz & Braham, 1993, p. 163). Quite simply, if you do not believe in God you are not Christian. Furthermore, Christians are not supposed to challenge this belief. Matthew 4 states that 'the scripture says do not put your lord God to the test' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p. 6). The depth of faith is measured in love of this God and in true love of Him comes true faith. This is evident in Matthew 22 'Love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p. 32). There are rewards for this faith. First of all faith, according to Christianity, is the key to heaven. Furthermore it gives you the strength to accomplish your goals on earth. Matthew 17 asserts 'I assure you that if you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, "Go from here to there and it will go." You can do anything' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.26). Faith is the most important value as it is said in the Bible that those who believe will go to heaven. Faith is particularly pertinent in Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* as the faith expressed by families and friends of the victims was paramount to their coping with the tragedy.

### *Humility / Chastity*

Humility is a prominent value in Catholicism. The Webster's Desk Dictionary defines humility as 'the quality or state of being humble' (Steinmetz & Braham, 1993, p.220). Christians hold the belief that God is greater than all and therefore they must live their lives for him. This means people should not elevate themselves with false importance but live lives of quiet devotion. Matthew 6 proclaims 'make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward in Heaven' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.10).

Humility is particularly relevant to Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* as it the family and friends of the victims in were described as handling the loss with humility and grace.

### *Poverty*

Poverty is a contentious value as it is not desirable in this modern world. The Webster's Desk Dictionary defines poverty as 'deficiency of necessary or desirable ingredients' (Steinmetz & Braham, 1993, p.354). There are arguments whether it is necessary for a good Christian to live in poverty. Luke 16 asserts 'I assure you it will be very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven, I repeat it is much harder for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.100). It can't be easy for high earners to subscribe to this thought. However, it has been written in the Bible (Keeler, 1993) that people who have given up their worldly possessions, such as the 12 disciples, have been in God's favour. Poverty ties in with humility as wealth often correlates with perceived importance.

### *Kindness*

A Christian is to be kind to others and respect other people. The Webster's Desk Dictionary defines kindness as 'the state or quality of being kind' (Steinmetz & Braham, 1993, p.251). Matthew 9 states that the 'the scripture says that it is kindness I want, not animal sacrifices' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.14). This is a value that is identified with Christians today. They are known for showing kindness and compassion to others and generosity in nature. Matthew 19 claims 'love your neighbour as you would love yourself' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.28). Treating others with kindness and compassion has been a Christian value and people who have been sanctified have generally been made saints due to their great compassion for others as

well as their faith in God. This value is demonstrated in Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* as the respect and kindness demonstrated by members of Elim Christian College and the surrounding community showed kindness in a time of crisis.

### *Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is a reoccurring theme in Catholicism. Catholics go to confession to confess their sins to a priest. In the Mass they pray to the Lord for cleansing of their sins. The Webster's Desk Dictionary defines to forgive as to 'cease to feel resentment against' (Steinmetz & Braham, 1993, p.176). Matthew 18 states 'Lord if my brother keeps sinning how many times must I forgive him? Seven times?', 'No, not seven times' answered Jesus, 'but seventy times seven because the kingdom of heaven is like this' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.27). It is believed that as the Lord is forgiving, Christians must be forgiving also. In Christianity everyone is seen as a sinner and consequentially no one is worthy of condemning another's sins. It is also seen as pious and humble to take blows given to you by others and forgive them. Forgiveness is also demonstrated in Matthew 5 when Jesus said 'you have heard it said that it was said "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" but now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps the right cheek, let them slap your left cheek too' (Keeler, 1993, New Testament, p.5). Forgiveness allows Christians not only to forgive others but to forgive themselves. This forgiveness of self is important for Christians retaining the belief that although they have sinned they can go to heaven. Forgiveness is relevant to Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*, most prominently in the schools public forgiveness of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

The origins of the Catholic Church are relevant to this study in detailing the fundamental themes on which Western Christianity was built and how it has



evolved in modern society. Catholicism is currently the second leading denomination in New Zealand with 14% identifying as Catholic (Census Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Catholic values are particularly pertinent to Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* as it deals specifically with the reaction of Catholics to this work. Supporters of the work claim that Christian traditions are becoming outdated in modern society and the Church needs to change to adapt. It can also be seen that while Elim Christian College is of Pentecostal faith the school shares some of the same values as the Catholic faith.

### **3.3 The origins of Protestantism**

The next phase in the development of Western Christian values was the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. The Reformation saw the division between the Protestant and Catholic Church due to disagreements on how the Church should be run. The Protestant ethic (Webber, 1983) is a set of values that evolved from this disagreement and was fundamental in deciding how the Protestant Church should be run. One of the men who heralded the Protestant Reform was John Wyclife (Britannica Encyclopaedia, 2010) who in the 14th century was the first person to translate the Bible into English. However, the two greatest champions of Protestantism were Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In the face of humanist endeavours throughout the Renaissance there had been an increasing discomfort with the Church. One of those who keenly felt this discomfort was Martin Luther. Born in Germany, Martin Luther studied to be a lawyer (Friedrich, Tischer & Schmucker, 1860). However, a spiritual experience made him join the order of the Hermits of St Augustine. He found this experience unfulfilling and returned to the University of Erfurt to become a lecturer (Friedrich et al., 1860) but Luther seemed more fixed on his spiritual journey than he was on teaching. He noticed hypocrisy in the behaviour of the bishops and clergy and expressed his discontent in 1512 when he nailed his 95

theses to the door of Castle Church at Wittenburg on All Saints Day (Friedrich et al., 1860). What followed was an open protest against the established Catholic Church, thus spawning a new group of Christians known as Lutherans.

Luther appealed to people's frustration with the Church at the time and refocused religion on the individual. The rich were happy that they could ensure salvation without paying large sums to the Church, and the poor were happy that they were given a position of dignity in his Church. Luther set the spark of the Reformation that spread all over Europe (Friedrich et al., 1860). As a result of Luther's protest the Church would never be the same again. Kersten (1860) contends 'Lutherism is set apart from Catholicism in that 'The powerlessness of man, stressed by Martin Luther, contrasts with the traditional Roman Catholic belief that although man is born sinful, he may overcome this state by good works' (p.22).

The Reformation led to the development of the 'Protestant ethic', a strict code of conduct derived from scriptures (Webber 1983). Webber (1983) defines the Protestant ethic as 'A moral code stressing hard work, asceticism, and the rational organization of one's life in the service of God' (Webber & Parsons, 2003, p.296). This has led to Protestants rationalising hard work as pleasing to God. Webber (1983) asserts that Calvinists believe, according to both the revelation of the Bible and to natural intuition, that men are evidently designed by God to serve the utility of the human race as 'This makes labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear to promote the Glory of God to serve the utility of the human race' (Webber, 1983, p.34). This explains the emphasis on hard work and aiding the community displayed by Protestants. Owners of highly-skilled labour and capital are overwhelmingly Protestant (Webber, 1983). Webber (1983) argues that this can be partially explained by historic environmental circumstances but also largely by the values of Protestantism.

### 3.4 Calvinism

Webber (1983) contends that 'Calvinism was the faith over which the great political and cultural struggles of the 16th and 17th centuries were fought in the most highly developed countries' (Webber, 1983, p.27). The Calvinist ideology arose in the midst of the Renaissance during the Protestant Reformation and this ideology was designed by John Calvin. Hooker (1996) describes Calvin as the first major political thinker to model social organization entirely on biblical principles. Originally a lawyer, Calvin moved to Geneva to rebuild the Church when the citizens of Geneva revolted against their rulers (Naphy, 2003). It was here he made significant changes in how the Church was run with very strict rules and regulations for the Genevan citizens. Calvin's autocratic style caused him to be ousted in 1538; however, he was later invited back in 1541, and upon his return restructured the religious landscape of Geneva. One of his most prominent moves was to create a close bond between church and state, particularly when dealing with moral issues such as crime. These laws were very strict and uncompromising. Geneva soon attracted many other Protestants ostracized from their own land and by 1550 between one third and one half of Geneva's population was made up of foreign Protestants (Hooker, 1996). Naphy (2003) contends Calvin's style of Protestantism became the main branch of Protestantism from the 17th century onwards.

Calvin took the Bible literally and believed not only that followers of Protestantism should abide by these rules but that they should be the basis on which society is formed (Naphy, 2003). Webber (1983) contends that Calvinists believed that 'the world's interest is solely in God; God does not exist for men but men for the sake of God'. (Webber, 1983, p.32). This is important in understanding how Protestants relate to others of non-Protestant faith.

Calvin and Luther may have had the same goals; however, their methods of reaching them were largely different. Calvin instigated change through

immersing Protestant values in politics while Luther instigated change from a protest against the Church. Their actions not only changed how the Church was run, they changed how the Church thought. The development of the Protestant ethic and choosing to live life with strict moral conduct changed the values of many in Europe and consequently many Protestants, unhappy with the values portrayed in Europe, settled in America.

Protestantism is relevant to this study as it has been an integral part of the development of Western Christianity. The break away from Catholicism during the Protestant Reformation assisted in the progression of Christian values. Through understanding Protestant beliefs, such as the belief that only Protestants are selected for the kingdom of heaven, a better understanding of the Christian themes in this study can be attained (Webber, 1983). Defining the values of Western Christianity is important as they will be a factor in deciding which values are used in analysing the case studies. It is important that the values of Western Christianity are defined because New Zealand was impacted by Western Christianity.

It may also be argued that Protestant values had an effect on New Zealand's development. The Protestant work ethic can be seen in the Kiwi 'do it yourself' attitude (Sinclair, 1986), and developed through hard labour in rendering a wild land habitable. Early settlers had to clear vast spaces of land and build from scratch (King, 2003). Women had different roles in this land as they often had to take on harder tasks like managing farms due to necessity (King, 2003). This, as Webber (1983) has defined, is inclusive in the moral codes of Protestants of hard work and discipline. Trotter (2007) contends that from the keeping up with the entrepreneurial talent of the New Zealand Company to the rampant capitalism of the 1980s it can be seen that social mobility is still a strongly held belief in New Zealand. This places the emphasis on the individual working hard which is in alignment with the moral code of Protestantism. Due to Protestantism's role in forming New Zealand morals and standards it is

important to understand how Christianity arrived in New Zealand before trying to grasp how it is portrayed by the New Zealand media today.

### **3.5 Pentecostalism**

#### *Origins*

Pentecostalism is particularly pertinent to Case Study Two: *Elim Christian College Tragedy* as Elim Christian College is of Pentecostal faith.

Pentecostalism is an extension of Methodism and the Evangelical American revivals (Martin, 2002). Robbins (2004) explains that the Pentecostal movement grew out of the revival known as the Great Awakening, in 18th century America. Martin (2002) contests that Pentecostalism in many respects, holds similar values to Methodism, in its entrepreneurship and adaptability, its lay participation and enthusiasm, and in its splintering and fractiousness. Pentecostal faith represents over a quarter of Christians worldwide and is deemed a cultural phenomenon (Anderson, 2004). The definition of Pentecostalism can be variable. Anderson (2004) defines the faith as ‘appropriate for describing globally all churches and movements that emphasise the workings of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and theological grounds’ (Anderson in Gooren, 2004, p.1). Alternatively Robbins (2004) defines Pentecostalism as ‘The form of Christianity in which believers receive gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences, such as speaking in tongues; healing and prophesying is one of the great success stories in the current era of cultural globalisation.’ (Robbins, 2004). The term ‘Speaking in tongues’ is derived from the apostles speaking in tongues through the power of the Holy Spirit, one of the central figures in the Pentecostal faith.

## *Beliefs*

There are three blessings in Pentecostalism. 'Justification' is the first blessing, by which Jesus' death on the cross provides salvation for those who believe. The second blessing, 'sanctification', is when the 'sins of Adam' are removed from the sinner (Robbins, 2004). Where the Pentecostalism diverges from Methodism is in the third blessing of Holy Baptism, in the intensity of millennial expectation, and in a greater emphasis on the power of Christ rather than as a Man of sorrows. (Martin, 2002, p.7). While millennial expectation was prominent in early Methodism, it is unclear to what degree it plays a role in contemporary Pentecostalism (Martin, 2002). Robbins (2004) asserts speaking in tongues is a defining factor of Pentecostalism, an innovation in the 1900s by a highly regarded holiness preacher, Charles Fox Parham. Robbins (2004) continues that people must enter the faith of their own free will (therefore not receiving the blessings at a young age) and that evangelicals are encouraged to convert others. The Bible is held in high regard in the Pentecostal faith and is taken in literal terms.

The Pentecostal faith is relevant to this study as it is the faith involved in Case Study Two: *Elim Christian College Tragedy*. Through studying Pentecostalism the reader accumulates a better understanding of the reaction of the friends and family of the students who died and how they coped with their loss. In particular, the Pentecostal belief of taking the Bible in literal terms is important in understanding what the friends and family believe about death. Also the idea of encouraging others to join their faith is important in understanding the openness in the way they discuss their faith with the media.

### 3.6 Christianity in New Zealand

Christianity played a fundamental role in the forming of New Zealand's identity as missionaries were some of the first settlers in New Zealand and the first to have meaningful impact on Maori (King, 2003). They were the first people to educate Maori on Pakeha language and beliefs. Explorers and traders preceded and co-existed with Maori but did not stay long enough to have a lasting impact on their culture (King, 2003). The primary interest of explorers and traders was business and they were predominantly based on the coast of New Zealand resulting in contact being restricted to tribes around coastal areas. The Anglican Church Missionary Society was established under Samuel Marsden in Rangiora in 1814 (Trotter, 2007). Rangiora was chosen due to its proximity to Ruatara, a Maori chief who had fostered a close friendship with Marsden. Ruatara would offer protection to missionaries and encourage participation from other Maori. Marsden was a fan of the policy of 'civilisation first' (King, 2003) which focused on civilising Maori and then teaching them Christianity. Marsden sailed to Sydney in 1815 and Ruatara died four days later. Marsden left behind him Tom Kendall (school teacher), William Hall (carpenter) and John King (rope maker and shoe maker) in charge of the mission (King, 2003).

It was not long after Marsden's departure that missionaries became affiliated with the social-climbing, musket-hungry Maori Chief Hongi Hika (King, 2003). Unlike Ruatara who respected and had an understanding of Christian values, Hika was not a particularly good model for Christian values. What made matters worse was that some early missionaries engaged in the musket trade, feeding local warfare. Agriculture and farming was difficult in Rangiora with the result that the mission became 'dependent on local Maori and assistance from Sydney instead of the self sufficient station Marsden had envisioned' (Davidson, 2004). Early missionaries interpreted the meaning of 'civilising' in different ways. This disparity led to many disagreements which is likely to have made their attempts at 'civilising' confusing for Maori. Despite displaying

some rather unchristian values, Kendall did manage to conduct the first two baptisms in 1823. The first clergyman to arrive in New Zealand, Reverend John Butler (in 1819), was no more successful than his predecessors (King, 2003). Rev. Butler opened a second missionary station in Kerikeri. Like Abraham returning from the mountain to find his followers deep in sin Marsden returned in 1823 and found that his protégées had turned to immoral behaviour in his absence. Kendall was dismissed, due to his musket trading and relationship with the daughter of a Maori chief, and Butler due to his drunkenness.

These reports on early missionaries may sound damning; however, they had to face challenges of their own in this untamed land. Early missionaries were a long way from home with a mammoth task of changing an entire belief system of a people who already held strong convictions of faith (King, 2003). Owens (1980) outlines these objectives as follows: ‘to bring Christianity, to civilise, to undermine heathen ways and beliefs, to promote British economic interests, settlements and political control’. In difficult times, ‘such objectives were not all compatible with each other’ (Nichol, & Veitch, 1980, p.20). These objectives were not all achievable at once and caused friction between the missionaries. They arrived to find Maori culture in a transitional period under stress from causes quite removed from the presence of missionaries. Not all being men of the cloth, these missionaries did not perhaps have the same conviction of faith to convince Maori to convert. Confronted with the Maori race in this fragile situation missionaries had four options; to hasten this change, to delay change, to blanket Christianity (to bribe Maori with goods in exchange for participating in Christian practices), or to do nothing. The impact missionaries had on Maori is arguable. Owens (1980) contends that ‘the missionaries had an impact but not what they expected. They thought they could set a model of a Christian family and the Maori would follow. It rarely happened’ (Owens in Nichol & Veitch, 1980, p.35). Maori also adopted a selective approach to Christianity, using what they liked about this new God while keeping aspects they liked from their own gods.



The missionaries who took over these missionary stations had the benefit of knowing the effects of the first missionaries there. Reverend Henry Williams chose to discard the 'civilisation first' policy that had been held by earlier missionaries (King, 2003). He learnt the Maori language and encouraged his workers to do the same. His clean living and impeccable manners gradually began to have an impact on Maori. Rev. Henry Williams was joined by competent missionaries such as his brother, William Williams, who translated sections of the Bible into Maori. Rev. Henry Williams understood Maori much better than his predecessors and therefore understood their needs from the Church Missionary Society. He overcame the language barrier by learning Maori and in turn teaching English to Maori. King (2003) writes that 'The literacy offered by the missions schools at Kerikeri and Paihia was embraced with enthusiasm by a growing number of Maori adults and children, especially after the mission printer William Colenso began producing the scripture in Maori' (King, 2003, p.144). The baptisms in the Bay of Islands escalated and 'by 1842 there were over 3000 Christian Maori in the region, and others further afield'. This was a result of Henry Williams and Marsden's periodic trips to the other parts of the country and the opening of stations at Kaitaia, Waimate, Mangapouri, Rotorua, Otaki and Waikanae. By the 1930s there were a number of Maori evangelists (King 2003). Many of these were slaves, set free from leaders who had converted to Christianity. They would travel to their home tribes to spread the word.

Anglicans were not the only denomination to settle in New Zealand. Catholic missionaries arrived from France in 1838 and settled in Northern Hokianga. The French had an advantage over the Wesleyans and Anglicans as they were celibate and therefore free of distractions from family or the opposite sex. They were led by Bishop Pompallier, the first bishop of any denomination to set foot in New Zealand (King, 2003). They were not welcomed with open arms. In fact Nathaniel Turner likened Bishop Pompallier and his Marist workers to 'the

great whore of Babylon' (King, 2003, p.145). However, Pompallier enjoyed great success. In 1839, he relocated to Bay of Islands and set up stations in the Bay of Plenty and the East Coast of the previously ignored South Island. The dignified and elegant bishop had by 1839 converted 1000 Maori. Pompallier, like Williams presented a moral way of living, which resonated with Maori (King, 2003). Both also displayed leadership skills and had the charisma and energy required to make their missions work.

There are varied opinions regarding the Maori shift towards Christianity. As well as literacy, missionaries taught Maori agricultural and building techniques, adding to the appeal of becoming Christian. In a sense (King, 2003) the key to becoming like Pakeha was to adopt Christianity as this was one of the only avenues available for Maori to learn about Pakeha life and culture. Settlers brought some less pleasant aspects of their lifestyle to New Zealand. Weapons, alcohol and disease had a lasting impact on Maori culture. The Musket Wars and the spread of European disease devastated the Maori population. This massive decrease in population is thought to have increased the number of Maori turning to Christianity for answers to these new evils. During the 1830s Maori began embracing Christian culture and a Christian God. However, examination of the missionary tuition did reveal that their teachings on health care and good diet did not stick. Reasons for this are explained by Nichol and Veitich (1980) below:

'It could be thought that trade in blankets could be an aid to comfort and health; but when the Maoris wore blankets in the same way as traditional garments they undermined health. It might be thought that new crops, such as easily grown potato, would aid health; but as they had less food value than traditional food, the opposite was the case. The ending of the war, one might expect, would prevent much loss of life and suffering; but it removed a male incentive to keep fit and it disrupted leadership. To encourage the ending of slavery and polygamy was a natural humanitarian gesture; but it brought increased burdens

of work for the women or the children they bore, hence, in all, it had an adverse effect on population numbers. It can be seen that especially in a cross-cultural situation, an attempt to solve problems often merely has the effect of altering the problem to be solved. Change, especially rapid change, seldom occurs without suffering' (Nichol, & Veitich, 1980, p.47).

While missionaries came to New Zealand with good intentions their euro-centric, imperialist views inhibited them from fully understanding Maori and making a positive contribution to their lives. However, eventually the numbers of conversions increased and Christianity was adopted in New Zealand. Davidson (2004) alleges that George Clarke estimated that in 1845, out of a population of 100,110 Maori, 42,700 attended Anglican services, 1,600 Methodist services and 5,100 were associated with Roman Catholics. New Zealand before the Treaty of Waitangi was a land without law (King, 2003). There were no unifying policies against which to measure Christian values. Instead, the 'law' was made by whom you worked for. For sealers, whalers and traders, that meant obeying their boss. For Maori it meant retaining their own set of beliefs and traditions, and for missionaries that meant obeying the Christian Missionary Society.

The relevance of the missionaries' involvement in New Zealand is pertinent to this study as it provides evidence that missionaries were responsible for providing social values and education in pre-colonised New Zealand. Christian values, while not the impetus for Maori to communicate with missionaries, were learnt by Maori as a product of this communication. Christianity set up the policies and beliefs in early New Zealand that would later be consolidated by the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

### *The Treaty*

In 1840, when the Treaty was signed, 2000 pakeha were living in New Zealand. By 1858 this had increased to 59,000 pakeha. Settlers came to New Zealand for its beauty and promise of freedom and to leave behind the abysmal conditions resulting from over-population and poverty in Europe. Many settlers came to New Zealand to escape established religion so perhaps it is no surprise that the Treaty of Waitangi was originally written without any reference to religious beliefs. In the hurried fashion in which the Treaty was written Lieutenant Governor Hobson, who would later become the first Governor of New Zealand, had forgotten to mention the role religion would have in New Zealand. It was written that ‘shortly before the signing took place, however, Hobson was intercepted by Bishop Pompallier who was worried that the embryonic state of New Zealand might adopt and entrench the British tradition of an “established church, and that the church would have been the Church of England”. Hobson agreed to this proposal with what Henry Williams called “much blandness of expression”. To Williams’ further annoyance, the Lieutenant- Governor (as he was called until New Zealand became a full Crown colony in 1841) asked Williams himself to convey this assurance in Maori to the reassembled chiefs’ (King, 2003, p.163).

Pompallier had his own motives for preventing New Zealand recognising an ‘established religion’ which would most likely be ‘The Church of England’. However, a hurried statement drafted by Williams read ‘The Governor wishes you to understand that all the Maoris (sic) who shall join the Church of England, who shall join the Wesleyans, who shall join the Pikopo or the Church of Rome, and those who retain their Maori practices, shall have the protection of the British Government’ (King, 2003, p.163). Although this was morally significant, it had no constitutional or legal power and is not considered part of the Treaty of Waitangi. On the day when New Zealand was defining itself as a nation, religious beliefs were an afterthought. Unlike the ‘freedom of religion

and state' of countries like America New Zealand never did resolve a clear policy on religion at its constitutional beginning. Missionaries had an important position in encouraging Maori to sign the Treaty. Once the Treaty was signed the physical, cultural and economic landscape of New Zealand rapidly began to change. The absence of the Christianity in the signing of the Treaty is relevant to this study as it demonstrates the attitudes towards Christianity at that time. As this study deals with Christian themes it is important to determine what Christian themes mean to New Zealand and the impact Christianity has had on New Zealand culture. This will contribute to a better understanding of why these values may or may not be present in the New Zealand media.

### *The New Zealand Company*

The New Zealand Company, created by Edward Gibbon Wakefield, was responsible for where many settlers would live. It founded settlements in Wanganui, Nelson, New Plymouth and Wellington. These settlements, based on religious beliefs and nationality, greatly influenced the cultural climate of New Zealand. King (2003) writes 'While the New Zealand Company's settlements contributed to only 15,000 settlers to New Zealand's founding population, they were disproportionately influential on account of being there first and establishing the ethos of their cities, three of which, with Auckland, would become and remain the 'main cities' and provide the foundation for the system of provincial government introduced in 1853' (King. 2003, p.173). If one should need proof of the Church's involvement in the colonisation of New Zealand they should look no further than Otago and Canterbury which both had religious patronage when they were founded by The New Zealand Company.

The first settlement by the New Zealand Company in Dunedin was affiliated with the Scottish Free Church, and its second settlement in Christchurch was affiliated with the Church of England. The Church involvement in Otago and Canterbury is evident in the colonists who moved there, the architecture of the

city and in the ethos the cities developed. George Rennie instigated much of the Otago settlement (Trotter, 2007), though his plans were dismissed in 1842 by the Colonial Office. It wasn't until Rennie was joined by two men, Captain William Cargill and Rev. Thomas Burns, that the idea of a settlement in Otago began to take shape. The two men heavily edited Rennie's original proposal and resubmitted it. This time it was successful and the New Zealand Company obtained the titles for it in 1843.

Burns was part of the Free Church, the religion of the settlers who arrived in Otago. Due to a schism between The Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Established Free Church (Trotter, 2007) there was tension in Scotland creating an ideal opportunity for people to get away to practice their religion in peace. 'They stipulated that it must be a Scottish Presbyterian settlement with ample endowments for religious and educational purposes, the whole emigration fund to be expended in promoting the emigration of selected Scotch Labourers' (Mackie, 1939, p.132). Rennie, who had formed the idea originally, did not like the exclusive policy that the Otago settlement had adopted. He fell out with Burns and Cargill leaving them to finish the work he had started. While the colonists were Presbyterian, the funding came from people committed to the Free Church. The plans for Otago hit financial strife until the Laymans Association financially backed them, many of whose members belonged to the Free Church.

It was decided that one eighth of the proceeds of land sales would be used for religious and educational purposes. A total of 21,400 properties at the price of 289,200 pounds, roughly 86,760,000 pounds, were appropriated for religious and educational purposes. In 1844 the deeds of sale were signed and in 1847 the terms of purchase completed. Two ships set sail from Scotland to travel to this new settlement in 1847, the '*John Wickliffe*' and the '*Philip Laing*'. An account of the ships leaving describes the scene; 'The parting at Greenock was conducted with grave solemnity, with prayers and singing of psalms, and on the

voyage out a strict discipline was maintained over the emigrants, religious services being held twice daily, while moments of relaxation were spent in singing hymns or the national songs of Scotland' (Mackie, 1939, p.133). The Otago gold rush in the 1860s meant the vision of a Presbyterian settlement was unfulfilled as it attracted many people of different cultures and religions to Otago. However, there are still remnants of its Presbyterian beginnings in Otago today.

The Christchurch settlement was to be 'the magnum opus of Wakefield's life, and it was to also be the last effort of the New Zealand Company (Trotter, 2007), which, 'unable to repay parliamentary loans to the amount of 236,000 pounds was obliged, in July 1850, to surrender its charter and property to the Crown' (Mackie, 1939, p.134). The idea behind the settlement was to create a small cathedral town, a replica of those found in England. Some early church leaders, including the Arch Bishop of Canterbury, supported this idea. The importance of religion is stressed in the decision that one third of the profits of land sales would go towards religious and educational purposes, decided by the Church of England. This scheme met with some opposition. Sydney Smith (1771 – 1845) stated 'In a sense a man does well to part with everything to save his soul, but what are we to think of a Church which, at every step of its progress, particularly states its belief that the salvation of men is an affair of money, and thrusts itself into everything for bettering the human race with a demand for a third of the hard-earned labour of the industrious?' (Mackie, 1939, p.136). Indeed it is hard to understand how the Church's appropriation of this amount of money was beneficial to the whole settlement. Otago and Christchurch begin to allude to township theocracies (Trotter, 2007), the kind of established religion that settlers were looking to escape. Four ships from England set sail for New Zealand in 1850, the '*Cressy*', '*Sir George Seymour*', '*Randolph*' and, '*Charlotte Jane*'. Although their voyage was not as sombre as those of the settlers from Otago there were still religious overtones (Trotter,

2007). While these settlements would later change as other immigrants were allowed to live there they still retained the sense of their original design.

The history of Christianity in New Zealand is relevant to this thesis to determine the perception the New Zealand media has of Christianity today. To understand how the New Zealand media informs the public on Christianity it is imperative to understand what Christianity means to New Zealand. The first missionaries to arrive in New Zealand were fundamental in making connections with Maori as well as playing a vital role in encouraging Maori to sign the Treaty of Waitangi (King, 2003). Later on, it was important in deciding where settlers would be located within New Zealand (Trotter 2007). Mackie (1939) contends that ‘the story of the formation of church settlements in New Zealand adds more than just a touch of interest to history; it brings to the forefront that religious bodies have not been backward in contributing their share to the solution of industrial and social problems of the day’ (Mackie, 1939, p.131).

It can be seen, from the large amount of tax that went to the Church in the Christchurch and Otago settlements that the Church was deemed to be very important in colonial New Zealand. The beliefs of the early settlers in New Zealand are also pertinent to this study as they have impacted on the forming of New Zealand’s national identity and how New Zealanders view Christianity. Those beliefs are also crucial in defining the 12 Christian themes that will be applied to the case studies in this research project. It is imperative that while creating a code for thematic analysis every aspect of Christianity is viewed to give an in- depth understanding of Christian values before choosing what themes will be chosen for the code.



### 3.7 Existing studies on the media and Christianity

*‘Religion motivates people to act, and it shapes cultures. It has a way of connecting itself to everything.’*

(Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, p.ix)

Only a small number of studies consider the relationship between the media and Christianity. The majority of these studies have focused on the media in the United States of America. This is relevant to this current study as the USA has a different religious climate from New Zealand and will therefore produce varying outcomes. There has however been a quantity of academic debate on this subject. Olasky (1990) claims ‘the press has been secularised in its framing of religion’ (Olasky in Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996:p1). He argues that the American media is cynical and negative in its reporting on Christianity. Silk (1998) insists that ‘religious values are clearly reflected in this type of news’ (Stout, & Buddenbaum, 1996, p.1). Both used framing to discuss the relationship between the media and Christianity. Olasky (1990) argues that reporting is secular due to either the lack of coverage or negative press coverage when it exists at all (Olasky in Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996). Silk (1998) asserts that negative press coverage does not necessarily mean that the media is secular. He claims that by holding Christians in account for their actions the press is upholding Christian values. The attitude of the press towards religion has always been a sensitive topic and both these theories have grounding but it is apparent that reporting on religion is not balanced.

Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) write that reporting on religion should be more than just routine announcements, and that not asking the right questions can result in an inaccurate story and miss the full picture. Studies during 2001 in America show that journalists often misinterpret the ability of their audience to understand complex issues such as religion (Ryan, 2002). While religion does not use technical jargon, it does use complex issues that can often be framed by

the media to make it a more compact story. Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) state that 'In the study of religion and media, framing has value far beyond just knowing what is in the news; it also determines the types of information that ultimately contribute to public opinion about a particular religion'. (Stout & Buddenbaum 2003, p.1). Silk (1998), Olasky (1990) and Moore (2003) conducted research on framing and religion. Olasky (1990) writes that 'because that audience is religiously diverse, journalists today apply the same news values to religious news that they do when reporting on other subjects' (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, p.93). In contrast Silk (1998) proposed that religious values are clearly reflected in this type of news.

Trends in religious reporting have shown that there was high interest up until about the 18th century in America (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996). Due to the lack of literature available on the media and Christianity in New Zealand it may be assumed that New Zealand escaped this as the country was colonized after the trend of religiously themed news. As a result religion seems fairly absent in New Zealand's history of journalism. However, modern day reporting is posing a new challenge to religious reporting. Schement and Stephenson (1996) write that the growth of the information age sees a transition for religion from the private sphere to the public sphere and as a result religious figures are living more of their lives in the public eye. Asking "why" questions about beliefs and values gives people a chance to tell their own stories. The Hutchinson Commission (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996) suggests that it is necessary for the media to serve as a forum through which the public can debate and clarify goals and values. Religion remains an important part of forming social and moral standards in society and the media remains an important vehicle for setting these standards.

Past studies on the media and Christianity are pertinent to this study as they have informed the methodological and theoretical approach to this research. Silk (1998) and Moore (2003), in particular, informed this study by providing

the idea of topoi which directed my research methods to a thematic approach. Both Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) and their application of topoi to their studies will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The influence of these two studies, both conducted in USA, has also brought to my attention the need for a study on the media and Christianity in New Zealand. A search has found no other studies in New Zealand that analyse both the media and Christianity. General literature on the media and Christianity is also important in establishing the relationship between these two institutions for the purposes of this study. Stout and Buddenbaum (1996) are particularly relevant in describing how the media has reported on Christianity in the past.

### **3.8 The role of journalism**

The media is a powerful faction of society armed with the dual responsibilities of protecting and informing the public (Islam, 2002). This is how it has earned the reputation of being a watch dog. Given that this is the ultimate ideological goal of mass media, the main ways in which it tries to achieve that are by reinforcing social belief and behaviour and excluding those that don't fit in. This is most successfully achieved through the free market (Curran, 2005) which allows all people the right to express their opinion. Therefore all important opinions get expressed. The range of opinions expressed also allows people to make more informed choices. Curran (2005) writes that the mass media contributes to reinforcing social ideas by contributing information, stimulating debate and representing the voice of the people. The media decides which information is important to the reader and ultimately what is not news (Curran, 2005). It is in this capacity that a country can be run as a democracy as it provides a vehicle for the public to express its opinions and ideas on key matters of importance. As regards the civil societarian approach, the strategy here is to enhance 'civil society', that is, to strengthen the various networks which are free from state control (unions, churches, civic movements, co-operatives, neighbourhoods, schools of thought etc.) in order to impose such

limits (i.e. social controls) on markets and the state, so that a kind of systemic change is brought about (Fotopoulos, 1999). One of the largest responsibilities that the media has is to protect the public from unlawful and amoral behaviour from people in positions of power. It is the media's duty to inform the public when someone in a position of power is abusing his or her power against the interests of the public.

As well as different objectives, the news is also determined by outside influences. Danelian (1992) noted that 'in political debate over social issues, interest groups often play a major role in making an issue salient to both policy makers and the media' (Danelian in Stout & Buddenbaum, 1992, p.8). Added pressures from advertisers and ratings are taken into consideration when determining what is newsworthy. The costs of publishing and competitive markets mean that the range of opinions reaching mass audiences is limited. As Bourdieu (2005) points out, 'competition rather than automatically generating originality and diversity tends to favour uniformity' (Fotopoulos, 1999). The media is also a business and competes with other newspapers and television and radio stations for ratings. For most organizations a central measure of success is the securing of large audiences. Tiffen (1989) contends that all news organizations 'particularly the popular ones, place great stress on communicating with and reflecting their community' (Tiffen 1989, p.52). Therefore, they use indicators to determine the news according to what interests their audience. These indicators are described as news values. Tiffen (1989) argues that 'There are several dimensions of news values. The most basic is market demand: how perceptions of the audience and its interests affect news production' (Tiffen, 1989, p.52). He writes that ratings, feedback and market research are the best indicators of how a newspaper is going, but can also be unreliable at times. News values are relevant to this study as they determine why certain themes are used by journalists in the two case studies provided in this research project.

The pressures created by the ratings mechanism, as Bourdieu (2005) points out, have nothing to do with the democratic expression of enlightened collective opinion or public rationality, despite what media ideologues assert. Where a general consensus exists it is generally the power the elite have over the news. Newspapers are funded and run by people of high social standing. Newspapers frequently cover the actions of elite people in society as this makes a story more newsworthy. This creates what is known as a 'balance of power' (Bourdieu, 2005). The person who holds the most power on any issue influences the perception of reality presented in the story. If the balance of power is equal, where the parties involved share the same social status, the article is heavily influenced. It has been argued throughout this chapter that Christianity has impacted New Zealand societal values. As a result Christian leaders may be seen to be morally elite and asked to give advice on such issues. The media plays to a target audience, and in regards to religion, it cannot alienate faiths that include large numbers of its target audience. Silk (1998) proposes that 'the media can ill afford to draw the circle of acceptable religion too small'. (Silk, 1998, p.53). This means that whether or not the media supports religious ideas it at least has to consider them when writing about the news.

### *News Values*

News values are discussed in this study as an extension of the role of journalism. They are pertinent to this study as this research project discusses the newsworthiness of Christian themes in the media. Cohen and Young (1973) proposed eight different factors that are likely to influence the value of a news story. These factors dictate that if a story is more frequent, stronger, clearer, more meaningful, in agreement with the image expected, unexpected, it has already been tuned in to be listened to. The more recorded a signal is the more likely it will be tuned in to and listened to (Cohen & Young, 1973, p.52-53). Palmer (2000) has adapted this list to add in a few other factors. Palmer (2000) defines the factors that make a story newsworthy as follows;

### *Frequency*

The more something is reported on the more it will be seen as newsworthy. This is because the public will be familiar with the theme and format of the story and therefore become more invested in its trajectory. Journalists use thematic reporting to make a rather mundane story newsworthy. For example, there were a series of dog attacks in 2006 that were reported on. One dog attack might not be worth reporting but if there has already been a series of attacks reported on then the story may be considered newsworthy. The irony is that the number of dog attacks in 2006 wasn't higher than in previous or subsequent years however, because the media had reported it, it became newsworthy. As a result the public perception was that there were a higher number of dog attacks than there actually had been.

### *Consonance and Continuity*

This drives competition in the news. Consonance is how much a story is being reported by other papers and media. The more papers reporting it the more newsworthy it becomes. Continuity measures the trajectory of a story. The more a story is covered throughout its unfolding the more newsworthy it will be. The consistent coverage by *The Dominion Post* of Case Study One: *The Virgin in a condom* from the time the statue arrived right up until it left meant that the story continued to be newsworthy by the standards of *The Dominion Post* and other papers.

### *Threshold and Clarity*

Threshold was also defined as a news value. The sooner something is reported the more newsworthy it is. This has resulted in newspaper competition to be the first to report an event. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt's first pictures with their children sold for \$14,000,000 to Hello and People magazine (Associated Press 8/1/2008.) After the pictures have been published they lose some of their value. The great need to be first is that once something has been reported its value

drops as it is already public knowledge. The clarity of a story factors in making a story newsworthy (Palmer, 2000). The audience likes what they can understand. Therefore, it is crucial to not complicate an event or report on events that are too complicated.

### *Context*

Context. An audience needs the news related to them in a way that makes historical, cultural, metaphorical, physical as well as literal sense (Palmer, 2000). This means reporting stories in the right context. To enhance the clarity of a story newspapers build them around themes to present the stories in a way that they perceive the audience will best understand them.

### *Cultural Proximity*

Cultural Proximity is also an important factor on what is newsworthy. Palmer (2000) defines news values as being a semiotic and empirical structure as well as having a universal and local understanding. This means that the values of news stations differ according to what is important to their audience. A particular instance of this was a Tsunami in Samoa 2009 (*The Daily Post*, 1 October, p.1) that killed 189 people, and at the same time an earthquake in Indonesia that killed over 1000 people (*The Daily Post*, 6 October 2009, p.13). The tsunami in Samoa received a disproportionate amount of media attention as there is a high Samoan population in New Zealand compared to the Indonesian earthquake which did not receive a high amount of news coverage perhaps due to New Zealand's smaller Indonesian population.

### *Unexpected nature and Composition*

The more unexpected an event is the more news worthy it is. For example, one of the most memorable news lines "Oh God, the humanity!" was the

Hindenburg Blimp crash in 1937 (The Zeppelin Library, 1997) 36 people died in the crash but it was perhaps the unexpected nature of their deaths that was most shocking. It may seem contradictory to the news value of frequency but unexpectedness is the exception to this general rule. The same can be said for the unexpected nature of 11 September 2001, when two planes crashed into the twin towers in New York (The University of Sydney, 2009). The unexpected nature of this attack shocked people to their very core. Whereas death tolls in countries involved in war and more specifically third world countries do not receive the same attention as they are seen as more expected. The composition of a story also adds to its value as a news story. This takes into account the skill of the writer, the proximity of the writer and his or her awareness of the main themes that the news story addresses.

#### *Actions of the elite*

The actions of the elite set and guide our social principles; society aspires to be like the elite and therefore everything they do, from sneezing to eating a hamburger, is news. Barrack Obama ordering a hamburger at a well known burger chain caused a global stir that reached New Zealand headlines. The greater the celebrity the more newsworthy they are.

#### *Personification and Negativity*

Personification and negativity are the final factors defined by Palmer in influencing the news. Crime reporting is a perfect example of negative news reporting. Crime reporting is always high on the news scale as it deals with violence, it scares people because crimes are usually reported on locally. Negative issues make good news stories as they validate the fears and concerns of the public sphere.



For the purpose of this research project news values are defined as frequency, continuity, consonance, threshold, context, clarity, cultural proximity, actions of the elite, unexpectedness, composition, personification and negativity. These will be the values that will be discussed in the original research of this study. News values are important to this thesis as they will assist in determining why certain themes were used in reporting on the case studies in this research project. This study deals with themes that emerge from news production. To use thematic analysis on the two case studies in this thesis it is important to understand how news is manufactured and, in particular how themes are decided when constructing news. Themes are the formats that news stories are presented in. Tiffen (1989) writes that 'Formats allow both audience and producers to share expectations about message form and content' (Tiffen, 1989, p.63). Without the specific formats for news the news process would be less clear and harder for the audience to understand. I will use the idea of news values when identifying the main themes in each case study.

### *Framing*

Accepted themes for news stories are shaped by both the media and society. 'What we choose to consider an "event" is culturally determined' (Cohen and Young 1973, p.52.) These are the stories that reinforce ideas of what society should be. This process is called framing the news. Framing the news is when the media constructs a story to present it in a way that is attractive to the reader. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) used frame analysis to show how political advocates and social movements use popular cultural symbols and social values in certain situations to help sell their world-wide views to the media and the public. Frames consist of 'internal structures of the mind' (Kinder and Sanders in Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p.24), for instance, the way we organise information for us and others to understand. Framing allows news stories to be presented in a way that people expect read about them, thus allowing easy interpretation of the information. There is comfort in the familiarity in the news being presented

this way. There are patterns in the selection and exclusion of stories in the news and such stories generally reinforce the beliefs of a society rather than oppose them. Every news story is based around a theme. For example, photographs of a celebrity in jandals at the petrol station will frame the story to reinforce the idea that celebrities carry out menial tasks just like ordinary people. Framing is pertinent to this study as themes are the basis on which news stories are framed. It is important for the reader entering this study to understand that themes do not emerge as a by-product of a story being reported but are actually selected specifically for a purpose.

Framing is important to this study as it is another word for the themes on which a story is constructed. The theme is the frame that supports the story. This study deals with latent themes in news articles and to discover these latent themes the framing of the news articles will have to be analysed. Frames make a story more accessible to an audience by providing a context for the story. This study will examine whether reporters use Christian themes when reporting on Christianity to make the story more accessible to an audience.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain the themes that emerge in the New Zealand media when they report on Christianity. This chapter will describe the research methods used in this study. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will explain the theory behind the research methods I used and why they were selected. The second section will describe the process of this particular study. The research question used in this study is *What topoi are emergent when the New Zealand media report on Christianity in New Zealand?* To answer this question I have chosen to use an interpretive research design. I have chosen this paradigm as the question lends itself to interpretation and it was anticipated that the data collected would be diverse and complicated. The question requires qualitative research because it does not answer definitively but instead aims at providing a greater understanding of the subject.

Throughout this research project I have asserted that not enough analysis has been conducted on the New Zealand media and that it is an obligation that needs to be met to ensure it operates effectively as a public institution and the fourth estate. I believe that all institutions, including Christianity, deserve fair and accurate coverage and therefore it is important to discover the subtext behind media reporting. I am not a practising Christian; however, I have great respect for people who have faith and will aim to be as objective as anyone can possibly be about such a personal subject. There is very little research on the media and religion outside of America and none in New Zealand. This research project was instigated with the idea that there will be further research on the media and Christianity in New Zealand as an extension of this study.

## 4.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimate or first principles. It represents a world view that defines for its holder the nature of the world (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). There are three main research paradigms one can choose when conducting qualitative research; interpretive, critical and post-modern. The paradigms for conducting research seem to be shifting beneath our feet and an ‘increasing number of researchers now see the world with more pragmatic, more ecumenical eyes’ (Huberman, 1994, p.5). It is important to note in this modern world of research that one paradigm may not fit your research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss this problem, suggesting that ‘the open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella-like paradigm over the entire project’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. xv). Therefore it is important to choose your paradigm of research carefully before conducting research. The three paradigms of research are outlined below.

### *Interpretive*

Interpretive paradigms are used to develop a sense of the subject through interpretation. Newport (2008) uses other academics to define the interpretive paradigm as follows: ‘The interpretive paradigm directs researchers to understand lived experience from the insiders standpoint (Gregory 1983), by observing and interpreting the complexity of their interactions, relationships and cultural values’ (Gregory in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, in Newport: 2008, p.32). I am using an interpretive paradigm in my research as this thesis examines cultural and moral values shared between the New Zealand media and Christianity. Huberman (1994) contends ‘that this approach does not lead to covering laws, but rather a practical understanding of

meanings and actions' (Huberman1994, p.8). Therefore the researcher does not set out to prove an answer but to understand the subject better.

### *Critical Paradigm*

A critical paradigm is 'a blanket term denoting a set of several alternative paradigms' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.109). It can be divided into three sub-categories; post-culturalism, post modernism and both of these combined. In critical theory, Guba and Lincoln (1994) stipulate that 'knowledge does not accumulate in a absolute sense, rather it grows and changes through a dialectal process of historical revision that continuously erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarges more informed insights' (p.114 ). The process of critical theory is transformative and continuously changes until a clear understanding has arrived. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stipulate 'The aim of inquiry is the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit mankind, by engagement and confrontation, even conflict' (p.115). This style of study differs from interpretive as it critiques data and is trying to prove something while an interpretive style seeks to understand the data.

### *Post positivis Paradigm*

Crouse (2003) asserts 'Postmodern is a new way of looking at reality that is becoming strongly entrenched in all areas of our culture' (p.1). This involves the new way we do research. From positivism a new paradigm, post positivism has emerged. In this paradigm 'ethics is a careful consideration and it is taken very seriously by inquirers but it is extrinsic to the inquiry process itself' (Guber & Lincoln 1994, p.114). This research paradigm is different from critical and interpretive as it tends to merge quantitative and qualitative methods together. I have not chosen this as a research method as I am not conducting quantitative data in my study.

## 4.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Information

Qualitative researchers such as Boyatzis (1998) and Silverman (1993) assert that qualitative researchers have a hard time being taken seriously in the academic world. This lack of understanding is regrettable as qualitative research has contributed greatly to the understanding of social organisations and structures and while qualitative data may not always be able to produce definite results it contributes largely to our knowledge base, providing a greater understanding of how the world works. Huberman (1994) attests that 'Qualitative data, usually in the form of words rather than numbers, have always been a staple in some fields of the social sciences, notably anthropology, history and political science' (Huberman, 1994, p.1).

Qualitative data is subjective in nature; however, it tells a story through analysis and helps build a fuller picture of the subject. It has many benefits in its openness as a research method. Silverman (1993) discusses the idea that flexibility can aid and hinder qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss the flexibility of qualitative research: 'Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields and subject matter' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.2). Flexibility can encourage creativity and new directions in conducting qualitative research. It means the researcher is not confined when analysing this data and can tailor their method to this research. It can also mean that it can be rather loose and if not approached with scientific rigor can lead to inaccuracy. Huberman (1994) continues to discuss the importance of qualitative research as it generally uses words which breathe life and understanding into research. Howitt (2005) expands on this by describing that qualitative research analyses the 'broader units of the text' (Howitt & Cramer, 2005, p.246). My research looks specifically at broader issues in the text and that is why I have chosen qualitative analysis as my research method.

Quantitative research deals with hard data. It became a dominant research method in the 1950's (Bryman, 1998). However, now it is being realised that surveys and other quantitative methods have limits and gaps where qualitative data doesn't. Bryman (1998) notes that 'Quantitative research is... a genre which uses a special language...(similar) to the ways in which scientists talk about how they investigate the natural order –variables, control measurement, experiment' (Bryman, 1998, p.12). This is not an appropriate research method for my study as my study is asking an open-ended research question that is looking to contribute to the body of knowledge rather than prove something one way or another. Specific procedures are set up in qualitative research to analyse that same qualitative research (Silverman, 1993). The implication is that quantitative researchers unknowingly use the methods of everyday life, even as they claim scientific objectivity (Cicourel, 1964, & Garfinkel, 1967 in Silverman, 1993).

Many critics discuss the misconception that qualitative research reports objectively while qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's own views and beliefs (Silverman, 1993). The quantitative researcher's aim to define and answer results at an early stage can affect the data that comes back. The method chosen, the time and place, the people chosen, the questions asked can all drastically change the outcome of quantitative research. So while it may be thought of as more scientific than qualitative research, there is still a margin of error. When choosing a research method based on the social sciences it is necessary to consider what type of method will best answer your research question. I have chosen qualitative research as my method as I am analysing themes which are generally interpretive. Had I chosen quantitative research as my method I would get exacting results but not the level of description brought in by qualitative analysis.



### 4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a straight-forward research method which ensures that there is little debate in the academic world on how it should be applied as a research method. The leading researcher on thematic analysis, Boyatzis (1998), describes the process of thematic analysis as follows: ‘Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit “code”. This may be a lot of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms’ (Boyatzis, 1998, p.vi). Thematic analysis, defined by Berg (1995) as a ‘systematic process for categorising the content of texts and identifying relationships among the categories, is the methodological basis for this qualitative research’ (Berg in Villers, 2008, p.57). The general goal of thematic analysis is to ‘find out which mechanisms control selection and organisation of the text segments’ (Villers, 2008, p.57). Strauss and Corbin (1990) proceed to note that ‘any sort of theme or code is at heart an interpretation by the researcher, and they consider such interpretations as deductive’ (Boyatzis 1998, p.149).

There are two types of thematic analysis; manifest-thematic analysis and latent thematic analysis. Manifest thematic analysis is when the researcher looks at the data on the surface, reporting only from what data is visible (Boyatzis, 1998). Latent thematic analysis is when the researcher looks at the underlying information presented by the data and compares it to the surface information (Boyatzis, 1998). I will be using latent thematic analysis to conduct my research to learn more about the underlying and surface themes the New Zealand media use when reporting on Christianity. There are a few things a researcher needs to consider when conducting latent thematic analysis. Boyatzis (1998) outlines these considerations contending that ‘Reliability is consistency

of observation, labelling, or interpretation' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.144). This means that the researcher must be consistent in applying this code to this data.

There are significant measures that can be taken to ensure that reliability is attained: double coding and independence of judgements. Double coding occurs when two people examine raw data and without any communication between them write their own findings. They then draw comparisons from their findings. Independent judgements occurs when researchers look at raw data together, or one looks at another researcher's prior code and draws similarities and differences from data. As this research project is a Master's thesis I cannot take these measures as it would include too much input from others to be called my own research. Instead, I will work at developing a code and applying it accurately to the news articles.

#### **4.4 The Process of Thematic Analysis**

There are three stages of thematic analysis: deciding on sampling and design issues, developing a theme and code, and validating and using the code. These strategies are used in all styles of thematic analysis. There are three styles of thematic analysis: theory-driven, prior theory- driven and data- driven.

##### *Theory- Driven*

Theory-driven analysis is a popular style when conducting thematic analysis as it allows the researcher to develop his or her own theory and apply the code accordingly. Boyatzis (1998) contends that 'theory-driven code development is probably the most frequently used approach in social science research. The researcher begins with his or her theory of what occurs and then formulates the signals, or indicators, of evidence that would support that theory. The elements of the code are derived from the hypotheses or elements of the theory' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.33). This allows flexibility in research and gives the

researcher control to adapt his or her theory to best suit the topic. This unfortunately means that projection can become a problem with thematic analysis as the researcher's theory may be a projection of his or her hypothesis for the research. Researchers can best combat this by carefully examining their research question when developing their theory and meticulously applying the code to their research.

When conducting theory -research it is important to consider sampling and design issues that might arise. It is crucial that an appropriate theory is used for analysing the data. Boyatzis (1998) outlines three steps for developing a code for a theory-driven approach. These steps are: a) creating a code, b) reviewing and revising the code in the context of the nature of the raw information, and c) determining the reliability of the coder and the code. Reporting on the data is a straight-forward approach. The researcher directly reports the results in his or her own format.

#### *Prior-Driven Code Development*

Prior- driven code development is very similar to the process of theory- driven code development except that it uses a theory that has been developed prior to the research (Boyatzis, 1998). This can be beneficial if it is a code that has been used successfully before and translates to the researchers own work easily. It may not work so well if the prior theory does not fit well with the data the researcher is analysing. It is up to the discretion of the researcher to decide whether it is appropriate to use a prior theory or develop theory own theory to apply.

#### *Data-driven*

Data-driven research is an approach that uses the data being analysed to develop a code. Boyatzis (1998) contends that 'data-driven codes are

constructed inductively from raw information. They appear with the words and syntax of the raw information. It is the task of the researcher to interpret the meaning after obtaining the findings and to construct a theory after the discovery of results' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.30). The researcher develops a code for the data used in the research from a sub-sample and uses this code to apply to the rest of the data. Boyatzis (1998) asserts that one of the main issues that researchers come across when conducting data-driven research is that they fail to find a dependent variable. To avoid this they must carefully examine their data before deciding on whether data-driven research is an appropriate method to use. Data-driven research also allows for quantitative analysis as well as qualitative. This is a useful approach when trying to decipher which is the most prevalent theme in your data.

#### *A Hybrid Approach*

Boyatzis, (1998) states that there are two situations in thematic analysis when a hybrid approach can be appropriate as a research strategy. The first is when the study concerns just one person, group or organisation and the second is for multiple case studies and where because of the nature of the data it does not lend itself to one particular approach. In this approach, depending on the data, different styles can be used in different stages of the method. I will be using a hybrid approach of theory and prior-theory driven thematic analysis in my research. This is because the code is derived from a combination of two existing codes used by Silk (1998) and Steinfels (2010) to create a new code. This allows me to customise my code to best fit my research question. I am looking for specific data and therefore it is much easier to develop a code that looks specifically for this data rather than systematically trawling through unnecessary data. This would bring up issues with sampling if I was to choose another style of thematic analysis.

## **4.5 Sampling**

In thematic analysis, three types of sampling are of critical importance: 'sampling the criterion or dependent variable, sampling subjects, and sampling the raw material' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.55). When sampling, both the unit of analysis and the unit of coding must be considered. The unit of analysis is the entity on which the interpretation of the study will focus (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). To be able to better understand the unit of analysis the researcher should ascertain how he or she is displaying the results. The unit of analysis for my research is the New Zealand print media. It was therefore very important when selecting case studies that the unit of analysis reflected the full diversity of the New Zealand media's reporting on Christianity. As thematic analysis is not generally used for media research there is no appropriate code to apply to my research. This led to the decision to develop my own code for this research project. Strauss and Corbin (1990) go on to note that any sort of 'theme or code is at heart an interpretation by the researcher, and they consider such interpretations as deductive' (p.149). Boyatzis (1998) agrees that the unit of coding is a vital part of thematic analysis. The unit of coding is 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). The unit of coding in my research is the Christian faith in New Zealand. High profile stories concerning Christianity were chosen as case studies as the greater input that Christianity had in the stories the stronger the unit of coding is.

## **4.6 Benefits and disadvantages of Thematic Analysis.**

Boyatzis (1998) outlines what to be wary of when using thematic analysis including projection, sampling and mood. Projection, first developed by Freud (1856 -1939) is when people project their own feelings or views onto others (Changing Minds.org, 2010). Projection is a cause for concern in thematic analysis as the researcher can project his or her opinions on the research

therefore changing the outcome. It is therefore very important that the researcher concentrates on the stage of research he or she is at and does not jump to conclusions. The second problem that may be encountered in thematic analysis is sampling. When you are using thematic analysis with any form of qualitative analysis, the law of “garbage in, garbage out” applies (Boyatzis, 1998, p.14). Thematic analysis often requires sifting through large amounts of data to find the right information. If the right information is not chosen or contaminated data is used the research can be compromised. The third problem might be the researcher’s mood and style. Boyatzis (1998) contends that ‘Ability to sense themes and develop codes, as well as to apply the codes consistently, will be adversely affected by the arousal effect of the source material on the researcher; his or her cognitive style and tendencies toward wanting a clear, definite correct answer will interfere’ (p.15). The best way to avoid the researcher’s mood influencing the outcome of research is to develop a clear code to apply to research. The challenges a researcher may face are both personal and professional. Boyatzis (1998) writes that one of the most common problems when studying thematic analysis is boredom or restlessness and wanting to try new methodologies. There is a tendency for researchers to stick to the manifest level of thematic analysis. However, it is important to realise that this is not the only level of thematic analysis and latent thematic analysis can yield more in-depth answers.

Thematic analysis has many benefits as a research method. Riessman (2008) writes that ‘the approach is suited to many kinds of data; it can generate case studies of individuals and groups, and typologies. Theorising across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition, while also a long history in qualitative theory’ (Riessman, 2008, p.74). Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations. (Villers, 2008, p.57). I am using thematic

analysis because it allows the researcher's own viewpoint to be expressed. This is important to my research as my research question is of an exploratory nature and therefore needs a certain level of interpretation. 'Thematic Analysis allows researchers using quantitative methods to incorporate operant and open-ended measures or forms of information collection into their designs' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.vii.) I will be using information in relation to topoi which is explained later in this chapter.

#### **4.7 Topoi**

Topoi has been chosen as a research method for this study as it supports my research question of identifying themes and deals with the subject of Christianity. Topoi comes from the Greek word *koinoi topoi*. Silk (1998) explains the origins of topoi in ancient Greece as follows; 'The orator as part of his craft would work up set pieces on a range of topoi which could then be dropped into a speech to amplify and strengthen the particular case he was arguing' (Silk, 1998, p.50). The relevance of these themes is largely underrated since by judging individual stories we form collective principles as a society. Although an uncommon research method, particularly in the field of media analysis, topoi has been used to look at the main themes the media uses when reporting on religion. This is surprising as 'conventionalised story types are the stock in trade of journalism, in every area of coverage' (Silk, 1998, p.137), making these themes ideal for topoi analysis.

Topoi has been applied by Moore (2003) and Silk (1998), who have both conducted studies on the American media and religion using topoi as a research method. Silk (1998) argues that the American media is unsecular and condones religious views in America by using topoi to support religious ideas. He asserts that journalists reinforce the 'social construct of reality' when they report on Christianity and, as a result they help identity the country's attitude towards religion (Silk, 1998). This means that while they may not condone certain

behaviours from religious officials they still condone religious values in the themes they report on. Topoi is inconsistent and changes with cultural shifts. It is a product or factor in the evolution of society.

Moore (2003) argues that ‘Silk failed to recognise the flexibility of topoi; the media has the ability to use topoi that could be perceived to be religious in nature in such a way that their religious dimension is vacated.’ (Moore, 2003, p.50). Moore’s study on the Jesse Jackson case, a religious advisor who sired an illegitimate child, illustrated that out of the legal issue of paternity and the moral issues of hypocrisy and adultery, paternity received more media attention. This demonstrates that while the theme of adultery was present, the way in which it was dealt with by the media was not necessarily a religious manner. I hope to further investigate this with my own research.

While there is little study done on topoi and religion in New Zealand there was an article written in the Australian Journalism Review (2007) that compared Silk’s use of topoi in America to a Destiny Church Protest in New Zealand. Hardy (2007) wrote ‘Journalists willing to minimise the effort involved in dealing with religious news fall back on structuring stories around a number of “topoi” or themes, the majority of which, as a result of the following principles of news structuring, are either unflattering to religions or shallow in their understanding of what the churches are trying to achieve’ (Hardy, 2007, p.66). This comment supports Silk’s research on topoi and the current research by implying that the media reinforces religious values through utilising traditional themes in reporting events.

This thesis intends to use topoi to ascertain whether these religious values are used by the New Zealand media. To do this it is important to identify the main topoi in news. In the Journal of American Academy of Religion (Vol 78, 2010), a senior religious reporter for the *New York Times*, Peter Steinfels (2010), lists several different topoi for reporting on religion. These topoi are:



- 1: Religious leader turns out to be a scoundrel
- 2: Traditional religion is finding it hard to take its place in the modern world
- 3: New research from scholars changes religious beliefs
- 4: Religions join together over a common enemy
- 5: New translation of scriptures sounds humorous
- 6: Zealous religious members turn out to be friendly, normal people

As this study intends to show, Moore (2003) is correct in his assertion of the ‘flexibility of topoi’. It hopes to demonstrate that topoi can be used in a manner of ways in reporting, however, still with the design of utilising Christian themes.

#### **4.8 Christian Values**

It is difficult to distinguish the difference between secular and non-secular values. This could be the reason there is much debate about this issue and many different interpretations of the words secular and non-secular. There are many debates and interpretations of the meaning of secular and non-secular. Mitchell (1967) writes that ‘Morals and religion are inextricably joined – the moral standards generally accepted in Western civilisation being those belonging to Christianity. Outside Christendom other standards derive from other religions. None of these moral codes can claim any validity except by virtue of that religion on which it is based’ (Mitchell, 1967, p.3). This demonstrates that moral values are not exclusive to any religion or secular organisation. While an institution can be based on moral values, these values do not belong solely to Christianity or any other religion. This study argues that just because moral values are not exclusive to Christianity this does not mean that these values, as part of Christianity, are in any way diminished. This thesis deals specifically with Christianity and for most branches of Christianity the values are carved in

stone, or more specifically, a stone tablet. The Ten Commandments (Keeler, 1993) that Christians aspire to live by are as follows.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
5. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

Living by these values is ultimately what it means to live a Christian life. As thousands of years have passed these values still remain pertinent in most societies. However, as the Western world evolves to a more secular lifestyle (Saul, 1992) the question remains whether Christian values are still significant in contemporary society? It is important to note that Christian values aren't exclusively Christian property. Many of the Ten Commandments are still legal requirements in most countries; in particular, commandments six, eight and nine may have legal ramifications. Individuals hold their own beliefs and values and these may evolve through age and understanding. However there are values that Christians have to uphold in order to be considered Christian and failing to follow these commandments is failing to meet the expectations of being Christian.

Silk (1998) defined his own code for the Christian themes that are emergent in the media. The main Christian topoi used in the world of journalism as defined by Silk (1998) are:

1. Good works
2. Tolerance
3. Hypocrisy
4. False prophecy
5. Inclusion
6. Supernatural belief
7. Declension

Moore (2003) chose the topoi of hypocrisy to analyse the media's coverage of Christianity in America. Moore (2003) indicated that topoi does not necessarily

prove that the American media was wholly unsecular as there are always inconsistencies when discussing beliefs and principles, however; it did find little evidence of secular values. I will be using both Steinfel's (2010) and Silk's (1998) definition of Christian values to create a thematic code which will be applied to the case studies. These 12 topoi will become the code for my research method (I have excluded 'religious leader turns out to be a liar' as this falls under hypocrisy.) These topoi are:

1. Good works
2. Tolerance
3. Hypocrisy
4. False prophecy
5. Inclusion
6. Supernatural belief
7. Declension
- 8: Traditional religion is finding it hard to take its place in the modern world
- 9: New research from scholars changes religious beliefs
- 10: Religions join together over a common enemy
- 11: New translation of scriptures sounds humorous
- 12: Zealous religious members turn out to be friendly, normal people

#### **4.9 Secular Values**

It is important for the purpose of this study to define secular values. Through defining secular values it will become apparent in case studies whether the media is utilizing secular themes instead of Christian themes. The word secular comes from the Latin "saeculum" which means "time" or "age" (Hitchcock, 1982:p10). Bowden (2004) defines secularism as 'a term which derives from the middle of the nineteenth century. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the date of the first occurrence in 1846 and the meaning as 'the doctrine that

morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state' (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p.849). Secularism 'manifested itself in the form of secular societies, of which there were more than one hundred in nineteenth-century Britain' (Bowden, 2004). The many different interpretations of the words 'secularism' and 'secular' are perhaps best summed up by Cox (1966) in saying 'Secularization is man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time' (Cox, 1966, p.2).

Martin (1969) divides secularism into three categories, Marxism, Existentialism and Rationalism. The Marxist version of inevitability does not regard the triumph of truth as the triumph of an idea, but the victory of reason embodied in a historical movement (Martin, 1969, p.19). Rationalists deduce by logic that God cannot be real and existentialists focus on the individual as being most important. Norris's thesis examines the secularization debate (which has met criticism) and argues that countries are becoming increasingly secular (Norris, 2004). This theory, started in the 1970's, has met with a lot of criticism over recent years as fundamentalist religious groups are growing in numbers, particularly in America. Norris (2004) argues that these criticisms on the process of secularization focus too much on the USA and a failure to analyse across the broad spectrum of religion. Secularism has been thought to be a religion in some schools of thought. Goody (1961) argues, in his article *Religion and Ritual: The Definitive problem*, that Marxism, Rationalism and Existentialism are belief systems that serve the purpose of religion in people's lives and therefore secularism is a religion. However, these belief systems are greatly different from religion in one major way; religious people believe in the supernatural afterlife and secularists do not. There have also been arguments that modern society replaces religious roles in many ways; now instead of going to church on a Sunday we go to the gym; when we want moral guidance we find the answers in our family and friends and the media (Saul, 1992). Brandt (1997) argues that the media is crucial in magnifying what he terms

secular morality. He argues that rather than religious values being enforced, a secular morality has developed in the Western world. Kurtz (2008) writes that secularism generally observes the following beliefs:

- 1: Human values should express a commitment to improve human welfare in this world
- 2: Secularists deny that meaning, values, and ethics are imposed from above.
- 3: Secularists maintain that through a process of value inquiry, reflective men and women can reach rough agreement concerning values, and craft ethical systems that deliver desirable results under most circumstances.
- 4: Secular humanists maintain that the basic components of effective morality are universally recognized. This includes the qualities of integrity, trustworthiness, benevolence, and fairness.

I will use the above to distinguish between secular and non-secular topoi when conducting thematic analysis. Topoi has been chosen as a research method as it has been applied by Moore (2003) and Silk (1998), who have conducted similar studies on current research with great success. It complements thematic analysis as a research method as it is a theme itself. As part of my results I will discuss what topoi were apparent when conducting thematic analysis.

**Chapter Four: Case Study One**  
*The Virgin in a Condom*

## Chapter 4

Two case studies were used to discover whether the themes that emerge from these articles utilized Christian themes. In this chapter I have analyzed Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* using the thematic analysis approach as laid out by Boyatzis (1998) in Chapter Three. I have chosen this event as it was an event covered by a variety of newspapers and was particularly important to Catholics as the Virgin Mary is sacred to them. This story also had a high level of coverage due to its controversial nature. It was an important story for New Zealand as the statue conjured ideas relating to Christianity's place in New Zealand. This chapter will demonstrate how a code was developed using the theories of Boyatzis (1998), Silk (1998) and Steinfels (2010). It will commence to discuss the background of *The Virgin in a Condom* and how this story was important in contributing to religious debate in New Zealand. It will continue to discuss the breaking of the story and the newspapers that have been chosen for this case study. It will discuss the Christian themes that emerge from the story as outlined by the code developed in the first section of this chapter as well as any other relevant themes that emerge. Finally, this chapter ends with a brief summation of what has been found in this case study and the implications of these results.

### *Development of code*

To develop a code I have combined Christian themes as discussed by Steinfels (2010) and Silk (1998) to create 12 themes that will become my code for analyzing these two case studies. I have combined both of the codes rather than using one as this opens up a broader range of Christian themes to explore. As explained earlier, the fault found with Silk (1998) as related by Moore (2003) was that in exploring one theme, other themes were overlooked. This study has chosen to examine 12 themes to reach a broader understanding of all the themes



present in religious reporting in New Zealand. I analysed each story written on these two case studies and wrote the latent themes apparent in each article.

1. Good works
2. Tolerance
3. Hypocrisy
4. False prophecy
5. Inclusion
6. Supernatural belief
7. Declension
- 8: Traditional religion is finding it hard to its place in the modern world
- 9: New research from scholars changes religious beliefs
- 10: Religions join together over a common enemy
- 11: New translation of scriptures sounds humorous
- 12: Zealous religious members turn out to be friendly, normal people

I will also discuss the other latent secular themes that emerge during the process of the story. This is to determine if there are any secular themes present in this case study. I will establish what latent themes are present in a story, first by reading the story and secondly by applying the topoi framework to compare the themes that emerge from the story to the themes that emerge from the list.

## **The Virgin in a Condom**

### **5.1 Background to story**

This case study follows the debate sparked by *The Virgin in a Condom*, a controversial artwork displayed at Te Papa in the exhibition *Pictura Britannica* from the 6 March until the 26 April 1998 (Courtney, 1998). *The Virgin in a Condom* is a seven centimetre statue of the Virgin Mary covered in a condom sculpted by British artist Tania Kovats (Courtney, 1998). It was designed by

Kovats to raise questions of suppression and protection of woman in the Church and deal with the subject of sex and religion (Courtney, 1998). It is controversial to Christians and particularly Catholics as they revere the Virgin Mary and found the image of a condom covering her degrading. Other religious groups such as Muslims and Buddhists also found this image offensive (Bingham, 1998). A group called 'Catholic Action' led by Arthur Skinner objected to this exhibition and asked for this statue to be removed. This story was marked with violence and tension. A man tried to break the statue and another assaulted a museum staff member ("Virgin on show", 1998). A counter protest from artists and others supporting the statue also emerged using performance art such as a topless woman handing out bread to the crowd to provoke the protesters ("Artist unrepentant", 1998). A protester even spat at another counter- protester ("Protester fined", 1998). The statue was not removed and the number of protesters declined as the exhibition drew to a close. This could possibly be because protesters became disheartened by the strong stance of the museum and perhaps because the story lost its newsworthiness as time passed. It was a rather anti-climatic end to what had been a passionate debate about the statue.

## **5.2 Breaking the Story**

### *The Dominion Post*

The story was broken by *The Dominion Post* on 6 March 1998 with the title 'British art brat pack hits Wellington' (Courtney, 1998). It describes the Pictura Britannica art exhibition and the trouble the exhibition has caused in other countries. The statue *The Virgin in a Condom* is first described here as controversial and it was reported that viewers thought it should be pulled from the exhibition. The following day, 7 March, *The Dominion Post* first reported the outrage Catholics felt at the statue (Bates, 1998). On 10 March, *The Dominion Post* reported on a man who kicked the statue, and offered an

editorial lamenting the fact that museums are being culturally insensitive to Christianity while they would not do this for other religions or Maori beliefs (Bates, 1998). *The Dominion Post* continued to cover this story consistently while the statue was displayed with 84 stories printed throughout the trajectory of the story. *The Dominion Post* was probably the newspaper that gave the greatest coverage due to its location in Wellington. It was also the newspaper that dealt with the subject of Christianity most extensively. This may have been due to locality making it a bigger issue in Wellington, affording *The Dominion Post* time to explore a variety of angles.

The story arcs, its highest point being the conflict between the two protest groups, and eventually dies on 27 April with coverage from both *The Press* and *The Dominion Post* of the last day of the statue being exhibited (“Controversial exhibition” & “Virgin in a condom ends stay” 1998). The reason that the coverage of *The Dominion Post* started out with much emotion was the locality of the story and the unusual occurrence of an artwork attracting such strong feelings from the New Zealand public. Later, *The Dominion Post* became more abrupt and didactic in covering the statue as the story had become less newsworthy due to the close of the exhibition and waning interest in the protest against the artwork. When it became apparent that the protesters would not be successful in removing the statue and the exhibition was drawing to a close the story lost its angle and was not considered as newsworthy. The language becomes less evocative and more informative. *The Dominion Post’s* article on the last day of the exhibition, 27 April 1998, is a brief summary of the events that occurred during the exhibition and protest (“Controversial exhibition”, 1998). There are no quotes from interviews and the objective appears to be to inform.

### *The Evening Post*

*The Evening Post*, also based in Wellington, covered the statue on a consistent basis. Throughout the duration of the story, *The Evening Post* covered the *Virgin in a Condom* a total of 60 times. It first reported the story on 9 March in conjunction with another offending picture titled *Wrecked* in the Pictura Britannica exhibition (Green, 1998). It followed with an editorial titled 'Objectors can stay away and save \$12,' ('Objectors can', 1998) describing the statue and why it is offensive to Christians, and asserting that people could choose whether they wanted to view the statue or not. From then on editorials and letters to the editor are printed in *The Evening Post*, arousing debate on the subject. *The Evening Post* also has a focus on Christianity during this debate. There are articles such as 'The Church is brought into disrepute, counters bishop' on 24 March focusing on the function of the Catholic Church in modern society. Bishop Patrick Dunn is quoted saying 'It is disappointing that there are still people in the Catholic Church who do not accept the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which brought about a changed style of leadership within the Church and greater participation of lay people' ('Church brought', 1998). Articles such as these contribute to the idea that Christianity is having a hard time accepting modern ideas. They are also a contribution to the debate of Christianity's place in New Zealand by discussing the actual function of Christianity in New Zealand society.

The day after the statue was removed *The Evening Post* wrote an article on the subject of forgiveness, titled 'Protesters forgive museum', on 27 April (Houlahan, 1998) to close the lid on the debate. After that coverage dies down and is last mentioned in *The Evening Post* on 25 May 2002, in an editorial on a campaign to stop sexually explicit movies (Du Fresne, 2002). *The Evening Post* is the newspaper that has the second highest coverage of this story. This is also probably due to the geography as *The Evening Post* is also based in Wellington and thus closer to the exhibition. *The Evening Post* tends to be the most focused

on the reaction of the Christians. This could be because of the high percentage of Catholics in Wellington making this issue more pertinent to *The Evening Post's* readership. This could also be due to Christianity being the angle chosen by *The Evening Post* and reported in a thematic way to make it more newsworthy.

#### *The New Zealand Herald*

The story is picked up in *The New Zealand Herald* on the 10 March 1998 with a picture of the statue (Gamble, 1998). It follows on the 11 March with an editorial covering the argument the exhibition has caused between Christians and the art world. The author Joe Bennett derides the argument itself as being pointless. He makes it clear he does not think much of the art- work but also thinks it is silly to oppose it being shown (Bennett, 1998). This is followed by two articles the next day, 12 March, on the artwork, headlined 'Art rage sign of healthy debate' (Abasa, 1998) and 'Headline art: chic or just facile?' (Reid, 1998). Both articles deal with what constitutes art rather than the outrage felt by Christians. *The New Zealand Herald* did not focus on the religious debate that surrounded the statue. It reported that other faiths, such as the Muslim faith, had joined with Christians in their dislike for the statue but did not make Christianity their angle.

The last time it mentions the statue is in an article by journalist Deborah Coddington on 24 September 2006, titled 'Religions of intolerance set examples of violence'. In this she dismisses the behaviour of the Christians during *The Virgin in a Condom* scandal as immature in their reaction to the statue, also pointing out that their reaction drew more media attention towards the statue than if the matter had been resolved quietly (Coddington, 2006). *The New Zealand Herald* reported 41 stories on *The Virgin in a Condom* between the 11 March 1998 and 24 September 2006. It did not give as much cover to the conflict perhaps due to its base in Auckland where there may have been

newsworthy stories more locally based. Instead the focus of *The New Zealand Herald* was mostly on the artwork and its artistic merit and the inclusion of other religions into the debate. *The New Zealand Herald* may have chosen this angle because artwork is more important to *The New Zealand Herald's* readership. It may have chosen to cover stories regarding other religions as its readership covers a wider variety of faiths than are covered by *The Press* and *The Dominion Post*.

### *The Press*

*The Press* first picks up the story on 9 March 1998 with the title 'Museum refuses to drop "gravely offensive" art' ("Museum refuses", 1998). This article discusses the man who kicked the statue and the protest that started outside Te Papa. The coverage after these initial articles is sporadic. It is the paper that covers *The Virgin in a Condom* the least with only 26 articles on the subject. *The Press* seems to focus on the legal implications of the event; for example, consequences to the man who kicked the statue and to the man who assaulted museum staff, both reported in the same article ("Man charged", 1998); also the petition that was made to remove the statue and lay charges for exhibiting an indecent object. The paper seems reluctant to enter the debate about Christianity.

The last article written by *The Press*, on 11 February 2006, confronts an issue that has also been controversial- a cartoon of the prophet Mohammad reproduced in papers around the world, including *The Press* (Eaton, 2006). This cartoon is offensive to Muslims because the image of Mohammad is not meant to be seen. In this article Dan Eaton from *The Press* compared the controversy over the cartoon to the *Virgin in a condom* controversy. Eaton writes 'If I were editor of *The Press*, I would not have published [the image of Mohammad]. I say this despite chuckling unapologetically at South Park's irreverent depictions of the Virgin Mary and not being overly concerned by the much ballyhooed

*Virgin in a Condom* exhibition' (Eaton 2006). Comparing *The Virgin in a Condom* to these other stories puts the statue into perspective. Eaton describes the debate about the statue as "much ballyhooed". This could be why *The Press* did not choose to focus on the debate concerning the statue as journalists thought too much was made of it. Instead rather than reporting on who was morally right, they focused on who was legally right. Also *The Press* is geographically far away from the event and this may have made the artwork less newsworthy to its readership.

#### *The Sunday Star Times*

*The Sunday Star Times* opens with the story 'Virgin statue on show despite attack' on 8 March 1998 ("Virgin statue", 1998). In the article Te Papa Chief Executive, Ms Sotheran, said that "The forum within a varied social and cultural mix, in which the chances of one cultural or social group expressing ideas and values that offend others, generally without intending to offend, is a daily risk". It does a follow-up story the following week on the issue that the statue will not be removed (Catherell, 1998). This time the story contains the perspective of Catholics as well as museum curators and artists. Arthur Skinner from Catholic Action was quoted saying "We are outraged at what is going on. Our holy mother, the mother of our saviour, has a condom over her head. May the Lord have mercy" (Catherell, 1998). The last time it mentions the statue is in an editorial describing footballer Zinedine Zidane's infamous assault on an opponent during the Soccer World Cup 2006 ("Turning the other", 2006). The article discussed the statue in conjunction to not succumbing to demands to suppress freedom of expression.

*The Sunday Star Times* did not report the removal of the statue; however, it did focus on the museum and its role more than it did on the protest or counter-protest. The reporting is generally balanced and inclusive of a variety of viewpoints. Being a weekly newspaper provides the newspaper time to gather

information from the events that occurred during the week and build the story around an issue. *The Sunday Star Times* reported on the themes of freedom of expression. This is shown in the way that *The Sunday Star Times* reports on the immovable stance of the museum and on the counter- protesters. In an article by *The Sunday Star Times* on 15 March, titled 'Te Papa's fingers burnt in outrage over condom art', the viewpoint of Ian Wedde, Te Papa curator, is clearly expressed (Catherell, 1998). He says "I thought a controversial contemporary exhibition early in the museum's agenda would be good because that's what we have to be". The same article labels the actions of the protesters as 'immature'. As well as providing a mode of address for the art world to clearly express their opinion *The Sunday Star Times* also focuses on the Christian lack of tolerance as theme throughout its coverage of the statue, as seen in an editorial on 16 Jul 2006, discussed earlier ("Turning the other" 2006).

### **5.3 Christian Themes**

#### *Racial intolerance and in tolerance of Christianity*

The theme of 'tolerance' or rather 'intolerance' was used repeatedly in the articles on *The Virgin in a Condom*. Silk (1998) claimed that 'Western religious institutions are by their very nature "tolerant" and the media are supportive of religion when they expose intolerance in religion' (Moore, 2003, p.63).

Tolerance was used in arguments both pro and anti the statue. The people who were pro the statue (for example workers at the museum and people who supported art) were claiming that the Christians were intolerant towards the rights of others' freedom of expression. Christians believed that the people at Te Papa were intolerant of the views of Christian groups and excluded Christianity in a public museum that was meant to reflect all strands of New Zealand's populace.



In articles Christians expressed their feeling of insult at being left out of such an important place for New Zealand's culture, leaving them feeling sour about that same culture. Editorials implied that Maori cultural values were respected but not Christian values. This was first brought up in *The Press* on 9 March 1998, when Graham Capill, leader of the Christian Coalition Party, commented, "When it comes to Maori spiritual values great care is taken to avoid offence and maintain protocol" ("Museum refuses", 1998). In a letter to the editor, titled, 'Anything goes in visual arts' in *The Dominion Post*, 18 March 1998, one man voices his opinions on the issue (Parker, 1998). He writes that 'One wonders if the bosses would remain indifferent to a strong protest by a group of Maori Christians'. Overlooking that Maori is an indigenous culture to New Zealand and Christianity an adopted religion this view implies Maori have preferential treatment on social issues in New Zealand. This lashing out at other cultures expresses that Christians felt disenfranchised and one man even moved from New Zealand he was so distraught with the debate.

This blatant racism caused Maori to speak out on the issue. *The Dominion Post* on 11 March 1998, wrote that four Maori New Zealand First MPs wanted the statue removed ("NZ First MPs", 1998). Ironically this speaking out by Maori did not cause the removal of the statue, as suggested by other Christians in articles. Discussion of these attitudes of intolerance in the newspapers meant that newspapers were promoting tolerance and understanding of others' views in New Zealand. This in itself is meant to be a Christian attitude but, as *The Dominion* pointed out on several occasions, Christians can be sometimes the most intolerant. *The Evening Post*, 18 December 1998, decreed that the refusal of Te Papa to remove the statue was a 'stand against intolerance and religious censorship' ("Te Papa pleases", 1998). The coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom* demonstrated that Christians did not support themes of tolerance; there were arguments that the reaction to the art work was intolerant and close-minded. In a letter to the editor, printed by *The Press* on 14 March 1998, Jane Kerr wrote, 'If you are so deeply offended, and too small-minded to think about

what issues the work is raising, here's a suggestion. Don't go to Te Papa; stay in church' (Kerr, 1998). This sentiment sums up the feeling of those opposed to the intolerance displayed by the Christians in this instance.

### *Tradition against modern ideas*

One of the most common themes of *The Virgin in a Condom* was traditional religious values set against modern ideas. Christian themes are generally used by journalists to show that Christianity is out of date with the modern world and that its traditions need to change with the times. In *The Virgin in a condom* debate this theme was epitomised in the coverage of the protest and the counter-protest held outside Te papa. These protests were extensively covered by *The Dominion Post* and *The Evening Post*; subsequent arrests were followed through and reported on. The way that the protest was played out set out two separate groups. The Christians represented traditional values and the artists represented modern ideas.

The media was not seen to support sides but they exemplified the differences of the two groups. On the entrance of the counter-protests the media conveyed the counter-protesters as 'tattooed' (Roy, 1998). The description of 'tattooed' is perhaps deliberately meant to be provocative as conjuring a bad image of these protesters, as 'tattooed' symbolises alternative and rebellious behaviour. Suddenly instead of being reported as an angry, outraged mob, the Christians are referred to as having 'knelt in prayer', while the counter-protesters drowned them out with 'heavy metal' music (Maxwell, 1998). While there was significant coverage on the theme of tradition versus modern ideas it did not seem to dig beneath the surface of the theme to provide more in- depth analysis. Instead of adding fuel to the protest there could have been coverage of the importance of tradition in modern society.

### *Christianity's place in New Zealand*

The seven centimetre statue led the media to question the function of Christianity in New Zealand. Unfortunately this theme was not fully explored as an idea and rather than looking at the role of Christianity in New Zealand most newspapers chose to explore other themes. One of informative debate on this subject was a letter to the editor in *The New Zealand Herald* on 26 March 1998, including the comments that 'forty per cent of church goers are over sixty years of age' and that 'institutional Christianity is losing its position as the mainstream values system of our society' (Farquhar, 1998).

Ideas were raised in articles asking whether New Zealanders are respectful of Maori beliefs and disrespectful of Christian values, and whether exhibiting this statue at New Zealand's national museum is indicative that Christianity is losing its place in New Zealand. Graham Capill was quoted in *The Press* on 9 March 1998. He said, "It is acceptable to allow Maori to say prayers and follow other religious rites according to their custom. Sadly, Te Papa does not extend the same courtesy to the Christian faith despite it also being foundational to the Christian way of life" ("Museum refuses", 1998). *The Dominion Post* on 13 March quoted Michael Bartram, spokesperson for the vigil holders, saying 'This is a grieving time for Christians. We plead with Te Papa to look at Mary as a model of humility and admit it has made a mistake' ("Man charged with", 1998). These quotes and the refusal of the museum to remove the statues demonstrate perhaps the lack of power Christianity has in New Zealand.

There are also many articles that supported the debate precipitated by the statue. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on 12 March 1998, in an article titled 'Art rage sign of healthy debate', that 'that damned object in the display case can move the viewer to tears, can stir memory, admiration and wonder (Abasa, 1998). Equally, as we have seen recently, it may also generate anger.' It continued to say that the object encourages debate on 'treating issues equitably,

acting with probity and encouraging tolerance and respect for cultural difference'. This does show that the debate surrounding the statue did encourage important questions about cultural and religious differences in this country. A debate on TV3 on the subject did nothing further to progress the debate, ending with both sides agreeing to disagree. *The Evening Post* reported on 14 April 1998, that the debate, between Bishop Cullinane representing Christians and Ms Sotheran from Te Papa, was tuned in by 14% of all possible viewers (15% were watching Shortland St). Ms Sotheran argued that Kovats was 'working through some issues when she made the statue' and Bishop Cullinane said that the statue was not encouraging serious reflection and was instead encountering 'kneejerk reactions' (Lane, 1998). These articles provide evidence that there was no intent to offend by Kovats and her artwork did not have its desired effect in New Zealand. This could perhaps be the fault of uninformed people making the loudest noise in this debate and the New Zealand media giving them a voice.

#### *Religions join together over a common enemy*

Religions join together over a common enemy was utilized in media coverage to demonstrate instances when religions did join together, and instances when people of faith disagreed on methods to remove the statue. This theme was endorsed by the *The New Zealand Herald* on 12 and 14 March 1998, when it reported that the Muslim community had joined Christians in wanting the statue gone (Bingham, & "Muslims join", 1998). As has been suggested earlier *The New Zealand Herald* most likely utilized this theme due to having a readership that is more religiously diverse than *The Dominion Post* and *The Press*. The Board of the Museum of New Zealand presented a united front, supporting Te Papa for keeping the statue on show. Members of the art community were also supportive of the statue. This can be seen in *The Sunday Star Times* on 15 March 1998, when art history lecturer, Jenny Harper said that the commotion

the statue caused was the 'reaction of an immature culture' (Catherell, 1998). Throughout the debate the art experts were united in their defence of the statue.

The *Virgin in a Condom* caused a schism in the Church between Catholic Action, who also launched a crusade against the bishops of New Zealand calling for them to be sacked, and other Christian groups who did not agree with Catholic Action's methods of protest. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on 24 March 1998 that Catholic Action had taken a one page advertisement asking for the bishops of New Zealand to be sacked due to their inactivity concerning the statue (Bingham, 1998). Arthur Skinner, leader of Catholic Action, said "The statue is still in there. It's no good leading from the back." He also blamed the bishops for the statue being exhibited in New Zealand in the first place. "This statue would never have been here if bishops had preached the holiness of life. We aren't going to tolerate this anymore. This country is going to the dogs." (Cardy, 1998).

The bishops responded on the 24 March 1998 in *The New Zealand Herald* that the protests were demeaning to the Church (Bingham, 1998). Bishop Pat Dunn also noted that the bishops of New Zealand were following the Church's modern style of leadership. He was quoted saying "This has only served to bring the Church into disrepute and to invite the sad and sorry spectacle of a counter protest denigrating the Eucharist, which is deeply painful to hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders." ("Church brought", 1998). This also enforces the theme of the Church moving into modern times. It seems that while Christians were united in the idea of wanting the artwork to go they had very different opinions as to the methods they would use to get rid of it. It is interesting that *The Dominion Post* would let Catholic Action take an advertisement out in the paper to call for New Zealand bishops to be sacked as surely this alienates part of their audience. It seems that the newspapers were encouraging this war of words because this conflict has good news values.

*Zealous religious members turn out to be friendly normal people*

Newspapers did not portray the more ‘zealous’ of the religious members featured in this study to be friendly, normal people. Arthur Skinner from Catholic Action was at the forefront of the protest. The bishops and religious officials in New Zealand came across as the most reasonable. It can be said that they approached the debate more reasonably than Catholic Action as their debate was less emotionally driven and reinforced with information. This can be seen in *The Dominion Post* of 9 April 1998, when Cardinal Williams chose to speak out about the statue and mentioned that he did not commend the actions of those who ‘let their sense of outrage express itself in language that was intemperate and abusive’ (Vasil, 1998). While they publicly stated the statue was not something they condoned, they did not use violent and aggressive means to assert their opinion.

It was reported in *The Evening Post*, on 23 March 1998, page 1, that Arthur Skinner from Catholic Action was calling for the bishops to be sacked for their lack of participation in the campaign against the statue. Father O’Brien said he was ‘unaware of any priests that support the stance on the bishops by Catholic Action’ (Shaw, 1998). Bishop Patrick Dunn was quoted in *The Evening Post* on 24 March 1998. He said, “It is disappointing that there are still people in the Catholic Church who do not accept the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which brought about a changed style of leadership within the Church and greater participation of lay people” (“Church brought”, 1998). These reports are sensible, logical reactions to the extreme actions of Arthur Skinner and Catholic Action. Letters to the editor also show extremist views. One letter, printed in *The Dominion Post* on 24 March, addressed the violent actions that have been taken by Catholics to stop the statue. The writer asked ‘What did you expect?’ (Heffernan, 1998). These extreme views that condone violence are not supportive of Christian themes and are not reflective of Christian society.

*The Evening Post* on 25 March 1998, noted the existence of ‘an extremist fringe group, laughably easy to wind up and given to pronouncements which border on the hysterical’ (Du Fresne, 1998), and *The Press*, 9 March, reported Christian Coalition Party leader, Graham Capill saying ‘When it comes to Maori spiritual values great care is taken to avoid offence and maintain protocol’ (“Museum refuses”, 1998). This blatantly racist opinion is misguided and confirms views of Christian intolerance for people not holding their own beliefs. It also does not make sense as Maori is an indigenous culture in New Zealand and Christianity is not officially New Zealand’s religion. It does not present Christians as tolerant and friendly people. *The Dominion Post* on 10 March, page 1, reported that ‘Many of the calls and letters have been very ugly and violent and intimidating and are frightening’ (Bates, 1998). In an interview Cardinal Williams spoke about the media’s representation of Catholics. “I don’t think any of the bishops were given the opportunity for properly explaining the views of the Catholic Church. The people that they interviewed in no way could be considered spokespersons for the Church. They belonged to a tiny group with membership in single figures who were not recognized by the Catholic Church. To be called a Catholic group they had assumed for themselves the name of Catholic Action but had no right or authority to do so, and were in fact regarded by Catholics as a way out, extreme group. It angered many Catholics that such an extreme group could obtain that publicity” (Interview with author, 2010).

Some newspapers used religious imagery in their reporting on Christianity. Some articles likened the crusade of Catholic Action to the holy wars. *The Evening Post* (25 April) called Skinner’s war on the condom his ‘latest crusade’ (Hollings, 1998). This comparison holds a gentle mocking tone as the crusades were fought on a far grander scale and portrays to the leaders of Catholic Action as zealots. This tongue in cheek comparison implies that Catholic Action was overdramatic in its reaction to the statue. The specific use of

‘crusade’ is also indicative that the New Zealand media is using Christian themes and ideas when covering Christianity.

One of the reasons that Catholic Action got so much coverage in the news is because the media chooses to report on religious zealots as their views are considered more newsworthy than generally acceptable Christian views. In an interview Cardinal Williams says on this matter, “I would like to suggest that the media has a very narrow pool of contacts on religious matters. They interview people who are not really representative of the life and membership of the churches, for example Lloyd Geering or Jim Veech. The media does not want analysis, they want headlines; the objective is not to inform but to sell newspapers. Lloyd Geering and Jim Vecch are often asked to comment due to their newsworthiness, Geering due to his notoriety and in the case of Veech, he is likely to offer an extreme and controversial view” (Interview with author, 2010). While Geering and Veech are not mentioned in this case study, Arthur Skinner and Graham Capill are chosen respectively as representatives of Catholicism and the Christian Coalition in this instance for their newsworthiness rather than their credibility.

Likewise Bishop Brian Tamaki is often called to offer religious perspective on an event because he is likely to offer an extreme view on the subject. For example in an article on 30 May 2007, in *The Dominion Post*, when commenting on the Religious Diversity draft statement, Bishop Tamaki is reported as branding it ‘treason’ for failing to properly recognize New Zealand’s Christian past (Martin, 2007). His opinion is valid, however using the term ‘treason’ to describe it is melodramatic. These opinions contribute to the belief that Christians are out of touch with the modern world.



### *Hypocrisy*

The theme hypocrisy emerges against the strong reaction by Christians to the art work. An editorial in *The New Zealand Herald* on 18 March 1998, implies that the Christians who are outraged have not done enough reflection on their own religion. The author asks 'would not a religion practising peace and love and respect for human life be astonished and concerned and just a little self reflective?' (Armstrong, 1998). Other articles described the violence of the protest and the lack of tolerance displayed as unchristian. Intolerance is expressed by Christians, violence was demonstrated in the attempt to remove the statue, and both the main Christian opponents to this debate do not necessarily live up to the Christian values they espoused.

Hypocrisy is a crucial theme for the media to report on (Moore, 2003). It is part of its role as a watchdog to hold individuals and institutions accountable for their actions. The media viewing Christianity as hypocritical is described by Moore (2003) using the theme of hypocrisy in his study of the case of Jesse Jackson (a renowned preacher who was counselling Bill Clinton on his affair when Jackson had had an illegitimate child to his mistress.) In the same way the editorial (above) by Armstrong (1998) insinuated the theme of hypocrisy; however, it did not report the theme overtly. This could be because they wanted to give the impression of objectivity. Hypocrisy is evident in the media's description of Christians being 'angry', 'outraged' and 'violent'. Through using these words the media implies that Catholics were acting in contradiction to the image of what Christians are meant to be.

### **5.4 Other Themes**

#### *Statue Abuse*

Very early in the story breaking the word ‘controversy’ was used. Throughout the trajectory of the story it was used 47 times. Controversy is defined by the Webster’s Desk Dictionary as ‘a prolonged public dispute’ (Steinmetz & Braham 1993, p.97). This label was given to the painting in the first article concerning other cities the statue had visited (Courtney, 1998). This ensured early on that no open-minded debate would take place and the ideas the statue raised were not fully explored. From the very beginning there was violence and arrests sparked by the presence of the statue and the words ‘anger, outrage and offended’ were highly featured in coverage of this story. The word ‘outrage’ was featured 36 times. The high use of inflammatory words and the use of a marginal extremist religious group, Catholic Action, to support comments and express energetic and extreme opinions did paint Catholics as a rather deluded, angry confrontational mob. The articles lacked the opinion of a high ranking respected Catholic member of the public. The Catholic representatives who were largely interviewed regarding the *Virgin in a Condom* were Arthur Skinner, the leader for Catholic Action and Graham Capill, the leader of the New Zealand Christian Heritage Party. Both these individuals have rather extreme opinions that vary from mainstream Christianity. Some of the most insightful coverage from a religious perspective was found in editorials covering visiting religious people in New Zealand.

### *Over Exposure*

One of the biggest problems with *The Virgin in a Condom* was over- exposure. Newspapers in New Zealand, particularly *The Dominion Post*, spent a lot of time covering this issue. What is surprising is that *The New Zealand Herald* barely covered this story at all. One of the reasons *The Dominion Post* and to a lesser extent *The Press* spent so much time covering *The Virgin in a Condom* is locality. Te Papa being in Wellington always meant that it was going to be covered more by *The Dominion Post*. However the discrepancy in coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom* between *The Dominion Post* and *The New Zealand*

*Herald* is so stark that it may be fair to say that *The Virgin in a Condom* was not a nationwide issue. Over exposure meant that the public's interest waned and important information can be lost in a sea of mediocre reporting and shallow debate. A letter to the editor of *The Dominion Post* on 27 March, states 'there are bigger issues these idiots could concern themselves with' (Ramlose, 1998). Another letter to the editor in *The Dominion Post*, 27 March 1998, agrees, stating 'had the media not given this issue extensive coverage, only the few who shelled out their \$12 entrance fee would have seen the image and only a few of those might possibly have been offended' (Jamieson, 1998). The media coverage of the statue is later referred to in *The Press*, 11 February 2006, as 'much ballyhooed' (Eaton, 1998). These comments are indicative that the issue was covered too frequently during the exhibition or at least not in ways that contributed to the debate.

### *Freedom of expression*

Freedom of expression is dealt with in the issue of *The Virgin in a Condom* continuing to be displayed. Solicitor-general John Mc Garth said that the museum was a place for 'artistic expression' and viewing them was a 'personal choice' (Peter, 1998). This is ultimately why the statue was not removed; even though Te Papa is a public place the exhibition was private and it was not in public view. Artists and art lovers vehemently defended their right of freedom of expression. Cheryl Sotheran defended the museum's stance on the statue. "We have to be, as far as possible, clear of censorship issues of that sort and while this is an extremely sensitive and emotional subject, the museum has to be available for the expression of divergent and controversial views" ("Virgin statue on show", 1998). Art history lecturer at Victoria University, Jenny Harper, said that the protests were 'the reaction of an immature culture' (Catherell, 1998). Harper is right in her statement insofar as that during much of the debate people were either for or against the statue without articulating their reasons.

Freedom of expression is not saying or doing the 'right things'; that is no test at all. It is about allowing a range of opinions and ideas to be expressed. So whether or not people agreed with the statue it was important that it stayed. However there was no justification for opinions which amounted to a lot of noise. Karl Du Fresne wrote in an editorial for *The Evening Post* 25 March 1998, that the situation was 'overworked public emotion feeding off itself until all sense of perspective is lost' (Du Fresne, 1998). Due to the strong emotion and intense reaction the statue evoked the argument for and against freedom of expression got lost. This could also be due to reporters not asking the right questions of people they interviewed and framing stories around the effect and not the cause of the uproar.

The theme of freedom of expression was apparent in some articles where artists or spectators expressed their right to view the work members of the public. A counter-protest sprung up in order to support the statue and promote freedom of expression. *The New Zealand Herald* printed a story on the counter-protesters on 27 March, 'Artist unrepentant at baring breasts'. This article was deliberately meant to be provocative, using the Christians' own terminology against them in the title of the story ("Artist unrepentant", 1998). The article concerns the artist explaining her reasons for baring her breasts and handing out bread to people in a counter-protest to Catholic Action. She is quoted as saying 'We wanted to put some life and humour into the protest'. It also had Arthur Skinner, leader of Catholic Action, speaking out against the counter-protesters. 'A naked woman hammering with a cleaver a loaf of bread, which is the body of Christ. It's blasphemy. Objectively speaking it's wrong to protest this way. The sacrilege continues.' (Cardy, 1998). While the counter-protesters weren't arrested, they were moved on by police as they did not have permission to protest. However, they came back the next day to continue their protest.

*Is it art?*

There were many discussions in the paper concerning the artistic merit of the statue. This topic was covered mostly by *The New Zealand Herald* with the story ‘*Headline art: chic or just facile?*’ (Reid, 1998). This article compares the debate of the Christians to ‘barking across the back fence’. There is much disagreement that the debate surrounding the statue validated its artistic merit. On 12 March 1998 *The New Zealand Herald* reported that ‘the irony is that if we had to look at further for proof of its effectiveness as a cultural signifier, then this contribution to this very busy debate is part of the proof’. New Zealanders perhaps have a relatively limited view on what art entails and this statue may have been beneficial in prompting New Zealanders to question what art really means to them. There were many who did not like the art work. As a letter to the editor in *The Dominion Post* on 28 March, stipulated ‘We are not, after all, talking about art. These two manufactured pieces, placed together, do not even constitute craft’ (Wilson, 1998).

In an interview Tania Kovats sheds some light on the intention of her artwork. ‘It still confuses me when I think about what happened over this work. It has proved controversial in other countries that have a Catholic minority – it is the disenfranchised Catholic that gets offended by the work, not the Catholic living in a catholic country. I think it’s more a political than sexual shock; the work becomes a totem of everything that they are unhappy about, an insult to sensibility and culture, especially given the sensitivity demonstrated towards other ‘minority’ cultures and cultural artifacts.’ I always saw the Madonna as being protected as well as suffocated by the condom - it was made at a time when condoms were seen as life savers at the start of relentless HIV campaigns. The Madonna will always be a site of a battleground as well as refuge. She is a potent archetype, perhaps still unrivalled in her potency’ (Interview with author, 2009). It can be seen that the work represents lots of issues to Kovats.

The point of this art work was to bring about discussion on these issues. Unfortunately, there was not one newspaper that discussed these issues in depth. Instead of talking about the issues, most of the comments were on the object itself, either the condom or the statue. Arthur Skinner is quoted saying ‘We are outraged at what is going on. Our holy mother, the mother of our saviour has a condom over her head. May the Lord have mercy’ (Catherell, 1998). Bishop Cullinane in *The Evening Standard* 10 March, states that ‘The problem (raised by the artwork) isn't about debating sexual morality. That needs to happen. The problem is about lack of sensitivity toward Christians who honour Mary because Christ himself did’ (Paviell, 1998). However, even though there was no problem with having a debate about the issues raised by the statue this did not happen in the media. The media instead hindered debate by choosing simplistic themes to frame the stories and interviewed people who detracted from important issues concerning the statue.

### **5.5 Other stories reported in the style of *The Virgin in a Condom***

#### *South Park*

There have been a few other stories in New Zealand that are in a similar context to *The Virgin in a Condom*. There was an episode of *South Park* in 2006, an animated sitcom that depicted the Virgin Mary menstruating. This outraged Christians who see the Virgin Mary as sacred, and there was an attempt at boycotting TV3 and Channel 4 when they showed the programme. *The Dominion Post* on 20 February 2006 reported that a letter signed by bishops called for TV3 not to run the offending programme (Nichols, 2006). The *South Park* episode was compared to *The Virgin in a Condom* as causing the Christian community great offence. In the same article Helen Clark, the current Prime Minister at the time, was quoted saying ‘We respect the right of the media to free speech, but it is a matter of taste and judgment and we hope they take care to show respect to all cultures and faiths’ (“TV Chief rejects”, 2006). This

raises the question, just because TV3 could show the programme does not necessarily mean it should; and just because the statue could be displayed does not mean it necessarily should. However, New Zealand is a country that can sometimes do with the boundaries being pushed and the debate that ensued from these offending pieces was perhaps beneficial to defining New Zealand's views on religion and freedom of speech.

The *South Park* episode conjured similar themes to *The Virgin in a Condom*, one of the most noticeable being freedom of expression. *The Dominion Post* printed on 23 February on the subject of freedom of expression citing 'The sunlight of free speech is its own best disinfectant' ("Freedom is at", 2006). The method of protesting was more dignified this time and Catholics spoke through the Catholic media relations officer Lindsay Freer. In *The Press* on 20 February 2006, Lindsay Freer was quoted saying 'the church was calling for a boycott of Canwest interests because the network had ignored previous reasoned and legitimate means of protest' (Thomas, 2006). In fact the whole debate seemed more focused on the themes brought up by this cartoon showing, rather than the name -calling that went on in the coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom*.

Although Catholic Action was still involved, Catholics weren't featured prominently in the news and the Catholic Church sought a court injunction to stop the programme from airing, using the correct legal channels. Media attention may have diminished due to the more civilized channels of protest sought, however the fact that this event coincided with *The Press* and *The Dominion Post* printing the image of Mohammad in a cartoon meant that these two events boosted media attention due to their frequency. Muslims also joined the protest against the *South Park* episode supporting the themes of 'religions unite over a common enemy', in this case a television network. Freer demonstrates the support of other religions in the same article, saying 'In New Zealand we are trying to promote an inclusive and tolerant culture, and whether we are Christian, Muslim or Jew, our faith, and those things we hold sacred,

should not be subjected to deliberate, gratuitous insult'. Other faiths are involved in the protest but there is no explanation as to why this cartoon is chiefly offensive to Catholics.

Once the *South Park* episode has aired the coverage of the story over the next three days is strong and then dies down. The reporting is informative and the exact same article is printed in *The Press* as in *The Dominion Post* on 23 February 2006 under two different titles ('Screening fires protest', and *The Dominion Post*, 'Protests fail to stop Mary show', Palmer, 2006). These articles discuss the number of phone calls the television network had throughout the screening of the show, the fact that Channel 4 tried to stop the episode from airing as it was worried it would adversely affect ratings, and the point of view from the networks chief operating officer, Rick Friesen. The article is a brief summary of events, the main theme being that despite its best efforts religion lost against freedom of expression. One of the final articles on this issue in *The Press* on 24 February 2006 makes a valid point about what protest can do to an issue. In this article it states that the audience for a *South Park* episode is generally 25,000 (Palmer 2006). On the night that the episode aired the ratings were up to 211,000. It was the same case with *The Virgin in a Condom*. The statue attracted 89,000 people throughout its stay at Te Papa and 'When you consider we've had over 600,000 people through so far', Te Papa communications director Paul Brewer said in *The Evening Post* 27 April 1998, 'this is in excess of what we expected, I don't think the exhibition has affected our popularity at all' (Houlahan, 1998). This enforces the idea that protests on issues of freedom of expression generally create more media attention and interest in the subject.

### *Mohammad*

An image of Mohammad was printed in *The Dominion Post*, *The Press* and *The Nelson Mail*. This cartoon, first published in a Danish paper in September 2005,



outraged Muslims as the image of Mohammad is never meant to be shown and it was seen as disrespectful to their beliefs. This drew comparisons with *The Virgin in a Condom*. It also drew comparisons between the Muslim and Christian community. Paul Morris, Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University, was quoted in *The Sunday Star Times*, saying ‘Modernity in the west and in some ways the modern era arises out of a particular set of challenges to the authority of the church. Muslim countries haven’t had the same modern history’ (Page, 2006). It was also dubbed as a dangerous decision to make as it was believed it could put New Zealanders overseas in danger, as stated by the Prime Minister at the time. Helen Clark condemned it. *The Press* 6 February 2006 says ‘the New Zealand press is free, and politicians don’t say what the press can print and what it can’t. It is a question of judgment, and I don’t think myself either the publication nor the reaction to it, do anything to bring communities and faiths together here or around the world’ (Houlahan, 2006). This suggests that the focus of printing the cartoon was not necessarily beneficial to New Zealand culture but rather for reasons beneficial to *The Dominion Post* and *The Press*. It is also quite possible that the reason that *The New Zealand Herald* did not print the cartoon was that it has a higher percentage of Muslim readers who would potentially be offended by this cartoon, to do so would therefore be damaging to *The New Zealand Herald’s* readership.

This case study also sheds light on how the media view Christianity. Journalists speak openly about where Christianity stands in the pecking order of religion. In *The Dominion Post* on 20 January 2000, a journalist writes that when creating controversial art the ‘softest targets of all is Christianity’ (“Art’s power”, 2000). Dan Eaton in *The Press* 11 February 2006, admits that while he laughed at Christians being mocked by *The Virgin in a Condom* and the *South Park* episode (as referenced above) he is ‘not afraid of Christians in the same way I am sometimes very afraid of some Muslims. Whether that fear is rational or not, or a good reason not to publish, is open to debate, but it is a fear

seemingly shared by many Kiwis and one which is not being diminished by the dire warnings from the Government of trade sanctions and bodily harm' (Eaton, 2006). This gives the impression that the media view Christianity as somewhat harmless while Islam is not a religion to be taken lightly. This continues in *The Sunday Star Times* on 5 February when Professor Paul Morris is quoted saying 'I think since Salmon Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* there's been an awareness of the extent to which Muslims find such mockery and jest deeply, deeply offensive whereas we're more used to the mockery of Christianity' (Page, 2006). To a certain extent these comments draw the conclusion that it is perceived as culturally acceptable to mock Christianity while satirising the Muslim faith is not.

The coverage of the cartoon does show a lot more fear of retaliation and explains the already serious repercussions on newspapers printing these images. *The Press* and *The Dominion Post* both ran the cartoon but on 4 February 2006 *The New Zealand Herald* ran an article explaining why it did not reproduce the image. 'Cartoons that set out to give offence for no redeeming purpose leave a nasty taste in the mouths of most people, and media with mass circulation publications generally avoid them.' On 5 February 2006, *The Sunday Star Times* comments on *The Dominion Post's* decision to publish the cartoon. 'This in effect is *The Dominion Post's* position. It argues that in a secular country people of all religious persuasions accept that their cherished beliefs may be subject to ridicule and satire by non-believers' (Brett, 2006). This is the kind of debate that should have occurred in the coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom* instead of wild accusations and emotive outbursts. I think the circumstances were slightly different, particularly as the Mohammad cartoon directly involved the New Zealand Press. It was also on a global scale so there were bigger implications such as the threat of retaliation and boycotts from Islamic countries. With this in mind journalists were more serious in this debate and generally did not print comments that would make light of others' beliefs when they realized the effect the cartoon was having globally.

## Conclusion

The contradiction of the media's attitude towards Christianity is that while it loves to satirise people of more extreme faith it still reinforces Christian themes. As Silk (1998) suggested, the media supports the themes of Christianity by criticising Christians who do not follow these themes; for example, the violence of the Christians in this debate, and their lack of tolerance for people of other beliefs, did not support these values. This violence is demonstrated by the attacks on the statue as reported by *The Sunday Star Times* on 8 March 1998, ("Virgin statue on show", 1998). Christian intolerance of other people's views and beliefs was reported on in articles such as *The Dominion Post* on 9 March 1998, when Christian Party Leader, Graham Capill is quoted saying, 'If Maori had been offended by an exhibit, within hours the staff would have addressed the problem' (Bates, 1998). The media by reporting this perhaps raises the suggestion that Christians should be more tolerant and not resort to violence to enforce their beliefs.

The theme of tradition versus modern ideas is also apparent in the debate although it was not fully explored and was presented more as an 'us against them' approach in the media. The theme of Christianity's place in New Zealand was explored in the media and the papers provided a voice for Christians to discuss the marginalisation of Christianity in New Zealand. However, there was no discussion as to why Christianity is marginalised in New Zealand society today. The theme of religions joining together against a common enemy was also reported on by *The New Zealand Herald*. This could possibly be an area of interest as *The New Zealand Herald's* readership has a diverse range of faiths located in Auckland. The themes of religious zealots turning out to be normal people was reported on as implying that the Christians protesting the statue were overly zealous and extreme in their opinions. This leads on to coverage of the Christians, suggesting that their violent reaction to the sculpture was intolerant and unchristian. Of the other themes that emerge freedom of

expression versus traditional ideas was once again used to further drive the fight between Christians and artists, the abuse of the statue being heavily reported on. The question was raised ‘is this art?’ This question was not really answered in the media as the focus remained on the object and not what it represented.

In an interview Cardinal Williams suggests that the lack of in-depth debate on the subject may be due to the lack of reporters knowledgeable on the subject of Christianity. ‘There’s no evidence in more recent years that there are any more qualified religious commentators who are able to provide comment on events in the life of the churches. There was a time when there was religious comment. As far as I remember *The Otago Daily Times*, *The Press* and *The New Zealand Herald* had people who were knowledgeable and so could offer comment, but those columns haven’t appeared for some years. As an example a reporter from *The Dominion Post* asked how to spell Vatican and that is not uncommon. In recent times when people have rung up for comment they have no idea of background and therefore I have to provide a context for them. As a result what has been happening is they just take material from overseas media sources and print verbatim.’ On the subject of the attitude of the media towards Christianity he says, “You get the impression that the articles and comment betray not so much neutrality and objectivity so much as antipathy. The media has a responsibility to report events accurately and accuracy requires context and background, both of which are not adequately provided when reporting on Christianity” (Interview with author, 2010). This is contradictory to themes being upheld by the media, however not contradictory to the idea that the media supports Christian themes but not Christians themselves. While it seems apparent that in the case of *The Virgin in a Condom* the media did not support Christians (presenting them as stereotypes and displaying their reaction to the statue as intolerant and hypocritical) it did support the Christian themes by reporting values such as tolerance and religions joining together against a common enemy.

## **Chapter Five: Case Study Two**

### ***Elim Christian College Tragedy***

## Chapter 5

*The Elim Christian College Tragedy* is the second case study in this thesis. For the purpose of consistency, this study will use the same methods as used in *The Virgin in a Condom*. I will use thematic analysis to examine which themes appear in the coverage of this story. This chapter starts by describing the background to *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* from when the event occurred on 16 April 2008 until it was last reported on, at the conclusion of the inquest by the Department of Labour. It will continue to describe the coverage of the event by newspapers included in this study; *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion Post*, *The Press* and *The Sunday Star Times*. It will then proceed to discuss the Christian themes that emerge in the coverage of the story and the analysis of why these themes are apparent. The chapter will conclude with final thoughts and concluding statements on the case study.

### 6.1 Background of the story

On 16 April 2008 seven people lost their lives at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Tongariro National Park when a flash flood trapped them while they were canyoning. Amidst the funerals that followed the parents talked openly about the pain at losing a child. Students arranged tributes to their friends and found different ways to remember them; some wrote songs, some arranged a ball theme with them in mind and some created a memorial website to them. The Principal of Elim Christian College was praised in his handling of events. His actions following the disaster resulted in him being named *North and South's* 'man of the year 2009' ('North & South', 2009). An investigation was launched at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre to determine responsibility for the deaths. While the inquest found no criminal activity the Department of Labour ordered the OPC to pay out \$440,000 in compensation and fined the centre \$40,000 for failing to ensure the safety of an employee, and

failing to ensure that the actions of its employee did not cause dangers for others.

## **6.2 Breaking the Story**

### *The New Zealand Herald*

The story breaks on 16 April 2008 with the title 'Five die, two missing on school river trip' (Binning & Eriksen, 2008). At this stage the bodies had not been identified and reporters refrained from making the story too personal, generally interviewing officials on the subject. It follows on 17 April 2008, page 1, with a story about Andy Bray, Natasha Bray's father, talking of losing his daughter. The words are emotive as he talks about what role models the students were, saying 'We have lost some amazing difference-makers, some role models, and my daughter was one of them' (Mckenzie-Minifie & Donovan, 2008). On 19 April 2008 there are two articles in *The New Zealand Herald*, titled 'A Tragic Force of Nature' (Gower, 2008) and 'Refusal to blame earns admiration' ("Refusal to blame", 2008). The tragedy was reported in *The New Zealand Herald* 16 times from 19 April until 23 January 2009.

*The New Zealand Herald* covers the funerals of Natasha Bray and Tara Gregory, a memorial service for the students and teacher and the application for posthumous awards in honour of Tony Mc Clean, the teacher who stayed with Tom Hsu till the end. Its last article on 23 January 2009 'Grief of Mangatepopo loss still raw' describes the Christmas spent alone by the parents of Floyd Fernandes; this may have been for many reasons relating to the privacy of the families at the time (Tan, 2009). It did not cover the investigation of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre and this may be due to other news events occurring that *The New Zealand Herald* deemed more worthy of coverage at the time. *The New Zealand Herald* was the newspaper that covered the tragedy in the most detail, from the articles in this study. This was probably

due to the fact that *The New Zealand Herald* is the paper produced in the locality nearest to the Elim Christian College. The funerals were covered early in the piece. This could be because the funerals took place very soon after the tragedy, which had not been covered by the newspapers as it was covered by the television news.

### *The Dominion Post*

*The Dominion Post* first reports the story on 16 April 2008 under the title 'Teens swept away' (Calman & McDonald, 2008). At this stage the students have not been found and there is only basic information to report. The reporter interviews officials, such as a police representative and the chief inspector of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre regarding the situation. *The Dominion Post* on 17 April 2008 captures the perspective of the Outdoors Pursuits Centre in an interview with Grant Davidson, chief executive of the Centre. Again the words are emotive and evocative. 'We're grieving for 35 years of instructors who have worked at Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits. We're an organization in shock' ('Return to the river', 2008). On 21 April 2008, *The Dominion Post* examines the issue of safety at school camps (McDonald, 2008). They follow with a story about how Natasha Bray's eyes were donated as a transplant for someone who could not see and the teacher, Tony Mc Clean, who fought to save disabled pupil Tom Hsu during the flash flood, giving his life in that effort (Field, 2008). It continues with a story describing the strength and courage with which teachers and students of the school, and the parents of the deceased, handled this difficult situation. 'The most striking situation of this tragedy, however, has been the complete lack of anger and finger-pointing that usually attends something of this ilk in this country.' ('Dignity in', 2008).

*The Dominion Post* focused on the good works throughout the trajectory of this story. Stories like the 'Bitterness over son eased by Kiwi warmth' (Chalmers,



2008) show the positive side of this terrible time, and the strength of belief in dealing with loss. It is hard to understand why *The Dominion Post* would place such emphasis on good works and Christian values throughout this tragic event. The cities where the papers are produced, Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland, all have relatively the same percentage of Christians living in their cities. According to the 2006 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2006) 56.2% of Auckland's population, 56.9 % of Wellington's population, and 60.1% of Christchurch's population is Christian. So it is not as though *The Dominion Post* has any more reason more than *The Press* and *The New Zealand Herald* to focus on Christian values from a news value perspective. It could possibly be that being the city where parliament is placed, and religious values being significant in the process of forming laws, *The Dominion Post* is more invested in reporting Christian values from a political perspective. In any case this paper reports on the tragedy and its consequences 21 times.

#### *Sunday Star Times*

*The Elim Christian College Tragedy* is reported in *The Sunday Star Times* four times. The first time, 20 April 2008 page 1, it reports on the funeral of Floyd Fernandes, titled 'God took back my treasure' (Knight, 2008). Kim Knight reports that 'Floyd's funeral reflected Elim's Christian faith of forgiveness, and the belief that Heaven follows death. His mother, Jennifer, is reported as saying that 'God had taken back her most treasured treasure'. This positive attitude and acceptance of such a tragic situation supports the ideas of the supernatural and of forgiveness, showing New Zealand a positive view of Christians. The next time *The Sunday Star Times* reports on the event ("Canyoning probes", 2008) it focuses on the investigation into the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre. *The Sunday Star Times* is the last newspaper to report on this incident on 1 February 2009, with 'Canyoning school rebounds'. This article discusses the enrolment at Elim Christian College and its surprising roll increase, double the size of past enrolment numbers (Van der Stoep, 2009). The increase in roll

numbers may have been deemed surprising because deaths at a school are often unsettling. However, Principal Murray Burton suggests the reason for the increase in numbers may be that ‘there has been a greater demand for a school and students with sound values’. This once again presents a positive image of the school implying that it has handled this situation very well and has become stronger because of it. *The Sunday Star Times* did not present a great amount of coverage on this incident. This could be because *The Sunday Star Times* is a weekly newspaper produced in Wellington and there were other significant events at that time which were more newsworthy.

### *The Press*

*The Press* reported on *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* five times. It first reported on it 17 April 2008, in an article titled ‘River deaths bring back memories’ (Brown, 2008). The article compared the event to a drowning of a girl in Christchurch 21 years earlier. This article is unusual in the way that it compares a tragedy so soon after it has occurred with another from long ago. *The Press* may have reported it in this way to make the story more local to Christchurch and thus newsworthy to its target audience. The newspaper followed with an article titled ‘Recalling the good amid the grief’ 22 April 2008, written by Michael Field. It covered the funerals of Natasha Bray and Portia Mc Phail and described how multimedia images had been used to provide insight into three of the students’ lives (Field, 2008). It followed on 10 of May 2008, with the title of ‘Public farewell prompts plea for country’s faith’ as Principal of Elim Christian College, Murray Burton, asked for New Zealanders to become Christian (Field, 2008). There was an article titled ‘Canyon charges’ (2008) that described the charges the Department of Labour laid against the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre. The final article reported on by *The Press* was on 23 January 2009, and is a follow-up on the charges laid by the Department of Labour titled ‘Industry fear as OPC pleads guilty over deaths’ (‘Industry fear’, 2009). The coverage by *The Press* started

with a Christian focus but like *The Sunday Star Times* it dropped the coverage only to pick it up again when the Department of Labour lay charges against the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre. It is commendable that as journalists they stuck with the story until its conclusion. *The Press* did not spend a great deal of time covering this story perhaps because it is the newspaper that is geographically most distant from where the incident occurred.

### **6.3 Tragedy Reporting.**

The disaster involving the Elim Christian College was reported in the context of tragedy, defined in the Oxford dictionary as ‘an unhappy or fatal event or series of events in real life’; ‘a calamity or disaster’ (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, p.360). Tragedy reporting (Berrington and Jemphrey, 2003) relates to coverage of ‘large-scale human tragedy’. In tragedy reporting journalists work under many different pressures to produce an article. They have to contend with their career as well as commercial and personal ethics. Berrington and Jemphrey (2003) write that ‘Consideration is given to the operation of emergency press facilities; ethical concerns in respect of door stepping the bereaved; editorial guidance, and finally the personal costs of reporting tragedy’ (Berrington & Jemphrey; 2003, p.225 ). Tragedy reporting requires great empathy from journalists to avoid hurting or offending others in this situation. As the situation is often quite harrowing it is hard for journalists to avoid being emotionally invested in this style of reporting. Berrington and Jemphrey (2003) write that ‘Journalists increasingly took on the role as involved participants rather than detached observers’; ‘the journalist in a recording crisis, such as war, is not removed from the pressures and forces of the drama that is going on around them’ (Morrison, 1994, p.306 in Berrington, Jemphrey, 2003, p.229). It is important to note that the style of reporting for tragedy is to bring out the best qualities of the victims. This way the readership can really feel that the world is losing something wonderful. Sometimes there is a secondary wave of stories looking at some of the lesser qualities the victim might have possessed in an

effort to make the victim appear more human. In the case of Elim Christian College these were children so it is natural that there are only good things to say about them.

In tragedy reporting there is generally some finger pointing to hold people accountable for the loss of life. What is extraordinary about the Elim Christian College disaster is that there was no finger pointing done by the victims' families and the school who all publicly said that they forgave the Outdoor Pursuits Centre at the beginning of the incident. As a result there were not many articles questioning the Outdoor Pursuits Centre's actions. In the situation of Elim Christian College the school and parents were very cooperative with the media and did not withhold or obstruct important information. As well as this they maintained the respect of all involved in the tragedy. Michael Field is a journalist who covered the Mangatepopo tragedy. This section outlines his comments on the reporting on the tragedy in an interview. 'The central part of it lies in the fact that the people you have to talk to are often in deep pain. You cannot, at least on the day, be challenging, aggressive, too deeply questioning. My view of the role of a reporter in such circumstances is that one must listen, let the subject talk and responsibly care the story to the public. I am also strongly of the view that journalists need not be intrusive; often families do want to talk, if only to ensure that the full story is told; need to be aware that in the early days of an event it is seldom that the full facts are available' (Interview with author, 2010).

On reporting on the Elim Christian College tragedy he said that 'the school and the families simply invited the media in; no rules, no conditions. They saw us all as a way of telling the nation about their children. It was utterly gruelling to be charged with that responsibility' (Field, 2009).

## 6.4 Christian Themes

### *Tolerance*

The people of Elim Christian College showed remarkable tolerance early on in their acceptance of the tragedy and forgiveness of the Outdoor Pursuits Centre's involvement in the event. There was no finger pointing going on which is unusual in this situation. They showed acceptance of the way things were as 'God's will' and celebrated the lives of those who had been lost. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on 19 April 2008 with the title 'Refusal to blame earns admiration'. The author of the article wrote 'Their response to the tragedy has been a credit to them. The evident faith the school upholds allows them to accept the fate of their teacher and classmates without the questions others might raise, but faith does not shield anyone from anguish' ("Refusal to blame", 2008). Although, anguish must have been felt initially, there were no pained outbursts to the media about how unfair life was. The strong stance that Elim Christian College took in not blaming the Outdoor Pursuits Centre meant that the media did not indulge in blaming people for the incident. The Outdoor Pursuits Centre pleaded guilty to charges and faced consequences, earning them respect from the parents of the victims.

This congeniality between the families of the victims and the OPC changes once the details of the coroner's report are released (further explained in this chapter under the theme of blame). One parent who broke the mould and pointed the finger at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre was Tara Gregory's mother, Catherine Linnen. An article in *The New Zealand Herald* on 20 February 2010, titled 'Mother remains angry at loss of life', Catherine Linnen was quoted saying 'there are no words to describe what it has done to me .... I'm just angry at the waste of lives' ("Mother remains", 2010). It is refreshing to see the media report these feelings as well as the acceptance of the event. Overall, the tolerance and calm demonstrated by the school, the parents

and the Outdoor Pursuits Centre caused the process to go very smoothly and affected the news coverage.

### *Believing in the Supernatural*

The funerals were covered in consecutive order. The journalists covering these stories went to great lengths to make the coverage of each funeral unique and special. They drew from special memories of family and friends and used the media as a vessel in which they could communicate their story to a wider audience. The tone of the stories is different from the tone usually taken by secular grieverers in that the Christian faith allowed these stories to be a real celebration, and while there was no denying families and friends were heart broken by these tragedies they saw there being some higher power that they could not control. God was mentioned in articles 21 times, the word faith seven times and prayer eight times. The belief that the victims had gone to heaven was also mentioned in articles. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on 22 April 2008 that Natasha Bray's brother, Ben, said 'I heard God always takes the best ones. I know now that's true. I love you Tash' (Natasha Bray, 2008). This belief that Natasha and these students were going to a better place hugely influences the perspective on death. There is an understanding that it was for a reason and death is viewed in a more positive light. This fundamentally shows that the school and parents have a firm belief in the supernatural.

The bereaved friends and families openly offered their views on God and on how their faith helped them get through the ordeal. *The New Zealand Herald* on 13 July 2008, in an article titled 'Students hold a dance for life', covers a dance held by the school in honour of the victims. Jessica Mulder, who lost her cousin Anthony Mulder in the flood, says 'We see this as a way of celebrating the life God has given' (Rushworth, 2008). This is an insight into how they view God's role in this disaster. The view that God had given them life and they were part of a bigger plan helped them appreciate life as a gift. *The Press* on 10 May

2008, explained the positive nature in which that tragic event was handled. Michael Field writes ‘Pentecostalism was the central theme with no blame laid, and its Christian rock provided, for most, an outlet for their grief’ (Field, 2008). In this situation the newspapers used quotes to support belief in the supernatural. In mainstream media it is not necessarily appropriate to disclose religious views but in choosing to include quotes relating to supernatural beliefs the media supports the theme of supernatural belief in this context.

### *Good Works*

The first thing you notice scanning the articles written about the *Elim Christian College Tragedy* is the themes of courage, love and compassion for others. This is demonstrated by the selfless tasks and great love and respect shown by the people at Elim Christian College. Tony Mc Clean died in the process of trying to help Tom Hsu swim to safety during the disaster. Tony Mc Clean’s efforts to save Tom Hsu were praised and he was written as a hero in the trajectory of the story. *The Dominion Post* on 23 April 2008 described the incident in an article titled ‘Teacher put up a good fight, says Dad’, explaining how Tony Mc Clean had tied himself to disabled student Tom Hsu in an effort save him. His father, John Mc Clean, described how he had seen Tony’s body and it had looked as though he had put up a good fight, like a good game of rugby (Field, 2008). This utter disregard for his own safety in trying to save one of his students is considered according to Christian values to be a good work. Had a non-Christian person done this he would still be a hero and written about as such, but consideration that his Christian background and his beliefs were tied to Christianity was often used to highlight his high morals and good standards. Dying when he might not have needed to, save for the effort of helping another, demonstrates Christian values. Selfless acts are one of the most important Christian values, seen in stories of Jesus dying on the cross to save humankind, and the good Samaritan who helps a traveller on the road. Tom Mc Clean, in choosing to help Tom Hsu, was supporting Christian values and presenting

Christians as truthful and sincere which is not how they are usually presented in the media.

‘Good works’ is also a theme for Natasha Bray, who had offered her Dad, who was on kidney dialysis, her own kidney prior to her death. When she died her parents donated her eyes to help someone see. *The Dominion Post* led with the story ‘Dead daughter’s transplant gift’ on 22 April (Field, 2008). Her father Andy Bray said at her funeral “I know now that your eyes have been donated to give someone sight, I just hope they have your vision”. This thoughtfulness of others in an event of tragedy is also a good deed.

The thoughtfulness did not just extend to the victims of the tragedy. Friends and families of the victims worked together to support each other during this tough time. *The Dominion Post* reported on 26 April 2008 that the suffering of Tom Hsu’s parents, who had travelled over from China for the funeral, had been eased by Kiwi warmth (Chalmers, 2008). The Elim Christian College students held a school ball with the theme of ‘luminous’ to remember those students who had left them that year. This was covered by *The New Zealand Herald* on 13 July 2008. Jessica Mulder, who had lost her cousin in the tragedy, said that ‘Love had allowed the Year 12 students to cope with the loss’ (Rushworth, 2008). It may be because of love that this tight-knit community could have the courage to continue with life in such a positive way following the tragedy. These are stories that are inspiring and truly encapsulate the idea of Christian values.

#### *Zealous religious members turn out to be friendly normal people*

Grief is a universal language. The respectful and open way these Christian people went through this very hard time really connected with the media and the community. Through my reading of the articles written about this incident it becomes apparent that the objective of the New Zealand media was not to



present Christians as different but rather to show how normal Christians are. The media often uses religious zealots in the media, for example, Arthur Skinner in the case of *The Virgin in a Condom*, because their extreme views are provocative to an audience. The case of *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* was rather different in that the genre of tragedy reporting does promote sensitivity in its coverage (Bennington & Jemphrey, 2003).

While Elim Christian College parents and students have strong religious beliefs these were chosen for their importance to the story rather than for news value. In this way the tragedy allowed normal Christians to explain their views in an honest way without fear of being contradicted. *The New Zealand Herald* on 28 June 2008, in an article titled 'Teacher honoured over river tragedy', allowed Daniel Charman to speak honestly about his beliefs. Speaking on his role in identifying the bodies of the students and teacher that died he said, 'I just prayed to God "thank you for these people" and I prayed individually for each of them'. He added that 'Looking back I probably should have done it quietly, but I did it out loud, so all the police and ambulance (workers) were probably thinking 'what's this guy doing?' but I wanted to do it and I'm glad I did it' (McKenzie-Minifie, 2008). This honesty and self-awareness of his religion show that he recognizes others may believe differently but still has strong convictions in his beliefs.

## **6.5 Other themes**

### *Blame*

Kirsten Duffy, who lost her 11 year old son Joshua Mc Naught when he drowned in 2000, appears in *The Dominion Post* of 21 April, 2008. In this article she predicts 'They will get angry when they realise that their children didn't need to die. It wasn't a freak accident. These are professional people and this is their full-time job' (McDonald, 2008). Early on she was the only person

to articulate blame and anger. Originally parents were forgiving of Jodie Sullivan and the OPC. In the early days of reporting the comments spoke of not blaming anyone and coming to terms with their grief. *The Dominion Post* reported on 25 April 2008, that ‘the most striking feature of this tragedy, however, has been the complete lack of anger and finger-pointing that usually attends something of this ilk in this country’ (“Dignity in the”, 2008). On 18 April 2008 *The New Zealand Herald* led with a story titled ‘It wasn’t her fault’ quoting Tony Mc Clean’s father, John, saying ‘In that moment she saved four of those kids’ (Donovan, Gower, & McKenzie-Minifie, 2008). Grant Davidson, the Outdoor Pursuits Centre chief executive, also praised Sullivan’s efforts. In *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 2008, he was quoted saying ‘She made the best decisions she could have under the circumstances and I think she has been incredibly brave’ (Cook, 2008). In the same article one of the survivors, Kish Proctor, said that he would trust Sullivan with his life. The refusal to blame from the families and friends of the victims prevented the media or anyone else pointing the finger at the Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

This forgiveness seems to dissipate as time passes and resentment begins to show as the details of what happened become apparent. Judge Anne Kiernan pronounces that ‘This is a tragedy that should not have occurred and a tragedy that could have been avoided’ (Vass, 2009). After this the people connected to this tragedy are more ready to place blame. Pastor Luke Brough is quoted saying that ‘Some of the parents would say it is God’s will, whereas I would say no, it’s not, it’s man’s will; people make dumb decisions’ (Field, 2009). The Labour Department report is also critical of young instructor Jodie Sullivan, saying ‘she made the decision to go into the gorge’ which was ‘an action on her part which ultimately resulted in the group being exposed to the hazard of a flash flood’ (Field, 2009). The families also are less warm towards Sullivan after the report comes out. *The New Zealand Herald* reports on 5 August 2009 that ‘A police decision not to lay criminal charges over the Mangatepopo canyoning tragedy has dismayed the families of the six Auckland

Elim Christian College students and teacher who lost their lives’ (‘Families dismay’, 2009).

The details of the incident and how it could have been avoided are exposed in the papers, damning the Outdoor Pursuits Centre. *The New Zealand Herald*, 4 April 2010, relates a comment; ‘But to hear the coroner say that in all likelihood the kids and their teacher would have survived if they’d just stayed put on the ledge must have been dreadful to hear’ (‘No room for error’, 2010). *The Sunday Star Times* on 4 April carries a damning report on the OPC titled ‘A Tragedy that could have been avoided’. It starts with evocative language. ‘Their school filled with flowers. Their funerals made national headlines. Parents were devastated but apparently forgiving. No More. At least one set of parents have considered civil action against the OPC, contacting lawyer Grant Cameron, who previously represented families involved in the Cave Creek platform collapse which killed 14 students and a Department of Conservation worker’ (Knight, 2010). It continues to describe the changed feelings of the Fernandes family. ‘The Fernandes family are, mostly, angry. At the coroner’s inquest, Jodie was asked if she was sure she could catch everyone. She was not sure.’ Of this, Francisco Fernandes, Floyd Fernandes’s father said “That is very hurting to know that, in spite of knowing, she made them jump.” This shows that the forgiving nature displayed at the beginning of the incident could not be sustained when the investigation drew out the details.

### *Safety*

When asked to describe the most important themes to emerge in this story, Michael Field, a reporter who extensively covered this story, commented that the main themes were “important health and safety issues and how we educate our children in the ways of the world.” This incident of whether students should attempt such risky activities was a continuing debate throughout the coverage. *The Dominion Post* reported, on 8 August 2009, Principal Murray Burton’s

opinion of the changes made to the OPC. He said of the document, “Those are wise words, but it’s not a document that will prevent the untoward happening. But hopefully it will minimise the risk” (Beaumont, 2009). The Elim Christian College and the OPC stressed the importance of not writing off outdoor pursuits as a consequence of the accident. *The Press* 26 August 2009 reported Independent Chairman of the review, Arthur Graves, saying ‘We are trying to create a sense of confidence amongst teachers in schools that going outside of the classroom is perfectly valid way of going about things’ (Hartevelt, 2009). Elim Christian College agreed with this and even organised a trip back there for the students to prove they were supportive of the Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

There were others who did think that this was proof of how unsafe and unnecessary these trips were, particularly once the investigation of the Outdoor Pursuits Centre had concluded. *The Press* on 25 February 2010, lamented ‘When did this craziness begin, this insistence by schools that kids need to risk their necks on the perilous, compulsory exercises in the wilderness?’ (McLeod, 2010). The debate on this subject never really took off ground and while the Outdoor Pursuits Centre made changes to meet safety requirements, it is hard to say whether other Outdoor Pursuit Centres have changed as a result of this incident.

### *Coping with Grief*

The families and friends of the victims openly talked about their ways of dealing with grief to the media. Jodie Sullivan, however, was more reserved when talking to the media. ‘The families of the seven victims have never held Sullivan personally responsible for the action, and this week the police announced they would be laying criminal charges. *The New Zealand Herald*, 9 August 2009, reported her lawyer as saying ‘She is doing her best to get her life back on track. She wants to continue her career in outdoor activities, and being at the summer camp will help her regain her confidence’ (Meng-Yee, 2009).

The families and students dealt with loss in different ways. The students continued with their ball planned for that year with the theme 'luminous' to celebrate the lives of the lost students. Natasha Bray's eyes were donated to someone who was blind so that her parents could find meaning in her death (Field, 2008).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this case the *Elim Christian College Tragedy* the school's actions exemplified Christian values and these values were reflected in the reporting. The vehicle of tragedy reporting reflected a different side of Christianity that is not often seen in the media. Usually the media is seen to enforce Christian values by reporting on Christians exhibiting unchristian behaviour (for example, the way that Arthur Skinner and Graham Capill were held to account for their intolerant views in *The Virgin in a Condom* coverage). However, in this account, the media was demonstrating how Christian people were living up to Christian values. The support and sensitivity of the media encouraged a good working relationship between the media and the parents and friends of the victims. The media supported Christian themes by framing the articles around Christian themes. The reporting seemed to be less emotive as time passed. The raw words that tried to make sense of loss in the beginning gave way to a more practical and informative style of reporting. It could be that the context of tragedy reporting did not allow for the scepticism the media usually turns to when reporting on Christianity. The form of tragedy reporting and the gravity of the situation made the story newsworthy in its own right and therefore allowed for Christians to express their views in an open manner. This sense of normalcy was evident in the use of the theme 'zealous Christians turn out to be normal people' throughout the trajectory of news coverage on this event.

Out of the Christian themes that appear in the media, the Christians in this coverage demonstrated tolerance, good works, supernatural belief, and showed

that Christians could be normal. Tolerance and blame are themes that were linked throughout this story. In an interview for this study Michael Field said that a journalist 'needs to be aware that in the early days of an event it is seldom that the full facts are available. People are often talking in ignorance of what has happened. In the case of the Elim Christian College this was a very obvious period of time; I was there at the college the night of the disaster, and I was there at the Coroner's Court a year or so later; the difference in facts and feelings was deep' (Interview with author, 2010). This marked change in the victims' families may have shown that they had had time to think about what had happened and understand more fully the facts of the incident.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

## Chapter 6

The purpose of my research was to determine which themes the media portray when covering Christianity. I conducted this study with the intention of understanding how the media perceives Christianity through analysing the themes that emerge when the media reports on Christianity. The underlying premise of my research is that it is important to understand how the media covers other institutions and social organisations as the media presents these groups to the public. Earlier it was mentioned that Christianity in New Zealand is facing a crisis. In addition a religious leader lamented the way in which the media covers Christianity. This prompted me to investigate this matter further. My contention was that the media do utilize Christian themes in their coverage of Christian people. Specifically, my research investigated two case studies on events that were important to Christians in New Zealand. My research has indicated that the New Zealand media does use Christian themes when reporting on the media in New Zealand. However, it does not always objectively represent Christian people in its reporting. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings of two case studies and the overall success of these studies. I will discuss *The Virgin in a Condom* and *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* and the implications of the findings that emerged in these studies. I will also discuss possibilities for further research. Finally, a concluding section will offer final statements on the research conducted in this thesis.

### 7.1 Research Contribution

In order to answer my research question I researched the background of Christianity, looking specifically at Protestantism, Catholicism and Pentecostalism. The origins of Protestantism and Catholicism are significant in creating an understanding of Christian themes used in this study. Catholicism is also important to the origins of Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* as the



study deals largely with the reaction of the Catholics. The background of Pentecostalism is explored as it is relevant to Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*, as Elim Christian College is of Pentecostal faith.

I then proceeded to examine the effects of Christianity in New Zealand. This was important in helping define how important Christianity has been to New Zealand in the past and how Christianity has contributed to New Zealand's national identity. I researched the history of Christianity and the media studies that have been conducted on these subjects. I looked specifically at the studies of Buddenbaum (1996), Olasky (1990), Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) to determine how the media have represented Christianity in the past and in other countries. This was helpful in deciding how to proceed with my own study of this subject. I studied the role of journalism, looking specifically at how the media frames news. This was useful in understanding how the media uses news values to decide what is newsworthy.

The Christian values that were explored in Chapter Two assisted in defining Christian beliefs. It was particularly important to define Catholic values as they are relevant to Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* in describing why the statue was particularly offensive to Catholics. Through discussing the origins of the Catholic Church in Chapter Two it became apparent that the Catholic Church is an institution based on traditional values. It was found that in recent years the Catholic Church has had to adapt its practices to suit the modern world. For example, the reforms of the Vatican Council attempted to integrate Christian dogma with modern ideas (Greeley, 2004). These changes have included the Mass no longer being said in Latin and the crafting of a more modern approach to scripture interpretation (Greeley, 2004). This struggle to bring Christianity into modern society was evident in Case Study One when the media used the theme 'Tradition against modern ideas'. This theme is characterised in the image of the protesters and the counter-protesters. The newspapers exaggerated the difference between the two alternative views of the

statue by reporting the most extreme opinions regarding it. They reported on Arthur Skinner from Catholic Action to give an extreme view on the statue as well a painting of topless Virgin Mary in the place of Jesus at the Last Supper (“Catholics spurn”, 1998). As a result the theme of ‘tradition against modern ideas’ was not discussed in conjunction with Christianity’s function in New Zealand.

This study contributes to Pentecostalism, particularly in the case of Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*. Its contribution is that it provides a perception into the way that people of Pentecostal faith deal with grief and loss. Pentecostal, as described in Chapter Two, is religion based on the workings of the Holy Spirit. Adherents are encouraged to convert others to this form of Christianity. This was important in understanding the open way in which parents and friends of the victims discussed their faith with the media. This was demonstrated in the way that, in *The Dominion Post* 22 April 2008, Nikki Bray said of her daughter Natasha Bray, ‘But the Lord gave us you, his ultimate gift. We now feel that we’ve given him the greatest gift we ever could’ (Field, 2008). The understanding that people of Pentecostal faith take the Bible literally is relevant to understanding their beliefs in what happens when someone dies and in dealing with loss (Robbins, 2004). Particularly the idea of salvation and how it is achieved is important to understanding their way of accepting the situation. This can be seen in the positive attitude with which they approached the situation. For example, a saying that Natasha Bray came up with before the incident was the words ‘jump in puddles’ meaning that if a situation is bad you have to look for the good in it (Vass, 2008). This saying was repeated by Andy Bray at his daughter’s funeral and was important to their family in dealing with their grief.

The reason for explaining ‘Christianity in New Zealand’ in Chapter Two was to understand the impact of Christianity in New Zealand. It was found that Christianity was a fundamental part of connecting with Maori, with

missionaries being the first to have significant contact there, and later in the colonisation of New Zealand when The New Zealand Company organised settlements according to religion. This is pertinent in Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* as the refusal of Te Papa to remove the statue questioned the power of the Church in New Zealand today. Christians, such as Graham Capill, questioned whether the statue would be removed if it was offensive to Maori. This prompted Maori to speak out saying that they would like the statue removed and did find it offensive. Despite them speaking out the statue was not removed. What was highly offensive to Christians was that the recently opened Te Papa translates in English as 'Our Place' and is a national museum. Therefore it is seen to reflect New Zealand's ideas and has national responsibilities. As pointed out in an article, if it had been a private art gallery the reaction wouldn't have been the same ("An image to offend", 1998).

The refusal to remove the statue and the ineffectual protest may indicate that Christianity is today losing its power in New Zealand. *The New Zealand Herald* printed a letter to the editor stating that '40% of church goers are over 60 years of age' and that 'institutional Christianity is losing its position as the mainstream values system of our society'. Trends from the 2006 Census show that the number of people who identify as Christian in New Zealand is declining. However, the amount of coverage *The Virgin in a Condom* received may be indicative that while Christianity is losing its power as a moral enforcer, it is still an issue of interest for New Zealanders. The two case studies show that Christians are often presented as stereotypes by the New Zealand media. In Case study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* the media presented the following stereotypes: that Christians make big things out of small issues, Christians are unreasonable, Christians are intolerant and Christians are stuck in the past. They are shown as unreasonable by choosing unreasonable people to represent them. By choosing to interview people such as Arthur Skinner the media ensured that Christians were not well represented in the debate. *The Evening Post* on 25 March 1998, exposed 'an extremist fringe group, laughably easy to

wind up and given to pronouncements which border on the hysterical' (Du Fresne, 1998). The action taken was that the statue was not removed from the exhibition despite the ardent protests of Christians.

The whole event was rather symbolic of the lack of actual power the Church has in New Zealand society. Case study two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* broke these stereotypes by reinforcing the idea that Christians are kind, Christians are generous, Christians are forgiving and Christians are strong in their faith. However, it was the specific form of tragedy reporting that allowed this side of Christianity to be seen as a unique study. The context of tragedy reporting requires the journalists to empathise with the victims of the tragedy. This neutralises the cynicism the media usually reserves for discussing supernatural belief. As a result not only did the media utilize Christian themes, it reported on Christianity in a generally positive way. This is evident insofar as the subject of Christianity is avoided in both case studies, yet the themes that emerge show that Christianity is still important in reinforcing values in New Zealand.

This study has contributed to the research on media and Christianity by further affirming the studies conducted by Silk (1998) and Moore (2003). In these studies Silk had stipulated that 'the media honour religion by using its own concepts in covering it' (Moore, 2003, p.49). Moore (2003) extended this argument by contesting that 'Silk (1998) did not recognise the flexibility of a topos; media have the ability to use topoi that could be perceived to be religious in nature in such a way that their religious dimension is vacated' (Moore 2003, p.50). Moore (2003) wrote that many of the themes used in this study are not exclusively Christian. However, the important part to understand is that these are the themes that are identified as Christian values that Christians pledge to follow, and by enforcing these themes the media is being supportive regardless of who or what else it supports. The media is committed to many different pressures when reporting (Hall in Cohen & Young, 1982). That means that it is

not supporting one single institution but many. Therefore it doesn't matter if the media is committed to other institutions because the Christian themes are apparent. It also does not matter if the themes are there by design or inadvertently, as the themes will have the same effect on the audience regardless. I asserted that the media utilizes Christian themes as part of its process in covering the news.

Both the case studies affirmed Christian themes in different ways. The case study of *The Virgin in a Condom* affirmed Christian ideas by demonstrating that Christians were not living up to their own values and beliefs. Violence shown by Catholics towards the statue demonstrated that they were not living up to the values which they have set themselves. This violence is evident in *The Sunday Star Times* 8 March 1998, when it reported that a man 'kicked the statue to the ground smashing its case' ("Virgin statue", 1998). Secondly, the case study of *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* asserted Christian themes by demonstrating Christians living up to Christian values in the way they responded to the incident. From the articles it was apparent that the discussion by the families and friends of the victims concerning supernatural belief was an important way for them to cope with their loss. The results of Christianity being supported by the media have yet to be concluded and further research can be done on the subject. Recommendations for further studies on Christianity and the media will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **What has this study revealed about journalism?**

Both case studies have demonstrated how important themes are in reporting. The latent themes in these case studies have shown how the media uses themes to effectively complete its role as enforcer of moral values. This is evident in Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* when the media discussed the themes of tolerance in relation to how the Christians reacted to having the statue displayed. It is also evident in Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College*

*Tragedy* when Christian values were reinforced by allowing the friends and family of the victims to discuss the tragedy. To determine these values I used thematic analysis in my methodology as outlined by Boyatzis (1998). Thematic analysis is an uncommon methodology to use in conjunction with media analysis. It was chosen in this study due to the research question focussing on themes in the media. The use of this methodology has proved useful in identifying how the media frames stories. Silk (1998) and Moore (2003) provided the theoretical framework with which to analyse these case studies by their research on which topoi the media use when reporting on the media. Out of this study it has been shown that New Zealand journalists favour the following themes when reporting on Christianity: ‘tolerance’, ‘religious zealots turn out to be normal people’, ‘religions join together over a common enemy’, ‘tradition against modern ideas’, ‘hypocrisy’, ‘good works’ and ‘belief in the supernatural’.

The two case studies contained news values as outlined by Cohen and Young (1973) and Palmer (2000) to make them more newsworthy. Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* was unexpected as the reaction by Christians to the statue was unexpected; it was on the threshold, as it was first reported on the day before the statue was on display and had its highest rate of coverage over the first few days. The story was locally and culturally significant to New Zealand as the statue was displayed in the Te Papa Museum, New Zealand’s national museum, leading to a debate on the importance of Christianity in New Zealand. Case Study Two: *Elim Christian College Tragedy* was newsworthy as it was a local event. The event was negative due to the loss of life and it was unexpected. Analysis shows that the New Zealand media tends to report on religion in stereotypes, using zealous religious members to comment as they are bound to provide controversial views. One exception may be Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*, the focus was on the tragedy that occurred. The form of tragedy reporting provided a context for the story and made tragedy the main theme. When Christians live up to Christian values it is

not seen as newsworthy, it is seen as normal. However, when they don't perform these roles they are reported on, for example Jesse Jackson's case in research conducted by Moore (2003). So when Catholics resort to violence to get the statue removed it becomes a newsworthy story. Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* is an exception due to other factors making the story newsworthy. The high body count and the potential of those lost as well as the unexpectedness made the story highly newsworthy in itself. However, the media still used the same themes to positively define aspects of Christianity in this instance. They used the same themes as expressed in Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* to convey Christians living up to Christian values.

As Cohen (1973) points out the elite are used to strengthen our values. Christians in New Zealand may be classed as moral elites in certain local situations and called to weigh in on moral issues concerning New Zealand. This is evident in Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* when Bishop Patrick Dunn was called in to comment on the issue of the statue being displayed. Of the statue he said that 'this has only served to bring the Church into disrepute and invite the sad and sorry spectacle of a counter-protest denigrating the Eucharist, which is deeply painful to hundreds and thousands of New Zealanders' ("Church brought into", 1998). The involvement of religious figures in such debates helps define the lines between freedom of expression and offensive material. However, as Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* has demonstrated, Christians as a religious group are losing their voice in such debates. This could be because modern society has found other ways to develop a moral voice. For example, the media, our friends and family, school, work, along with celebrities in our modern society define what is socially acceptable and there is no longer the need to go to church to learn about morals (Saul, 1992). The media may have used Christian themes in reporting to make a story more accessible to an audience. By using Christian themes the public relates to the themes and can better understand the story. So while Christianity is still seen as morally elite, it does not solely own that title any more. Simplistic

themes, such as tolerance and zealous members turn out to be normal people, are repeatedly reported on in both case studies to make the stories easy for the audience to understand.

### **7.3 The Virgin in a Condom**

The coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom* while utilizing Christian themes did not support the violent actions of Christians against the statue. However there may have been better ways of reinforcing Christian ideas. For example, the amount of media attention that Arthur Skinner and Graham Capill received was largely due to their inflammatory and controversial comments, rather than their insight into the values of Christianity and its moral issues. Capill made a remark that ‘sadly Te Papa does not extend the same courtesy to the Christian faith, despite it also being foundational to New Zealand’s way of life. If Maori had been offended by an exhibit, within hours the staff would have addressed the problem’ (Bates, 1998). This is controversial as it suggests that Maori receive preferential treatment in New Zealand. This case study has demonstrated that the media in New Zealand tend to report on religious leaders who will provide the most controversial remarks on an issue, as this makes a story more newsworthy due to the unexpected nature of the comments. Christian values show that Christians are meant to be tolerant and non-violent. When they are not it qualifies as news, due to its unexpected nature. The intolerance and violence shown by the Christians was unexpected and therefore news. However, by allowing controversial opinions to be expressed, the media excluded in-depth discussion on the issues raised by the statue.

The media used the theme of ‘tradition against modern ideas’ to support Christians by portraying the behaviour of the counter-protesters as amoral. The depiction of the counter- protesters as acting illegally, spitting on people, being tattooed, swearing and baring their breasts, juxtaposed with the Christians kneeling in prayer, creates an image that perhaps supports Catholic Action’s



more legitimate means of protest (Maxwell, 1998). The media allowed the spokespeople of Catholic Action to discuss the counter-protesters. Kevin Bennett from Catholic Action derided the actions of the counter-protesters saying that 'It's a disgusting thing they have done. It's a direct attack against our blessed Lord himself' (Roy, 1998). Arthur Skinner commented on the counter-protest saying, 'A naked woman hammering with a cleaver a loaf of bread, which is the body of Christ. It's blasphemy. Objectively speaking it's wrong to protest this way. The sacrilege continues' (Cardy, 1998). Both these comments condemn the counter-protesters as being immoral. The media playing up the actions of the counter-protesters and providing a forum for the Christians to condemn them makes the New Zealand media appear supportive of the protesters. It is also important to remember that the media has a role to reflect the societal norms of this audience and the counter-protesters were not protesting in a completely legitimate way. In this case the media may have been more supportive of the protesters due to their protest being lawful when the counter-protesters were protesting illegally.

The coverage of *The Virgin in a Condom* also examined Christianity's place in New Zealand. It was found that while people may still be concerned with Christian issues here Christianity may have lost a lot of its power as a moral elite in this country, demonstrated by the fact that, while the debate was very noisy and a lot of people had an opinion of the subject, Catholic Action's ultimate objective of removing the statue was not recognised. It would be fair to say that if Christians did have influence on the decisions on this country the statue would have been removed from the exhibit, or not shown, as was the case in Britain where the statue was made. The statue has been shown in other countries such as Italy where the percentage of Catholics is much higher (BBC News, 2010) without fuss or protest. However, in Sydney the statue was stolen and in New Zealand it was kicked and the Te Papa staff abused. This could possibly be because New Zealand and Australia, having adopted Christianity into their culture, are perhaps disenfranchised and don't know how to deal with

these situations. However, it could also be that Italians, having a long history of art and religion, better understand the purpose of contemporary art and could appreciate the context in which the statue was made.

‘Religions join together over a common enemy’ was a theme that emerged throughout the exhibition, and was supported by newspapers reporting on other faiths that had aided Christians in their quest for removal of the statue. This was a theme that *The New Zealand Herald* chose as an angle when reporting on the statue. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on Muslims who had joined the debate to remove the statue (Bingham, 1998). *The New Zealand Herald* may have reported on the subject as its readership is more religiously diverse and therefore this issue was more pertinent for its readers. However, while most Catholics were united in the idea of wanting to get rid of the statue, they were divided in their methods of achieving this goal. Catholic Action was sure that protesting loudly was the way to get the statue removed, while the Catholic bishops wrote letters to Te Papa asking for the statue to be removed. Arthur Skinner caused more controversy by calling for the bishops to be sacked as he felt that they were not doing their job properly. This action showed division within the Catholic Church, moving the debate away from Te Papa and focusing it within the Church. *The Dominion Post* did not aid this effort by allowing Catholic Action to print a full page advertisement calling for the bishops to be removed (“Catholic Action plans”, 1998). Coverage on this issue showed that while Christians and Muslims had united in this debate there could have been more unity within the Catholic community. By reporting on the other faiths joining in, *The New Zealand Herald* was supportive of the unity of other faiths, while *The Dominion Post* added fuel to the fire by allowing a full page advertisement, calling for bishops to be sacked, to appear in its paper, thus providing a forum for the bishops and Catholic Action to slate each other.

Other non- Christian themes emerged through the reporting on the statue. These themes were outlined as ‘is it art?’, ‘over-coverage’, and ‘statue abuse’. These

themes did not necessarily support or undermine Christians in this event but were crucial to the discussion on the statue. The question ‘was it art?’ was raised a few times throughout the debate. This was mostly in editorials from *The New Zealand Herald*, which perhaps covered this question more fully than other newspapers since it was geographically further away from the protest than other newspapers and perhaps because art was deemed as a more important topic for the readership. ‘Over-coverage’ of the statue was also discussed as the exhibition drew to a close. It was commented on in various instances that the papers had given the statue too much media attention (Ramlose, 1998). Over-coverage may have been detrimental to the overall debate on the statue as people lost interest, and serious debate was drowned in a lot of noise. Statue abuse was a theme that was apparent throughout the trajectory of news coverage on the statue. This theme is related to the idea of intolerance towards ‘artistic expression’. Newspapers covered the two men who were abusive towards the statue and the museum staff from the time of the incident until their sentencing in court (“Diversion sentence”, 1998). Coverage of this theme was fairly concise and informative, giving the appearance that in these stories the objective was to inform. The latent theme of these articles, however, was the idea that Christians are intolerant and extreme in their views.

#### **7.4 The Elim Christian College Tragedy**

*The Elim Christian College Tragedy* expressed Christian themes in a different way. It showed Christian people living up to Christian values, a theme that is not often seen to have news value in the media as it is not considered out of the ordinary. It also showed rather zealous Christians behaving very normally and speaking very openly and honestly to the media. The form of tragedy reporting was enough to make the story newsworthy for this event and it needed to be approached with sensitivity. This allowed the parents and friends of the victims to be open about their religion without fear of their ideas being misconstrued. As demonstrated by the first case study, *The Virgin in a Condom*, the

representatives of Christianity chosen by the media to speak on matters of importance are often not an accurate reflection of the religion as a whole. This is shown in the amount of coverage Arthur Skinner received on the issue as a representative of Christianity. His ideas were controversial and therefore newsworthy. *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* showed an insight in how Christians dealt with grief without having to resort to the shock factor of the words of a controversial zealot.

The theme of good works emerged early on in the coverage of this event in how the school community supported each other during this time. For instance Natasha Bray's eyes were donated to a blind person. These actions helped the friends and family find some meaning out of the death of these students. The theme of good works was also apparent in the way that the parents and friends of the students remembered them; they held a school ball, created a memorial website and made paper cranes in their memory. The media covered these instances in a very positive way is using the theme good works to show the families and friends of the victims overcoming adversity. This is seen in typical 'rags to riches' stories when someone who was down and out turned their life around for the better. This is a popular theme as it gives people hope that things can improve. Not only were these students creating good work and moving on with their lives, they were 'overcoming adversity'. The media's emotive and positive coverage of this subject supported the idea that Christians do good work and are beneficial to community life.

The New Zealand media usually stays away from references to God and supernatural belief. However, in the context of *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* which dealt specifically with death there was an opportunity for the theme of 'supernatural belief' to be discussed. Parents and friends of the victims were very open with their feelings on the incident and how they were getting through their grief. The word God was mentioned frequently and parents talked of finding peace with the thought that their children had gone to

heaven. This can be seen in the *The Sunday Star Times* (Knight, 1998) when it ran with the title 'God took back my treasure'. The talk of God throughout this event was the cornerstone for the school getting through the situation. The faith and positive attitude of the school was one of the reasons that the media could be so positive in its coverage. The media coverage of supernatural belief was conveyed through the quotes of the parents and friends of the deceased students. While the media didn't comment they let the parents and friends talk without restraint on the subject and gave them an opportunity to express their beliefs. By doing so they were being supportive of the theme of supernatural belief.

The themes that emerged that were not Christian values were blame, safety and, coping with grief. Originally the media praised Elim Christian College for its refusal to blame the Outdoor Pursuits Centre for the deaths of the students. This sentiment changed quite drastically when the coroner's report came out. In an interview Michael Field, a reporter on this event, said 'I felt at the time of the death the families were resting heavily on their faith and seeing it as all part of God's plan. It was the religious side of the thing but as time moved on, it was clear the families could see the more human hand in it and began to demand answers. It was as if during the funerals, there was no blame to be attached; but later people realised there had been fault. By the coroner's report time it was all very realistic and secular' (Interview with author, 2010). The media, however, was very supportive of the anger that emerged from the report. Most of the same journalists had covered this story from when it first happened and, seeming to be very connected to the people in this story, were rather emotive in reporting the details that emerged from the coroner's report. The theme of safety was a reoccurring theme in coverage of *The Elim Christian College Tragedy*; the incident raised concerns about safety regulations at school camps and adventure activities. This issue was explored rather thoroughly in the coverage, with arguments from both sides. This is shown in *The Dominion Post* when it ran with the title 'School camp deaths, disasters in waiting' (McDonald,

2008). These articles outline the potential risks in students going away on adventure activities.

## **7.5 Emergent themes**

It is important to remember that out of the list of Christian themes used in the thematic analysis in this thesis, only a certain number of Christian themes were reported on. Tolerance, religious zealots turn out to be normal people, good works, religions join together over a common enemy, traditional religion is finding it hard to take its place in the modern world, and supernatural belief were reported on, while the other themes, such as new translations of scriptures sound humorous, false prophecy, inclusion, declension, and new research from scholars change religious beliefs did not surface. This may suggest that these themes that have emerged are the more significant themes to New Zealand society right now and that is why they have emerged in these case studies. The two themes that were reported in both case studies were tolerance, and zealous religious people turn out to be normal people.

### *Tolerance*

Tolerance was a theme demonstrated in both case studies. The actions of Graham Capill and Arthur Skinner were highly insensitive towards other minority groups in New Zealand and this was followed by acts of violence towards the statue. For example, Graham Capill is quoted as saying ‘Sadly Te Papa does not extend the same courtesy to the Christian faith, despite it also being foundational to New Zealand’s way of life. If Maori had been offended by an exhibit, within hours the staff would have addressed the problem’ (Bates, 1998). The violent reaction of the Christians and the refusal to see another perspective in the debate made them appear intolerant. Contradictory to this is the reporting on Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* which praises the actions of the friends and family of the students who died in their

refusal to blame the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre. This is shown in *The New Zealand Herald* (“Refusal to blame”, 2008) with the headline ‘Refusal to blame earns admiration’. This does change once the coroner’s report is released and the parents and friends have more information on the how the deaths occurred. While the theme ‘tolerance’ is reported on from different perspectives it is clear that this is a Christian theme that the New Zealand media uses when reporting on Christianity.

#### *Zealous Religious members turn out to be friendly normal people*

Both case studies portrayed contradictory depictions with the theme of ‘zealous religious members turn out to be friendly, normal people’. In Case Study One: *The Virgin in a Condom* representatives of Catholicism are seen as overly zealous in their opinions and actions whereas Case Study Two: *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* presents Christians as down to earth friendly people who live very normal lives. The feeling towards the parents and friends of these students is the unifying aspect of loss, making the parents and friends of the students very relatable.

#### **Concluding statements and ideas for further study**

The focus of this research was on the institution of the media and how it structures news articles. I will summarise the significance of my findings in relation to my research question: *Which themes emerge when the New Zealand media reports on Christianity?* My investigation explored relevance of latent themes in the media and their importance in reinforcing values in New Zealand society. I perceived that, as seen in the studies of Silk (1998) and Moore (2003), the New Zealand media would reinforce Christian values. The central focus of my research was specifically on Christian themes in the media to better understand how Christians are represented in the media. The most significant finding to emerge from my research is that the New Zealand mainstream media

is not necessarily, as commonly perceived, secular. This outcome illustrates that the New Zealand mainstream media, whose function is defining and enforcing society values, uses similar values as outlined by Christians in their reporting. The potential issue present is that mainstream media in New Zealand is constructed in a way that is not secular, and perhaps needs some more disclosure on this when reporting. The research recorded in this thesis offers a significant contribution to the field of media research as it provides analysis of the New Zealand media, an institution in New Zealand that is not sufficiently analysed. As it is part of the media's role to analyse the actions of other institutions it is important that its actions are also analysed. The results of this study are complex and while not conclusive, are indicative of how the media approaches Christianity. It can be seen that while case study one, *The Virgin in a Condom*, presents a negative view of Christians and *The Elim Christian College Tragedy* presents a positive view both studies condone Christian themes.

This study has also shown that reporters don't tend to fully explore Christian issues. This could possibly be because reporters do not generally have much background knowledge of Christianity. Cardinal Williams outlines the need for religious reporters to have the background to provide a context for a story. Michael Field wrote that the absence of religious reporters in the media today may be linked to the lack of interest in Christianity in New Zealand (interview with author 2010). Cardinal Williams argues on this point saying that Christianity is still relevant to New Zealand and represents a significant portion of the population (Interview with author, 2010). They are both correct. As discussed in Chapter One the number of Christians in New Zealand is declining, however 51.2% of the population is a significant number when taking target audiences into account. I would make recommendations for religiously trained reporters in New Zealand as I think that background knowledge is important to providing a context to the story.



There are only two case studies in this thesis and the results may differ if more case studies are involved. If further research was taken on this subject it would be beneficial to include more case studies to build on these results. The study could also be on different types of media, for example, magazines or television news could extend the research done in this study. A study exclusively on Christian media might provide a useful contribution to the field of Christianity and the media. Extensive research has been done on Christianity and the media in America, however, there are many countries that have not had this style of study done that might benefit from it, for example, Australia and England. Now that this study has been conducted it provides a platform for further research into the way in which the media reports on these themes, and its effect on attitudes towards Christianity.

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