

‘Romanists’ for Rum, Baptists Against Booze: Two Churches in the Struggle Over Prohibition in 1919¹

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two referenda held on the issue of prohibition in New Zealand in 1919. It especially examines the attitudes of the Baptist and Roman Catholic churches on the issue of alcohol and their roles in the prohibition debate. For their part Baptists of that era were totally anti-alcohol and strongly supportive of prohibition. Catholics, on the other hand, felt under particular emotional stress at that time, largely because of ongoing chaos in Ireland (the motherland of many New Zealand Catholics) and because of increased anti-Catholicism fostered by the Protestant Political Association which emerged in 1917. In that context the Catholic hierarchy was more inclined to portray the prohibition movement in Catholic-versus-Protestant terms and, with greater than normal vigour, to urge Catholic faithful to oppose prohibition. The prohibition movement came within a few thousand votes of success at the two referenda. Because Catholics were so strongly urged to oppose prohibition, it is suggested that not only did returning soldiers keep New Zealand ‘wet’ – the Catholic vote also kept New Zealand ‘wet’.

The early twentieth-century campaign for prohibition of the sale of alcohol in New Zealand was part of a multi-faceted drive to create a pure society. Alcohol was unequivocally deemed evil and the only solution to its mischief was to ban it completely. The crusade against alcohol was in many ways a religious crusade, a crusade to bring in the kingdom of God. And it nearly succeeded. The critical year was 1919. In that year not one but two referenda were held on the issue of prohibition.

The roots of this unusual development lay in a recommendation of the National Efficiency Board (a wartime body to aid the economy

¹ The term ‘Romanists’ was commonly employed by Protestants as a description of Catholics in anti-Catholic contexts. James Liston, later bishop and archbishop, described the term as ‘that “vulgar word used by the uneducated”’: *Otago Daily Times*, 15 December 1917, 10. I also express here my appreciation to Hugh Laracy and Nicholas Reid who read earlier drafts of this article.

and promote national efficiency) in July 1917 that the greatest efficiency would be promoted by national prohibition.² As the war came to a close, a petition pressured parliament to create a referendum along the lines of the National Efficiency Board's recommendations. The result was a special continuance-versus-prohibition poll in April 1919, followed by a three-way choice of prohibition or national continuance or state ownership at the time of general elections in December 1919. In the April referendum the prohibition vote trailed national continuance by only 10,000 votes out of more than 500,000 cast. In the December referendum, prohibition received 49.8% of the vote, just 3263 votes short of the bare majority needed.³ Thus prohibition came within a whisker of success in both polls.

From one point of view it was the returned soldiers who decided the issue. In the April 1919 poll, prohibition won on election night by more than 10,000 votes. However, when the returning soldiers' votes came in a few days later, the result went the other way. The returning soldiers had rejected prohibition by a majority of nearly four to one.⁴

It is, nevertheless, equally valid to consider the role of the churches in the struggle. The Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Salvation Army and Baptist churches were all lined up in support of prohibition. The post-war Anglican Church was wavering from its typical position of moderation such that in 1922 a couple of its diocesan synods adopted resolutions supporting prohibition (albeit on a split vote).⁵ The only church to weigh in emphatically against prohibition was the Catholic Church. Given its emphasis that loyal Catholics would vote against prohibition and given the wafer-thin closeness of the two elections, it may be argued that it was the Catholic Church that kept New Zealand from going dry in 1919.⁶ At the time of the two referenda Catholics comprised approximately 14% of the national population. It

² National Efficiency Board Report 1917, *Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives* [AJHR], 1917, vol. II, H43A, 12.

³ For these statistics see J. Cocker & J.M. Murray (eds), *Temperance and Prohibition in New Zealand*, London: Epworth, 1930) 126-7.

⁴ R.M. Burdon, *The New Dominion: A Social and Political History of New Zealand 1918-39*, (Wellington: Reed, 1965), 21.

⁵ Christchurch and Auckland Synods.

⁶ See also argument that Catholic and Anglican stances were crucial in earlier prohibition referenda: A.R. Grigg, 'Prohibition, the Church and Labour: A Programme for Social Reform, 1890-1914', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 15, 2 (1981) 135-54 at 146-7. Note how in 1922 *NZ Tablet* (NZT) could assume that the great majority of Catholics voted against prohibition 'as usual': NZT, 14 December 1922, 18.

required only 1632 Catholics (2.3% of Catholic voters) to be influenced by the Catholic hierarchy to change their vote and vote against prohibition in the December 1919 referendum to cause prohibition to fail.

If the prohibition cause was a moral crusade that would help bring in the kingdom of God, how would the Protestant churches react to apparent resistance of the Catholic Church to God's righteous cause? The matter needed sensitive handling. The prohibitionist movement needed to foster the small amount of support it received from Catholic quarters. No way could the prohibition cause be seen a 'No Popery' movement.⁷ At the same time, however, there was a tendency for Protestant prohibitionists to see Catholicism as linked with the liquor industry.⁸ Conversely there was a tendency for Catholics to see prohibition as a Protestant cause and as having anti-Catholic dimensions.⁹ Thus there was significant Catholic-Protestant cleavage on prohibition, and this was interlinked with division over other issues. The balance of this article will explore the contrasting stances of the Baptist and the Catholic Churches in the prohibition struggle and note the prevailing Catholic-Protestant ill-will that fuelled their attitudes.¹⁰

We will begin with the Baptist position. Congregational autonomy and non-hierarchical ecclesiology indicate that any central union cannot dictate to local churches and individual members. From their early beginnings Baptists have stressed that the conscience should not be coerced. They have lived in the tension that the Bible is authoritative, but there is liberty of conscience. In terms of Baptist understandings of church, even though most Baptists may have been anti-alcohol, one might expect openness of perspective to other Baptists holding a counter-perspective to the majority one, especially given Saint Paul's specific acknowledgement of liberty of conscience in matters of food (and, by implication, drink) in Romans 14.1-6?

⁷ *NZ Baptist (NZB)*, February 1920, 28.

⁸ See Catholic reaction to charges by Baptist minister, R.S. Gray, of an unholy alliance between 'the Liquor Party and the Roman Catholics': *NZT*, 14 December 1905, 1-2.

⁹ See for example, an Irish article subsequently reproduced in *NZT* asserting that the Prohibition movement was 'essentially Protestant' and threatened the Mass: J.M. Prendergast, 'The Ethics of Total Prohibition', *NZT*, 30 November 1922, 9-11.

¹⁰ In selecting the Baptist Church I am using it to typify Protestant prohibitionist sentiment. I could equally have chosen another church such as the Methodist Church for this purpose.

However, liberty of conscience has sometimes been a vaunted myth in Baptist history because the collective Baptist body has worked out what the Bible says on a topic and other viewpoints are frozen out. Increasingly this was the case in relation to alcohol. When Baptists first came to New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century, they came with divided attitudes on the issue of alcohol (reflected in a divided perspective on the use of alcoholic wine at communion).¹¹ This was because the English Baptist Church was then similarly divided, with the Temperance movement gradually becoming an English Baptist majority stance only in the second half of the nineteenth century and moving to its state of almost total dominance of English Baptist outlook on alcohol by the end of that century.¹² It is significant too that in moving to a total abstinence stance, English Baptists, because of their strong sense of the principle of the separation of church and state and of liberty of conscience, were reluctant as a body, to use the power of the state to impose prohibition on the nation as a whole.¹³

While New Zealand Baptists may at first have had diversity regarding alcohol this did not last long. The nation's desire to avoid the evils of old Europe and to become a 'better Britain', likely fostered New Zealand Baptist moves to seek a totally anti-alcohol society.¹⁴ The New Zealand Baptist Union president, the Hon. Thomas Dick, acknowledged in 1885 that a few years earlier, New Zealand Baptist temperance supporters were a minority and had only recently become a bare majority. He argued, however, that 'within a few years those who touch strong drink among church members will be the rare exception'. He went on to call on the three-year-old denomination to mass its forces against 'that gigantic atrocity, that diabolical conspiracy . . . the traffic in intoxication', which 'must be destroyed root and branch'.¹⁵ In 1889 the New Zealand Baptist annual conference commended the temperance question 'to the earnest support of all our Churches'.¹⁶ In 1901 that same body affirmed its conviction 'that of all the suggested measures for

¹¹ Paul Tonson, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.: Volume I: 1851-1882*, (Wellington: NZ Baptist Historical Society, 1982) 79.

¹² Joe L. Coker, 'Social Conscience and Political Power', *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*, 1, (1, 2005): 20-38 at 29ff.

¹³ Joe L. Coker, 36, 37; also D.W. Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century', *BQ*, XXXIV, 1 (1991-2) 13-24 at 17, 19-20.

¹⁴ On the notion of New Zealand seeking to be a 'better Britain' see, James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001) 27-31, 76-86, 170-3.

¹⁵ NZB, November 1885, 164-5.

¹⁶ NZB, January 1890, 11.

coping with the [liquor] evil, the total abolition of the liquor traffic is the only effective remedy'.¹⁷ The editor of *NZ Baptist* could confidently assert in September 1907 that the forthcoming annual conference would indicate 'our unabated and unrelenting hostility to intemperance'.¹⁸ New Zealand Baptists now spoke with one voice on the alcohol issue. Not only were they personally opposed to alcohol; they felt no restraint against using the power of the state to eliminate it altogether from society.

In the first two decades and more of the twentieth century, New Zealand Baptists were rock-solid against any consumption of alcohol for themselves or for the nation, with no contrary view given public expression. Not a letter or a hint appeared in the monthly *NZ Baptist* containing any suggestion that a contrary position might validly be possible or that any good Christian held such a position. Repeatedly the editor slammed alcohol as 'white slavery',¹⁹ as 'Herod',²⁰ as 'the great Hun',²¹ as 'the cannibal trade',²² as 'a cancer',²³ as 'wet damnation'.²⁴ Sermons of various preachers on the topic were printed in the *NZ Baptist*, all anti-alcohol: it was 'the devil's stronghold', 'a vicious habit'.²⁵ If there was any question of the overall Baptist position on the issue, the answer was clear at its national conference in October 1918, with one evening given over to a prohibition rally, with the meeting being described as 'full of fire'.²⁶

The early-twentieth-century, one-sided Baptist stance relating to alcohol can also be seen in a list of questions asked of candidates for the Baptist ministry in 1924. One of these asked candidates to state particulars of ways in which they had endeavoured to be useful to others and listed about seven possibilities as a check-list. One of the possibilities was 'Temperance Propaganda'.²⁷ Its specific mention carried the

¹⁷ Supplement to *NZB*, January 1902, 12.

¹⁸ *NZB*, September 1907, 233.

¹⁹ *NZB*, July 1918, 100; April 1919, 57.

²⁰ *NZB*, August 1918, 117.

²¹ *NZB*, September 1918, 129; January 1919, 1; also in sermon of Rev. W.S. Rollings: *NZB*, February 1919, 27.

²² *NZB*, November 1918, 166.

²³ *NZB*, April 1919, 56.

²⁴ *NZB*, April 1919, 57.

²⁵ Rev. W.S. Rollings in *NZB*, February 1919, 26, 28.

²⁶ *NZB*, November 1918, 166.

²⁷ *New Zealand Baptist Union Handbook* 1924-1925, 24. In that context temperance typically meant prohibition or total abstinence from alcohol.

implication that no good Baptist would be other than a supporter of ‘Temperance Propaganda’.

In the 1919 referenda, it was virtually unthinkable from a Baptist perspective that a good Christian could support any position other than prohibition. Again and again, Rev. J.J. North, as editor of *NZ Baptist*, rammed home the point:

- ‘[W]e adjure every man and woman whom our voice can reach, to throw themselves into this most urgent and most hopeful of social efforts’.²⁸
- ‘We are sure that it [prohibition] ought to have a place in every pray and every preach [sic] between now and the decision [the April referendum, two months away].’²⁹
- ‘Are you working and praying for Prohibition on April 10th?’³⁰
- ‘This reform is of God. . . . To me, Christ calls in this opportunity of giving the final knock-out of this evil, as plainly as he ever called in Galilee. . . . Who will dare refuse to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty? My soul, be not of their number.’³¹
- ‘That any man who uses the Christian name should vote for the liquor traffic is to us unthinkable.’³²

Not content with recently emerging from one war, Baptists were ready for a new one in the struggle for a better world. In fact the military and moral wars were interlinked. The German-American association, which was formed early in the war ostensibly to promote friendly relations between the two countries, was, according to North, actually a tool of Germany to keep America out of the recent war. The association was ‘largely financed by the great brewing concerns of America’, something not surprising given that ‘the Kaiser was one of the chief shareholders in American brewery stock’.³³ The prohibition-versus-liquor struggle was a ‘war’ between good and evil, an attack on the ‘devil’s stronghold’.³⁴ The ‘dagger must be driven home’.³⁵ The ‘triumph’ of

²⁸ *NZB*, September 1918, 129.

²⁹ *NZB*, February 1919, 17.

³⁰ *NZB*, March 1919, 33.

³¹ *NZB*, April 1919, 56-58.

³² *NZB*, December 1919, 177.

³³ *NZB*, February 1919, 27.

³⁴ *NZB*, February 1919, 26.

³⁵ *NZB*, January 1919, 1.

prohibition in America' was 'as a peal of the archangel's trump which heralds the coming triumph of Christ's kingdom; or as one of the footfalls of the Christ Himself in his mightiest and final advent into the world of our humanity'.³⁶ 'It looks as though North America is to be the first earthly home of the City of God.'³⁷ We must follow: 'It is up to all lovers of their country to arise and dedicate their powers to this crusade which has a world sweep and a world goal; and which is led by the world-conquering Christ.'³⁸

The Catholic Church was largely on the other side of the fight from the Baptists in relation to prohibition. Again and again, its archbishop, Francis Redwood, urged Catholics not to vote for prohibition. In his urgings, Redwood implied that Catholics who did not follow his advice were being disloyal to the church. In a hierarchical approach to authority, he had not only the high-ground of his office; he also had a clear statement of the Australasian archbishops in October 1918 against supporting prohibition.³⁹ Redwood used extreme language in rallying the faithful. So too did the fiery Irish-focused editor of the Catholic newspaper, the *NZ Tablet*, Father James Kelly. Why this intensity of heat?

From one point of view it was simply a question of how to deal with evil – qualified evil. Redwood noted in 1919 that alcohol per se was not evil. It was a good gift of God, even though much abused. Redwood's rhetoric even rose to the heights of claiming that 'the legitimate, temperate, and scientific use of alcohol in health and disease has saved more lives than any other element known to man, except only air, water, and food'.⁴⁰

The problem with alcohol was not its moderate use but its abuse.⁴¹ How could alcohol be evil when Jesus himself not only drank but assisted others to drink by turning water into wine?⁴² Wine was a 'gift from God'.⁴³ To hold otherwise was a heresy - the Manichaean heresy of

³⁶ *NZB*, February 1919, 25.

³⁷ Article of Rev. W.S. Rollings, *NZB*, March 1919, 36.

³⁸ Article of Rev. W.S. Rollings, *NZB*, March 1919, 37.

³⁹ For the text of this statement see *NZT*, 5 December 1918, 15.

⁴⁰ *NZT*, 11 December, 1919, 26.

⁴¹ *NZT*, 22 August 1918, 15; 7 November 1918, 14; 5 December 1918, 15 (statement of the Australian archbishops).

⁴² *NZT*, 15 August 1918, 17; 3 October 1918, 15; 27 March 1919, 15; 10 April 1919, 25; 11 December 1919, 26.

⁴³ *NZT*, 27 March 1919, 15.

denying the goodness of the material world.⁴⁴ Temperance was a 'virtue pleasing to God' when sought voluntarily.⁴⁵ Even total abstinence was a worthy position to hold when embraced voluntarily: 'mount the water waggon by all means; but mount it as a free man and not as the slave of a servile state'.⁴⁶ Total abstinence was not wrong; what was wrong was to impose this on all and sundry through prohibition.⁴⁷ In fact prohibition might actually weaken morality by fostering sly-grogging, hypocrisy and lawlessness.⁴⁸

The proper solution to abuse of a good gift was proper use, not prohibition altogether. While drunkenness was bad, indeed a serious sin, 'legislation never made and never will make a people moral'.⁴⁹ What the Church could do was provide instruction.⁵⁰ Moral principles needed to be internalized, with the following of conscience through voluntary restraint and self-discipline: 'true reform must come from within'.⁵¹ Prohibition was 'unjust aggression on human liberty', frustrating the possibility of a voluntary embracing of virtue.⁵² In a nutshell, prohibition was repeatedly asserted to be 'tyranny', an attack on liberty.⁵³ If change was needed, then state control, not prohibition, was the best solution.⁵⁴

The intensity of the rhetoric against prohibition as expressed by both Archbishop Redwood and the editor of *NZ Tablet* may well suggest that there was more at stake than simply the issue of the best way to deal with the admittedly widespread evil that stemmed from excessive drinking. In the two preceding referenda on national prohibition the Catholic Church in 1911 had spoken out against prohibition but not to the extent or with the intensity that it did in 1919, while in 1914 it seems to have largely ignored the prohibition referendum. The referenda of April 1919, December 1919, 1922 and 1925 are quite different in this

⁴⁴ *NZT*, 8 August 1918, 14; 15 August 1918, 15; 19 September 1918, 14; 7 November 1918, 14.

⁴⁵ *NZT*, 15 August 1918, 17.

⁴⁶ *NZT*, 10 October 1918, 15; also 3 October 1918, 15.

⁴⁷ *NZT*, 31 October 1918, 14.

⁴⁸ *NZT*, 19 September 1918, 15; 10 April 1919, 25; 11 December 1919, 26.

⁴⁹ *NZT*, 15 August 1918, 17.

⁵⁰ *NZT*, 15 August 1918, 17; also 11 December 1919, 25.

⁵¹ *NZT*, 22 August 1918, 15; 5 December 1918, 15; 10 April 1919, 26.

⁵² *NZT*, 3 October 1918, 17; 22 August 1918, 15; 7 November 1918, 14.

⁵³ *NZT*, 8 August 1918, 14; 22 August 1918, 15; 29 August 1918, 15; 27 March 1919, 15; 10 April 1919, 26; 13 November 1919, 15.

⁵⁴ *NZT*, 29 August 1918, 15; 5 December 1918, 15; 27 March 1919, 15 (the latter two references drawing attention to a suggestion of the Australasian archbishops).

regard. Again and again Catholics are warned, with extensive reasoning, against voting for prohibition. Why the difference starting in 1919?

The year 1919 was a time of intense Catholic-Protestant rivalry.⁵⁵ The two religious blocks had engaged in major struggle earlier in the decade over the issue of the teaching of religion in schools. Another flash-point was acute Protestant resentment at the 1907 *Ne Temere* Catholic decree which refused to accept the validity in Catholic terms of a mixed Catholic-Protestant marriage where the ceremony was not held in a Catholic church. This persisting resentment eventually resulted in the government passing an amendment to the Marriage Act in 1920 making it illegal to question the legitimacy of any state-sanctioned marriage.

A further deeply felt point of Catholic-Protestant tension concerned Ireland, the beloved homeland of so many New Zealand Catholics. Its struggles for independence and the counter-struggles of its predominantly Protestant north meant that guerrilla warfare, terrorism and assassinations were racking that land especially in the period 1918-1922. The result was that New Zealand Irish Catholics (140,000 strong) were under 'special strain' and therefore likely to be particularly sensitive to actual or imagined religious threat.⁵⁶ The intensity of religious and nationalistic feelings over Ireland later led to Bishop [James Liston](#), the coadjutor Catholic bishop of Auckland, being prosecuted for sedition because at a St Patrick's Day gathering in 1922 he not only praised the 'martyrs' of the Easter Rising in 1916 but allegedly claimed that they had been 'murdered by foreign troops'.⁵⁷ It is significant that when *NZ Tablet* warned against Protestant menace to the Mass in writing against prohibition in 1922, it brought in the Irish dimension in referring to New Zealand as a 'land of wowsers and Orangemen'.⁵⁸

Evidence of Catholic-Protestant ill-will on the Protestant side can be seen in the formation in 1917 of the vitriolic, anti-Catholic, Protestant

⁵⁵ See thesis of C.J. van der Krogt, 'More a Part than Apart: the Catholic Community in New Zealand Society 1918-1940', PhD thesis, Massey University, 1994, iv, contrasting intense sectarian strife during and immediately after World War One with subsequent warmer relations.

⁵⁶ This was a point made in 1920 by R.A. Wright, M.P., in urging in 1920 that the Marriage Act amendment, which in his view was 'aimed definitely at the Roman Catholic Church', not be passed at a time when there was 'special strain upon the loyalty of the Irish': *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (NZPD), 1920, 189, 616.

⁵⁷ On this incident see Rory Sweetman, *Bishop in the Dock: The Sedition Trial of James Liston*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1997).

⁵⁸ NZT, 30 November 1922, 18-19 at 19.

Political Association, by a Baptist minister, Howard Elliott.⁵⁹ In 1919 this organisation was at the height of its influence, with a claimed national membership of 200,000 in 225 branches.⁶⁰ While Baptists distanced themselves from Elliott, they did not distance themselves from intemperate anti-Catholic language. For example, the J.J. North, editor *NZ Baptist*, had the words 'the Roman menace' as part of a bold type heading in June 1918.⁶¹ That this was not an isolated phrase can be seen in the way North repeatedly used the word 'hate' in describing Catholic-Protestant and Rome-Britain relationships in his 1922 book, *Roman Catholicism: 'Roots and Fruits'*.⁶² That this was not the intemperate language of an isolated extremist can be seen in Professor John Dickie of the Presbyterian Knox College (later principal of its Theological Hall) twice using the word 'menace' to describe the Roman Catholic Church in his two-page foreword to North's book.⁶³ It is significant that it was the Baptist Church that was the one denomination to come out fully in support of the 1920 amendment to the Marriage Act and of Rev. Howard Elliott's efforts to secure this amendment.⁶⁴ The lifelong intensity of North's hostility to Roman Catholicism is evident in his valedictory address on ceasing to be the principal of the New Zealand Baptist Theological College at the annual assembly of the Baptist Union in 1945, listing 'Romanism' as a particular 'bête noire' as it was 'the most dangerous perversion of the Christian religion that there is'.⁶⁵ Baptists and Catholics might occasionally have warm relationships.⁶⁶ More likely, however, was distrust and even enmity.

This article has been arguing that the immediately post-World-War-One period was one of particularly heightened Catholic-Protestant

⁵⁹ Elliott left his Baptist pastorate to found the Protestant Political Association. However, he continued in some standing with the Baptist denomination being on the denomination's active military chaplains' list until 1929 and on its ministers but 'out of pastoral charge' list until 1932: see various New Zealand Baptist Union Handbooks.

⁶⁰ M. King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, (Auckland: Penguin, 2003) 316.

⁶¹ NZB, June 1918, 83. The editor was Rev. J.J. North. He became principal of N.Z. Baptist Theological College in 1926.

⁶² J.J. North, *Roman Catholicism: 'Roots and Fruits'*, (Napier: N. Pub. 1922), 1, 2, 7, 8, 10 *et passim*.

⁶³ North *Roman Catholicism*, 1.

⁶⁴ NZB, November, 1920, 164; New Zealand Baptist Handbook, 1920-1921, 26.

⁶⁵ NZB, December 1945, 303.

⁶⁶ For example, a warm letter dated 5 June 1919 from Baptist pastor Knowles Kempton to Bishop Cleary, responding to the latter's 'beautiful message' of goodwill as the former was about to leave Auckland for a pastorate in Dunedin: Auckland Catholic Diocesan Archives (ACDA): Cle 89-2.

animosity. The Catholic stance on prohibition needs to be considered against this backdrop of pervasive Catholic-Protestant rivalry and tension, spilling over at times into hatred and bitterness. In that context, prohibition looked to a lot of Catholics like a Protestant cause. Should Catholics then support it?

One crucial matter was the central importance to Catholics of the mass and the central role of wine within the mass. Would prohibition indirectly be an attack on Catholic worship by cutting off its communion wine? There were a few signs that this could be the case. One was the fact that when individual American states adopted prohibition around this time (prior to nationwide prohibition in 1920), a couple of the states initially made no exemption for communion wine, though this lack of exemption was quickly rectified.⁶⁷ However, this showed that alleged threat to the Catholic mass was no figment of the imagination and this evidence was repeatedly raised to show the specific threat to the Catholic Church that prohibition might bring.⁶⁸

Closer to home, an apparent statement of an Australian temperance lecturer, Rev. B.S. Hammond, in Ashburton in November 1911, that clauses in temperance legislation exempting alcohol used for religious purposes would likely be repealed about ten years after the original legislation was passed, suggested threat to the Catholic mass. This isolated comment led to the *NZ Tablet* warning just prior to the 1911 referendum on national prohibition that for the purposes of the mass the Catholic Church 'insists strictly' that 'the fermented juice of the grape must be used' and that 'the bare possibility of being deprived of the Mass is a prospect which no good Catholic can regard with equanimity'.⁶⁹

In 1918 and 1919 *NZ Tablet* was still raking over the old Hammond statement in conspiratorial tones: the 'official lecturer' for the prohibitionists had 'let the cat out of the bag' about the ultimate goal of cutting off alcohol even for communion.⁷⁰ Notwithstanding repeated

⁶⁷ Charles Todd, a leading lay Catholic prohibition champion of that time, named Arizona and Oklahoma as initially adopting 'bone-dry' prohibition in 1916-1917 but quickly making legislative amendment to allow for alcohol for sacramental purposes: C. Todd, *Prohibition and the Catholics*, Dunedin, 1919, 12.

⁶⁸ *NZT*, 8 August 1918, 14; 15 August 1918, 15; 29 August 1918, 15; 3 October 1918, 15; 27 March, 1919, 15; 10 April 1919, 26.

⁶⁹ *NZT*, 30 November 1911, 9-10.

⁷⁰ *NZT*, 8 August 1918, 15; 15 August 1918, 15; see also 29 August 1918, 8-9; 5 September 1918, 15; 12 September 1918, 15; 3 October 1918, 15; 31 October 1918, 14; 3 April 1918, 14; 10 April 1919, 26, 27.

denials of the prohibitionist New Zealand Alliance that this was its policy, coupled with an affirmation of its settled view that any prohibition legislation must include ongoing exemption to cover communion wine, Catholic assertion that Hammond's 1911 statement demonstrated ongoing prohibitionist intent persisted.⁷¹ The persistent emphasis by Redwood and the *Tablet* editor on the threat to the Catholic mass despite these prohibitionist denials may well suggest that the two were subtly emphasising sectarian dimensions to the issue of prohibition – that prohibition was in fact a disguised attack on Catholicism.⁷²

Could the prohibitionists be trusted? 'We have learned the ways of the wowser in the past to know that no promises of his can be trusted, and that he would leave no stone unturned to injure us'.⁷³ Again and again *NZ Tablet* labelled prohibitionists as extremists. They were 'the fanatics of our day'.⁷⁴ Archbishop Redwood was later to warn that there were in the ranks of the Prohibitionists 'bitter enemies of the Catholic Church and of the Mass'.⁷⁵

When Archbishop Redwood urged Catholics to vote against prohibition in the April 1919 election, he presented the core of prohibitionist sentiment as stemming from 'a handful of fanatics' and warned the faithful against becoming 'the slave of a false system inspired by narrow-mindedness and fanaticism'.⁷⁶ Redwood ensured that his views not only appeared in *NZ Tablet* but would also be read out in all parishes by sending 100 copies of his letter to each diocese with the request that the letter be read from the pulpit in each church on the Sunday prior to the referendum. In his letter to his bishops Redwood indicated that he was 'telling' Catholics 'how to vote'.⁷⁷ The fact that Archbishop Redwood's expressed opposition to prohibition was at its height in 1919 compared with his actions at other liquor polls before 1919 may suggest that his stance was fuelled by the tenser Catholic-Protestant climate of that particular time period.

⁷¹ See letter of the general secretary of the New Zealand Alliance, John Dawson to Bishop Cleary dated 21 November 1918 (ACDA, Cle 89-2 / 219). See also letter of prohibitionist Catholic layman Charles Todd, *NZT*, 26 September 1918, 31; also the *Month*, 15 November 1919, 15.

⁷² V.d. Krogt, 375.

⁷³ *NZT*, 12 September 1918, 15.

⁷⁴ *NZT*, 15 August 1918, 15; 22 August 1918, 15, 17; 19 September 1918, 15; 31 October 1918, 14.

⁷⁵ *NZT*, 30 November, 1922, 29-30 at 30.

⁷⁶ *NZT*, 10 April 1919, 26, 27.

⁷⁷ V.d. Krogt, 361-2.

Around this time *NZ Tablet* saw the prohibition movement as an anti-Catholic 'No-Popery party', who would 'leave no stone unturned to make a Prohibition law a weapon of attack against Catholics'.⁷⁸ 'Methodists and Baptists' were named as the instigators of prohibition in America, the *NZ Tablet* editor then going on to state: 'from Lloyd George to Howard Elliott we know what to expect from them in the way of fair play and reasonableness'.⁷⁹ The intensely anti-Catholic Elliott was still on official lists as a Baptist minister. Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Britain and strong supporter of prohibition, was seen as having Baptist identity.⁸⁰ A week after this reference to Lloyd George, the editor of *NZ Tablet* made an obscure reference in discussing communion wine and prohibition to 'Churches which have made Baptist or Jewish Premiers their rulers on earth', again probably another reference to 'Baptist' Lloyd George.⁸¹ Whatever the particular meaning, the *NZ Tablet* editor was clearly linking prohibition and Baptists, and stigmatizing both.

Certainly there was smoke if not fire from the Baptists to fuel the suspicions of Catholics. Baptists were prepared to recognize some measure of prohibitionist support from Catholic quarters: a Father Cronin as a prohibition campaigner, a 'foremost R.C. layman in Dunedin' [= Charles Todd], Dr A.B. O'Brien, 'one of the very foremost' of Catholic laymen in Christchurch, and Bishop Cleary's 'advocacy' of prohibition in Auckland.⁸² However, when the *NZ Baptist* gave credit for those Catholic efforts on behalf of prohibition it was in the context of publishing a strongly anti-Catholic letter from the Protestant Political Association leader, Rev. Howard Elliott. In replying to Elliott, *NZ Baptist* editor, J.J. North, while warning against prohibition becoming a 'No Popery campaign', declared: 'we are very hostile to Romanism'.⁸³ Furthermore when North was bemoaning the selfish voters who had robbed prohibition of its rightful victory in April 1919, he asserted that their viewpoint about alcohol was: "'Oi loikes it, and oi'l have it".⁸⁴

⁷⁸ *NZT*, 8 August 1918, 14; 15 August 1918, 15; 27 March 1919, 15; 3 April 1919, 14.

⁷⁹ *NZT*, 29 August 1918, 15.

⁸⁰ New Zealand Baptists claimed Lloyd George as a Baptist even though his Baptist identity and perspective, especially in relation to his sexual morality, were much more tenuous in his adult years: see sermon, 'Lloyd George and Liquor', *NZB*, August 1918, 116-18; also North, *Roman Catholicism*, 11.

⁸¹ *NZT*, 5 September 1918, 15.

⁸² *NZB*, March 1919, 33; April 1919, 56; February 1920, 28.

⁸³ *NZB*, February 1920, 28.

⁸⁴ *NZB*, May 1919, 66.

There is enough of the 'Oirish' (linked in New Zealand minds with Catholicism) in the statement to sense anti-Catholic sentiment between the lines. It is not surprising in that environment if Catholics viewed the prohibition crusade as having an anti-Catholic dimension.

Voting for prohibition appeared to be ruled out for loyal and faithful Catholics. 'Never', thundered *NZ Tablet*, 'under any circumstances, as you are Catholics, vote for Prohibition'.⁸⁵ The bishops had spoken: 'be guided by the bishops'.⁸⁶ The view of *NZ Tablet* was that the October 1918 Australasian archbishops' statement warning against prohibition was an 'authoritative declaration of the guides of the Catholic Church in the Southern Hemisphere'.⁸⁷ Granted, 'the pronouncement does not bind in conscience', but 'for loyal Catholics it will be accepted with the respect due to the superior wisdom of the men from whom it emanated'.⁸⁸

Archbishop Redwood used all the moral influence he could muster in a letter written to clergy to be passed on to their congregations immediately prior to the April 1919 poll:

The clergy and people of this archdiocese and of the other dioceses naturally look to their Metropolitan for right guidance on the matter of Prohibition – National Prohibition – with which this Dominion is threatened. I hope such a calamity will never befall it. . . . I call therefore upon all Catholics in the Dominion to vote dead against National Prohibition, as they value common sense, liberty, and the sacred claims of their Holy Faith. . . . Let him cast his vote patriotically and religiously against it, in this and every other election.⁸⁹

Redwood made a similar appeal to his flock, this time directly through the pages of *NZ Tablet*, on the eve of the December 1919 referendum:

Catholics need not be reminded of the danger to our Holy Religion if Prohibition is once carried. We exhort them, as we did in the past, to see to it that they never put the Altar and the Mass in the perilous position of dependence on the frail and worthless promises of politicians. What we said on that point last April ought to be remembered now; and as Catholics did then, so we

⁸⁵ *NZT*, 12 September 1918, 15; also 3 October 1918, 15.

⁸⁶ *NZT*, 31 October 1918, 14.

⁸⁷ *NZT*, 5 December 1918, 15.

⁸⁸ *NZT*, 27 March 1919, 14; 3 April 1919, 14.

⁸⁹ *NZT*, 10 April 1919, 25, 27.

are confident that they will next week vote loyally for religion, for personal liberty, and for right reason.⁹⁰

At first glance all this looks like almost irresistible pressure in a hierarchical church for all good Catholics to vote against prohibition. That, however, is not the total story. In the first place a key Catholic layman, Charles Todd, was heavily involved in the New Zealand Alliance, later even becoming its president in 1926-1928. He was active in sponsoring overseas Catholic speakers to lecture on prohibition to New Zealand audiences. One such was an American priest, Father George Zurcher, in 1922. Todd paid all his expenses and salary and kept him totally separate from the NZ Alliance 'so that there will be no room for idle tongues to connect him up with Methodists, Baptists etc and thus detract from his good work'.⁹¹

In addition Todd argued for prohibition in correspondence to *NZ Tablet*. To his credit, its editor, James Kelly, printed at least three of his letters, even though he then proceeded to attack Todd's arguments at length so that the faithful might be in no doubt how much credence should be given to those views.⁹² Todd was later to complain that he could not get his letters published in *NZ Tablet* because its editor was seeking to 'advance the interests of the trade' and attacking Catholic prohibitionists;⁹³ but *NZ Tablet* did at least give him some space earlier on. In order to get his message out in 1919 Todd published his own book in that year: *Prohibition and the Catholics*. He accepted that it was 'a Manichaeian error' to declare alcohol as evil in itself. In response to the argument that Jesus drank alcohol, Todd rejected the view that Christians today should slavishly follow Jesus: 'they are not walking in the Master's footsteps when they forsake their friendly donkey to ride in "cheap and nasty cars"'. We should follow the spirit and principles of Jesus' teaching. Drunkenness was rife in the twentieth century in a way that it was not in the time of Jesus. It was the function of the state to promote the common good and the economic and social well-being of the community, and prohibition would do this.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *NZT*, 11 December 1919, 26.

⁹¹ Letter, Charles Todd to Bishop Cleary, n.d. [early 1922]: ACDA, Cle 85-2.

⁹² For Todd's letters and *NZT* editorial attack of Todd's views see *NZT*, 26 September 1918, 30; 3 October 1918, 15-17; 14 October 1918, 15; 17 October 1918, 34-35; 24 October, 1918, 15, 17; 20 March 1919, 14.

⁹³ Todd, 1919, 2. Later still, in 1925, Todd complained in the *Month*, 3 November 1925, that *NZT* reneged on a prior agreement to run a paid advertisement from him.

⁹⁴ *Month*, 12, 6, 15.

Bishop Cleary of Auckland was probably even more important than the lay activist Charles Todd in articulating a stance alternative to the dominantly anti-prohibition Catholic viewpoint. Even prior to becoming bishop, he had shown sympathy for the prohibition movement while editor of *NZ Tablet*, 1898-1910. In December 1902 he received a letter signed by '200 Catholics' attached to the prohibition cause expressing 'heartfelt thanks and appreciation' for his pro-prohibitionist sympathies:

Unfortunately like most Catholic Colonials descended from grand old Irish parentage, there are among your humble subscribers some who have tasted the hardship and bitterness of drink; it is therefore all the more pleasing to us when we find a co-religionist priest taking the worthy stand you have done in trying to abolish the greatest curse that ever visited our fair land, or disturbed our domestic happiness.⁹⁵

Cleary was, however, often very circumspect with regard to his views on prohibition after he became bishop. When a prohibition speaker claimed that Cleary had said in 1918 that he would vote prohibition, Cleary denied that he had made such a statement, notwithstanding his sympathies in that direction.⁹⁶

While Cleary had amicable relationships with the New Zealand Alliance he was very cautious that this should not get him into trouble. Thus when he wrote in 1918 to Rev. R.S. Gray (a Baptist who was then a fulltime campaigner for prohibition and was shortly to become president of the Alliance), noting that there was no official Catholic paper in New Zealand, he declared: 'This statement is certain and authoritative; but naturally, I do not wish my name to be brought into any public statement on the subject, by any person, and this reply is given subject to that condition.'⁹⁷ Moreover, Cleary moved against allowing a Catholic welcome or the exercise of priestly functions of celebrating mass etc. to any itinerant Catholic priests who gave prohibition lectures, either as employees of any prohibition organization or without proper Catholic authorization.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Letter of '200 Catholics' to Father Cleary, 10 December 1902: ACDA, Cle – 2.

⁹⁶ On this see *NZT*, 17 October 1918, 14.

⁹⁷ Letter Cleary to Gray dated 20 August 1918: ACDA, Cle 89-1/39 (emphasis original).

⁹⁸ See for example his letter to his priests in relation to Father Cronin dated 12 March 1919 and his letter to his coadjutor bishop, Liston, dated 23 November

There was a clear difference between Cleary and his archbishop, Francis Redwood, on the issue of prohibition. When a Catholic layman wrote to Cleary as editor of the *Month* in 1926 criticizing Redwood's stance on the issue, Cleary wrote him a private reply headed with the words, 'NOT FOR PUBLICATION', the letter then beginning:

It would not be correct for me to publish anything involving an adverse criticism of an old and venerated Prelate, especially on a matter on which both he and the rest of us, ecclesiastics and laymen, are free to form and follow their own conscious opinions.⁹⁹

Cleary had to walk a fine line on the prohibition issue. Not only did his archbishop hold an anti-prohibition stance but this was also the collective viewpoint of the Australasian archbishops. How much wriggle room did this leave Cleary? Just enough for him to articulate a measure of support for prohibition without being directive on the matter or clashing head-on with the majority and more authoritative point of view.

A major stress of Cleary was that what Catholics needed to focus on was principles. How these then translated into specific policy was over to each Catholic. Within the framework of the principles there was freedom of conscience.

What were the principles of his church? Cleary spelt them out as soon as he started the *Month*, which he continued to edit, in 1918; and he spelt them out twice more, just prior to each of the two 1919 referenda:

- Rejection of the view that alcohol was an evil thing in itself
- Recognition of the right use of alcohol while thundering against its abuses
- Belief in prohibition for individuals or communities who did not know how to use alcoholic liquor in moderation
- 'She [the church] steadily counsels her children to practise total abstinence', with Pope Pius X (pope 1903-14) and other popes having given special blessings to 'the total abstinence movements in many lands'

1922, supporting Liston's stance against Father George Zurcher: ACDA: Cle 85-2.

⁹⁹ Letter from Cleary to E.M. Gibson dated 6 January 1926: ACDA: Cle 85-2 (emphasis in heading original).

- Rights of worship (the continuance of availability of communion wine) and rights in justice (adequate compensation for liquor interests where prohibition was enforced)

Apart from any qualifications in these principles ‘there is nothing in Catholic theology against the public conscience endeavouring to remedy or diminish intemperance either by prohibition or by State ownership and control’.¹⁰⁰

We can note significant contrasts between Cleary’s views in the *Month* and an alternative statement of Catholic principles in the rival Catholic newspaper, *NZ Tablet*.¹⁰¹ Part of the difference was in the tenor of the statements. While recognising its dangers, *NZ Tablet* material was much more affirmative about the positive aspects of alcohol, recognising that it ‘has always been a feature of convivial meetings and a conventional sign of hospitality and goodwill’. A key difference between the *Month* and the *Tablet* statements is that whereas the *Month* saw prohibition as an appropriate response for Catholics, the *Tablet* ruled it out: ‘Catholics ought to advocate Temperance or even Total Abstinence; but they ought to have nothing to do with the Prohibition movement’, first because it brought potential attack on the Catholic Church in its train, and secondly because it was an undue attack on human rights and liberty.¹⁰²

Prior to the two referenda, Cleary articulated the evils associated with alcohol: vice, crime, disease, domestic strife and economic loss.¹⁰³ At the same time, Cleary was astute in the way he portrayed the ‘enemy’. This was not alcohol per se. Too many Catholics drank to some extent for that to be the best strategy. Rather it was the powerful, unscrupulous, devious *liquor industry* – ‘the trade’, an institution that was distant from ‘us’.¹⁰⁴ Two aspects of the trade in particular promoted excessive drinking: tied houses and individuals taking their turn to buy drinks for their whole group under the custom of ‘treating’ or ‘shouting’ a round of drinks.¹⁰⁵ In Cleary’s view, ‘the evils of the drink traffic, within our Diocese, have gone far beyond the limits of toleration. . . . [W]ith our dying breath we would declare it our conscientious belief that there is a

¹⁰⁰ *Month*, 15 July 1918, 18; 15 March 1919, 6; 15 November 1919, 13.

¹⁰¹ *NZT*, 7 November 1918, 14. *NZT* drew the principles from a Father Keating’s pamphlet, published by the London Catholic Truth Society.

¹⁰² *NZT*, 7 November 1918, 14.

¹⁰³ *Month*, 15 March 1919, 6; 15 November 1919, 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Month*, 15 July 1918, 16; 15 May 1919, 6, 9; 15 July 1919, 4; 15 November 1919, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Month*, 15 July 1918, 16; 15 March 1919, 5.

real, solid hope in National Prohibition for the deep physical and moral and economic mischiefs of the licensed and unlicensed traffic in alcoholic liquors'.¹⁰⁶

Despite the evils of the system, Cleary readily acknowledged that Catholics had freedom of conscience in their response to the issue.¹⁰⁷ At the same time the Catholic Church was not a pro-alcohol church: it was built 'on a rock, not upon a vat'.¹⁰⁸ The best solution was to 'mount the water wagon and stay there! Such total abstinence . . . has the warm approval and blessing of a series of Supreme Pontiffs of our Church'.¹⁰⁹

This article has indicated diversity of perspective within the Catholic Church in New Zealand in 1919 over the prohibition issue. At the same time the weight of New Zealand Catholic Church authority was clearly against prohibition. In comparison with Archbishop Redwood and the editor of *NZ Tablet*, each of whom was outspokenly anti-prohibitionist, Cleary had to articulate his pro-prohibition views sensitively, moderately and cautiously. The less visceral tone of his articulated views likely made them far less influential. The two differing Catholic opinions both urged liberty on the issue. For Cleary, this meant that a good Catholic could vote either way. For Redwood and *NZ Tablet* it meant a vote against prohibition. The greater part of the Catholic vote will have lined up with Archbishop Redwood in opposing prohibition. Baptists, in contrast, though they were ostensible champions of liberty, in fact provided little liberty in talk or in practice. The strength of group pressure, articulating one perspective only, meant that contrary opinions either did not arise or remained concealed. The Baptist monolithic stance over alcohol was strengthened by a sense that Catholic-Protestant differences on the matter in 1919 were in some measure another round of their ongoing struggles over other issues. On the 1919 prohibition issue it was the Catholics who won; and their vote was significant in keeping New Zealand wet.

At that time, however, sectarian bitterness was being fuelled by Rev. Howard Elliott, who won a key anti-Catholic victory the following year in the amending of the Marriage Act. We note further, however, that a great majority of New Zealand Catholics were significantly of Irish background. A perusal of the Catholic magazines of that period shows both their deep love of Ireland and their gut-wrenching heartache over

¹⁰⁶ *Month*, 15 November 1919, 13.

¹⁰⁷ *Month*, 15 March 1919, 6-7; 15 April 1919, 6; 15 November 1919, 15-16.

¹⁰⁸ *Month*, 15 May 1919, 6. See, however, close linkages between the liquor industry and Archbishop Redwood in 1922 in v.d. Krogt, 365.

¹⁰⁹ *Month*, 15 March 1919, 7.

the Irish struggle first with Britain and then in their own civil war, 1918-1922.¹¹⁰ That struggle was seen in both British-Irish and also Catholic-Protestant terms. Inflamed feelings on that issue likely stiffened New Zealand Catholic resolve to resist further Protestant attack on their liberty and on their church in the prohibition struggle.

Returning soldiers kept New Zealand wet. So also did the Catholic Church. Can we go one step further and suggest that Baptist zealots in New Zealand like Howard Elliott and anti-British freedom fighters like De Valera in Ireland also kept New Zealand wet?

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¹¹⁰ Material showing the level of connection between NZT and Ireland can be seen in Heather McNamara, 'The New Zealand Tablet and the Irish Catholic Press Worldwide, 1898-1923', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, 2 (2003) 153-67 at 153 *et passim*.