

‘The Man from Wales’: A Study of the Mission of Ivor Powell in New Zealand, 1955-1956

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Ivor Powell’s two years of evangelistic crusades under the auspices of the Baptist Union of New Zealand in the mid-1950s. It notes their highly organised and strongly denominational flavour. Early Baptist euphoria at 2729 crusade ‘decisions for Christ’ was much more restrained in a survey fifteen months after Powell left New Zealand which indicated that relatively few of those ‘converts’ were in Baptist church membership. The article notes the narrowness of Powell’s preaching approach and suggests that conversion is commonly more of a process and more relational in nature than the crusade approach assumed.

Colin Brown, in his history of the New Zealand National Council of Churches, identified three mid-twentieth century approaches to evangelism: (1) evangelistic meetings pressing for personal decisions; (2) witness through social action; (3) processes of education and nurture.¹ Notwithstanding the dangers of over-generalisation I would suggest that in 1950s New Zealand Baptists were strongly oriented towards the first approach, the Methodists were starting to veer towards the second approach, and there was a strong tradition among Presbyterians supporting the third approach (though significant sections of that church remained attached to the first approach).² The Baptist Union’s

¹ Colin Brown, *Forty Years on: A History of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1981), 101.

² While the Methodist denomination had traditionally focused strongly on evangelism of individuals through direct appeal, the mood was starting to move strongly away from that. Thus the Methodist Church supported the 1959 Billy Graham crusade only on a split conference vote after a divisive debate. Then in the early 1960s the Methodist Church declined to support the subsequent 1969 Billy Graham crusade. The general orientation of seeing evangelism in a more instructional frame is perhaps reflected in historian Allan Davidson’s comment on the fact that the Presbyterians generally had an ‘emphasis on learned preaching’ and also that they ‘always had some ambivalence towards evangelism and avoided proselytism’: Allan Davidson, ‘1931-1960: Depression, War, New

sponsorship of Ivor Powell's evangelistic missions in New Zealand throughout 1955 and 1956 was one of a number of examples of its ongoing commitment to 'crusade' evangelism. Was it effective?

Although Powell came to New Zealand as an outsider, his Welshness was an asset – he was both exotic and from 'home' (from Britain). These factors made it easy to promote Powell's meetings by urging people to hear 'the man from Wales'. Some came to hear him simply for that reason.³ Actually, Powell himself had been away from Britain for more than six years – he came to New Zealand from three years of evangelism in Australia and prior to that, three and a half years evangelising in South Africa.⁴ And after his two years in New Zealand, Powell moved on to evangelism with the Canadian Baptists.⁵

New Zealand Baptists (along with society as a whole) had a deep attachment to Britain in the 1950s. An example of this can be seen in the 1953 'thank you' response from both the queen and the governor-general for the New Zealand Baptists forwarding on the passing of their annual assembly loyalty pledge to the reigning monarch.⁶ The Welsh/British connection made it easy to promote Powell in 1950s New Zealand.

Baptists in New Zealand had been keen on evangelism from their beginnings there in the middle of the nineteenth century. A century later, the 1950s was a decade of particularly strong Baptist evangelistic focus. Intermixed with this was a Baptist goal of advancing the Baptist denomination. In 1947 the Baptist Assembly sought a 10% growth in Baptist membership in the following year:

Our Churches are...called in the name of Christ to the task of making their whole membership 100 per cent effective, with the object that, by a concerted effort in evangelism, 1,000 new members may be won in the year 1948.⁷

Life' in Dennis McEldowney (ed.) *Presbyterians in Aotearoa, 1840-1990* (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990), 103-43, 109, 124. Presbyterian and Methodist denominational divergence from Baptists was much more marked in the 1950s than it had been earlier. My view is that the seeds of that divergence were starting to emerge to a significant extent in the 1950s.

³ See one example in *New Zealand Baptist* (NZB), October 1955, 240.

⁴ NZB, March 1954, 65.

⁵ NZB, May 1956, 66.

⁶ NZB, February 1953, 33.

⁷ Special report on evangelism (adopted by the Assembly): *New Zealand Baptist Union Handbook* 1946-1947, 19.

The outcome was growth of only 2%.⁸ Failure to achieve their ambitious goal did not daunt them – in fact the failure does not seem to have been publicly voiced or reflected on. Instead a national Board of Evangelism was set up at their annual assembly in 1948.⁹ The Board's initial major strategy was the promoting of team-based evangelistic crusades using New Zealand preachers.

Reports of Powell's evangelistic success in South Africa aroused New Zealand Baptist interest as early as 1950. Securing Powell's services took some time because the Australian Baptists were already in the queue for Powell's ministry; so New Zealand had to wait.¹⁰ Even so, Powell and the New Zealand Baptists committed themselves to the 1955-1956 visit as early as 1952, two and a half years prior to the event.¹¹

Powell was vigorously promoted and eagerly awaited. The New Zealand Baptist Board of Evangelism began the promotional side of the visit as early as May 1951 by starting to buy in supplies of Powell's booklets.¹² From 1952 the Board got in copies of the *Australian Baptist* magazine in order to run occasional reports of Powell's Australian ministry in the *New Zealand Baptist* to keep Powell's name before New Zealand Baptists.¹³ The itinerary for Powell's visit was mapped out sixteen months prior to his arrival.¹⁴ A brief call to prayer was issued to all New Zealand Baptists for the campaigns sixteen months before they got underway, followed up by a circular letter along the same lines to all churches six months later.¹⁵ The 1953 Board of Evangelism annual report concluded with the words: 'If the Board may leave one word with our folk for the coming year, it would be this: PRAY AND PREPARE FOR THE IVOR POWELL CAMPAIGNS – 1955-1956.'¹⁶ To heighten

⁸ The goal was difficult to measure anyway, partly because the statistical year ended on 31 August. My calculation of 2% is gained by considering both additions to membership by baptism and net membership growth for the two years 1947-1948 and 1948-1949 and halving those figures to get 1948 figures.

⁹ NZBU *Handbook* 1949-1950, 91.

¹⁰ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 3 July 1950, 4 September 1950, 2 October 1950, 6 August 1951: New Zealand Baptist Archive (NZBA): MA 059.

¹¹ Board of Evangelism report to the annual assembly 1952: Baptist Union Handbook 1952-1953, 86.

¹² Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 7 May 1951, 4 February 1952: NZBA: MA 059.

¹³ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 31 March 1952: NZBA: MA 059.

¹⁴ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 3 August 1953, 5 October 1953, 6 November 1953, 7 December 1953: NZBA: MA 059.

¹⁵ NZB, September 1953, 195; minutes of Board of Evangelism, 1 March 1954: NZBA: MA 059.

¹⁶ NZBU *Handbook* 1953-1954, 89 (emphasis original).

Baptist awareness a number of articles appeared in *New Zealand Baptist* in 1954.¹⁷ Any Baptist not getting in behind the crusade faced the risk of criticism and shame. Six months into the campaign *New Zealand Baptist* carried the following snippet:

WHERE IS IVOR POWELL NOW?

A visitor from overseas asked this question of one of our ministers. Despite the fact that a report is posted to every minister following every mission, this man could only say, 'I haven't any idea!' It is the duty of every N.Z. Baptist to follow with interest and prayer the work of the Man from Wales in our midst.¹⁸

In his two years in New Zealand Powell preached throughout the country. His typical 'campaign' was to preach for fifteen days (including three Sundays) at one venue before moving on to the next campaign the following Sunday.¹⁹ Some campaigns were held in Baptist buildings; but many were in public venues to cope with large crowds. Meetings commonly drew several hundred people but on occasion the number could be in the thousands.²⁰ Powell's focus was centrally towards evangelism. He variously described the response of inquirers/converts as 'professing faith in Christ', 'accepting the Lord Jesus as their Saviour' and 'making the great surrender'.²¹ Decision language was also commonly used – responders 'made the great decision'.²² Was it conversion?

At times Powell had the sense to recognise that 'real conversions' could not be assessed on the spot: 'When I come back in two years and see how many are working Christians in the church, I will tell you [how many real Christians there have been]'.²³ At other times, however, he

¹⁷ For example, *NZB*, March 1954, 65; July 1954, 154; August 1954, 184; September 1954, 200.

¹⁸ *NZB*, August 1955, 188.

¹⁹ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 31 March 1952: NZBA: MA 059.

²⁰ *NZB*, July 1955, 160 (re Invercargill); *NZB* October 1955, 240 (re an Auckland City Hall rally in conjunction with the Mount Albert campaign); *NZB* June 1956 142 (re Hamilton).

²¹ Ivor Powell reports to the Board of evangelism re Nelson, Levin, Tawa-Linden, Wellington Eastern Suburbs, Shackleton Road, Tauranga, Rotorua, Whangarei, Lower Hutt: NZBA: MA 060, B17/3.

²² See, for example, Powell's reports on the August 1954 Mount Albert campaign, the November-December 1954 Napier-Hastings campaigns and the November 1955 Christchurch central campaign: NZBA: MA 060, B17/3..

²³ *NZB*, August 1955, 182.

would describe the responders as ‘converts’.²⁴ Only thus could he encourage the baptising of initial responders in an area before the crusade ended there. This concept of instantaneous conversion and of initial decision/faith equating to conversion would have meshed well with New Zealand Baptists. A few years earlier the New Zealand Baptist Union Council had issued a statement on evangelising New Zealand, which included the affirmation, ‘When a penitent exercises faith in Christ *at that moment* Salvation becomes his’.²⁵ The difficulty is that while conversion may well be ‘at that moment’ conversion, how is that confidently known ‘at that moment’?

Powell’s method of soliciting public response was to invite people to meet him in an inquiry room. All who made this move were counselled by Powell. This could sometimes mean the counselling of twenty or more people in a comparatively short space of time. Powell nevertheless insisted that he could and should handle the counselling completely on his own – a fact that provoked resentment from some Baptists who felt that people from the local church of the area should be involved. Altogether Powell recorded 2729 people, excluding children, as having made the great decision for Christ through his ministry in New Zealand – a very sizeable figure.²⁶ New Zealand Baptist seemed euphoric at the results. One-third the way through the New Zealand missions the Board of Evangelism reported:

We believe it can be said without hesitation that the campaign thus far has been one of the highlights of our Baptist history in this country; results to date have fully justified the great expectations of our people for these missions.²⁷

A year later the Board still held that viewpoint:

Practically the whole of our time [in 1955-1956] and energies have been devoted to the oversight of the Crusade being conducted by our good friends, Rev. and Mrs. Ivor Powell. It has been a year of unprecedented opportunity for gaining new strength in our Churches, both by the addition of many new converts, and in the great spiritual uplift received by our members. We believe it is true

²⁴ For example, Ivor Powell report number 1 (re Timaru): NZBA: MA 060, B17/3.

²⁵ ‘Report on “The Baptist Churches and the Evangelising of New Zealand”’: NZBU *Handbook* 1946-1947, 162. Emphasis added to ‘at that moment’.

²⁶ See Powell’s handwritten records of decisions in NZBA: MA 060, B17/3.

²⁷ Annual report of Board of Evangelism 1954-1955: NZBU *Handbook* 1955-1956, 71.

to say that both of these objects have been very largely achieved in many parts of the country. Seldom in the history of our denomination in New Zealand has there been such a widespread response to the Gospel message, presented, it should be said, in a most attractive way by 'The Man from Wales'. Reports from every quarter agree that these Missions have been the most effective and compelling presentations of the Gospel experienced in this country for many years.²⁸

Wrapped up in Powell's focus on evangelism was his desire to grow Baptist churches, as did New Zealand Baptists themselves. When Powell began his ministry in Australia he reported to the New Zealand Board of Evangelism:

I came to find great suspicions and many 'wet blankets'. Now thank God, all the ministers are thrilled: all the churches are packed to the doors, and what is more to the point, every mission results in baptisms and additions to the local church.²⁹

This desire to promote the Baptist cause left Powell ambivalent as to venue – church buildings or public hall? On the one hand 'outsiders will attend a meeting in a City Hall when they absolutely refuse to enter a church'. On the other hand 'converts won in a central hall are apt to be left high and dry. . . . The Baptist [sic] declare that they do all the work whilst others get the results! The Man from Wales is a Baptist and whilst I shall never try to steal sheep from other denominations, I am still a BAPTIST. I shall hope that most of the converts will join my church. That is why I like preaching in churches.' The Board of Evangelism comment in circulating Powell's letter containing those statements was: 'It will readily be seen that the Missioner is a Baptist and his missions are run primarily for the strengthening of our Baptist churches.'³⁰

Powell's very strong denominational focus markedly limited the extent to which his crusades could be interdenominational. The purpose of his campaigns was not simply to make converts but to strengthen Baptist churches. Thus Powell's exhortation in June 1955 was: 'Let us work and pray, and preach until all New Zealand knows there is a Living Christ among the Baptists.'³¹ Baptist churches themselves were alert to

²⁸ Annual report of Board of Evangelism 1955-1956: NZBU *Handbook* 1956-1957, 79.

²⁹ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 1 September 1952: NZBA: MA 059.

³⁰ Undated circular letter (1954) from Powell to the Baptist Ministers of New Zealand: NZBA: MA 060, B17. Emphasis original.

³¹ NZB, June 1955, 129.

this aspect of the Ivor Powell crusades. Thus Rev. Eric Batts reported in relation to the Dunedin crusade:

Our Baptist position in Dunedin has been greatly strengthened by forthright and definite preaching of the Gospel and by Mr. Powell's courageous enunciation of our Baptist and Protestant emphases.³²

Powell vigorously promoted Baptist perspectives. The Christchurch campaign organisation, in writing to potential follow-up visitors, noted that each convert had received from the missionary two booklets: *After Conversion What?* and *Confessing Christ* (baptism).³³ Further Baptist emphasis was expressed in Powell's encouraging churches to hold adult baptismal services as a climax to his campaigns. Prior to his arrival in New Zealand Powell wrote to all the Baptist ministers in New Zealand:

I value the opportunity to speak about believer's baptism. The actual baptising is always done by the minister, but if he can prepare beforehand a few candidates, and have them in readiness for such a service at the end of the campaign, that provides the opportunity for me to expound the truths most dearly held among us. I hope every mission will end in this way.³⁴

Given this predetermined encouragement to hold baptismal services as a final act of the crusades, Powell was a little disingenuous in writing of the South Dunedin mission: 'Toward the end of the campaign *it became evident* that once again *it would become necessary* to close with a Baptismal Service'.³⁵ Not all Baptists supported the holding of baptismal services in this manner, the matter being raised, for example, even prior to his arrival, at the annual Baptist Assembly in 1953.³⁶ Apart from hesitation concerning the administering of baptism too quickly to converts, the practice must have meant that other denominations were less likely to support the campaigns. What the Presbyterian Church thought of the following public report from Dunedin is uncertain, but

³² NZB, May 1955, 107.

³³ NZBA: MA 060, B17.

³⁴ Undated circular letter [1954] to the Baptist ministers of New Zealand. No wonder that with those sorts of comments the Board of Evangelism circulated the letter as CONFIDENTIAL with the comment: 'It is quite conceivable that some matters falling into the wrong hands might be misconstrued and misrepresented.' NZBA: 060.

³⁵ Ivor Powell report number 3 to the Board of Evangelism: NZBA: MA 060, B17/3. Emphasis added.

³⁶ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 1 February 1954: NZBA: MA 059.

the overall reaction but may be guessed as being less than wholeheartedly warm in relation to the following item: 'One young man who sought and found the Saviour was already a theological student in training for the ministry!'³⁷

When the Waihi Baptist Church inquired of the Board of Evangelism whether they could hold an Ivor Powell crusade on an interdenominational basis, the clear answer was: 'the Board is not able to sanction such a Mission, as it would not meet the wishes of Mr. Powell'.³⁸ Thus if other churches wanted to support a Powell crusade they would be supporting a Baptist crusade. In some places the Brethren and/or Salvation Army churches were strong supporters.³⁹ In Nelson the Anglican Church gave strong backing to the crusade.⁴⁰ To quite an extent though, Baptist churches 'carried on this mighty offensive alone'.⁴¹ The Rotorua crusade reported that 'co-operation from the leaders of other denominations was not encouraging'.⁴² It is a moot point, however, whether the lack of co-operation is to be blamed on those churches or on the approach of the Baptist crusades.

In the crusades, there was no truck with the Roman Catholic Church. Catholics were beyond the pale, in urgent need of conversion. Hence Powell's narrative:

I am always reluctant to pin-point individual cases of conversion for I fear lest this would make them a target for the evil one. However, my readers may be stimulated to pray if I mention that one man, to use his own words, 'born and bred, and brought up a Roman Catholic' saw his need of Christ, renounced his former faith, and stated that he would like to become a Baptist. Another lady, who had already received special tuition in preparation for membership in the same church, also discovered her need of the Saviour, and finally stated her desire to be a Baptist.

Powell's strong Baptist emphasis and his holding of baptismal services within his crusades must have created difficulties for churches of

³⁷ *NZB*, May 1955, 107.

³⁸ Correspondence reported in minutes of Board of Evangelism, 6 September 1954: NZBA: MA 059.

³⁹ *NZB*, March 1956 66 (re Tauranga), *NZB* June 1956, 142.

⁴⁰ Ivor Powell report number 5 (re Nelson): NZBA. Given Powell's narrow Baptist approach, it is revealing that in describing Anglican co-operation Powell stated: 'For the first time in years, I enjoyed the prayerful co-operation of certain other churches'.

⁴¹ *NZB*, June 1956, 142.

⁴² *NZB*, April 1956, 94.

other denominations. The report on the Hanover Street mission included this description:

The campaign concluded with a great Baptist Rally in which the church was packed out. All local churches were well represented, beside a great number of others who had become interested during the course of the campaign. Five believers were baptised, and then in response to a stirring appeal by the missionary ten others, one man and nine women, came forward and were baptised forthwith. Of the women, seven were nurses in the hospital, one a specialist sister. All gave evidence before their baptism that they were sincere and convinced Christians. Several are of other denominations. It was a moving climax to a memorable campaign.⁴³

Given the strength of Presbyterianism in Dunedin, there would likely have been a Presbyterian or two amongst the several 'of other denominations'. I wonder how a Presbyterian minister would respond when a parishioner rang him the following day and said she had been moved at the Powell meeting and had been baptised then and there. And I wonder whether he would be recommending Powell crusades to his fellow ministers.⁴⁴

In terms of content, Powell's evangelism was narrow in its focus. In an article in *NZ Baptist* Powell contrasted two forms of evangelism. One focused on national and societal issues, the other on 'repentance' and the change of the individual heart. It did not seem to occur to Powell that both approaches could have validity and that his clearly preferred second approach may have been too narrow on its own.⁴⁵ Powell's understanding of conversion assumed that it was instantaneous and that it involved rejection of alcohol, smoking, gambling and dancing and change in sexual mores.⁴⁶

⁴³ *NZB*, May 1955, 107. See also *NZB*, July 1955, 160 re the baptising of 31 people at the Invercargill crusade, with 16 of them responding for baptism during the service itself.

⁴⁴ The host church, Hanover Street Baptist, was likely uncomfortable about the matter – in responding in 1958 to a survey on the Ivor Powell mission it noted that it did not like the final baptismal service: NZBA: MA 60, B17/3.

⁴⁵ *NZB*, April 1956, 88.

⁴⁶ Powell's stance on alcohol can be seen in his article, 'I'm glad I'm a Baptist' in *NZB*, March 1956, 62, where he is clearly critical of a Fiji preacher who drank alcohol. See also *NZB*, May 1956 116. His negative views on gambling and dancing can be seen in his article on 'Modern Evangelism', in *NZB*, April 1956, 88, where he is critical of churches that sponsor 'dancing and whist drives'. In

Powell's preaching was folksy and highly imaginative in approach. It was populist, not the 'learned preaching' of the Presbyterians.⁴⁷ His sermons were essentially colourful retelling of biblical stories, very commonly those of the Old Testament.⁴⁸ The story-telling nature of his preaching meant that he could draw it quickly to a close when his wife stood up unobtrusively at the back to signal that he had spoken long enough!⁴⁹ His description of the creation of Eve exemplifies the way he would embellish the biblical narrative:

She was lovely; she was indescribably charming; as dignified as befitted the queen of creation; as refreshing as the morning dew. Her eyes were lit with enquiry and pleasure as she scanned her surroundings. Her movements were graceful and effortless, and when she spoke, pleasure thrilled the Creator's heart. She was fascinatingly beautiful; she was good, and very desirable. 'And the Lord God brought her to man.' Poor Adam, he was dumbfounded! He wondered if this were a dream; if this goddess would disappear immediately he awakened. Then he rubbed his eyes. She was still there, and her friendly smiles added charm to her attractiveness. Poor man, he was shy; he was an inexperienced boy; he had never had a sweetheart. And then love was born in his soul. The wedding took place within the sacred precincts of God's open-air cathedral. God, the Father of the bride, gave her away; man's best Friend, the royal Surgeon, stood at the groom's side; and the Holy Spirit was the officiating minister. And when the service ended, the choirs of heaven sang their anthems.⁵⁰

Powell was very aware of the need to draw an audience. One way to do this was to show films. Powell had put together several documentaries of overseas countries he had visited and these seemed to

the same article he stated: 'I have never yet known an all-night prayer meeting to thrive in a church where dances are held. They cannot co-exist. One will kill the other.' A strong expression re sexual mores comes through in Ivor Powell mission report number 18 (re Tokoroa): NZBA: MA 060 B17/3.

⁴⁷ On this see footnote 2.

⁴⁸ Comment of Rev Brian Smith to the author 1 February 2006. Brian Smith, principal emeritus of Carey Baptist College, heard Ivor Powell preach several times in Christchurch during Powell's New Zealand campaign. See also the report of the Wanganui Baptist Church in NZB, October 1956, 264.

⁴⁹ Memory of Margaret Kimpton on her survey form handed to Laurie Guy 10 March 2006.

⁵⁰ Ivor Powell, *Bible Pinnacles* (London: Marshall Morgan, 1952), 1-2.

have pulling power.⁵¹ Another way to draw people to his main meetings was to hold supplementary meetings within community organisations. In the case of the Christchurch crusade in October 1956, Powell was scheduled to speak at a Rotary Club, at a Christian Businessmen's luncheon and at the YMCA youth time.⁵² In Timaru Powell was interviewed on the local radio station on Welsh rugby.⁵³ In Hamilton when he addressed a Rotary meeting, Rotarians teased him about Welsh rugby history. Powell's response jokingly criticised New Zealand rugby that he had seen, and asserted: 'If I had picked a team from my Baptist women, I would have spanked the lot of them'⁵⁴. The comment was reported in national newspapers and Powell got to speak on radio on the matter. Powell claimed: 'As a result of that sporting talk, many hundreds of men attended my services, and thanks be to God, many of these were won to Christ.'⁵⁵

The campaigns were handled in a well organised fashion. Powell himself was highly organised, writing a report of his ministry each month for the Baptist Board of Evangelism and for the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* magazine. He also wrote several general articles, probably to keep his mission and presence before New Zealand Baptists, on subjects such as the missionary challenge, Christmas, 'I'm glad I'm a Baptist', modern evangelism, and Pentecost.⁵⁶ Significantly, there was little if any focus on wider society and its concerns.

Powell was at one with the New Zealand Baptist denomination in his highly organised approach. The denomination expected every Baptist in New Zealand to throw their weight behind the campaigns. The stress on organisation required each Baptist minister immediately at the conclusion of a crusade to file a report focusing on their local church (in order to foster publicity for the ongoing ministry). A public rebuke was given to two ministers/churches for 'tardiness' when their reports were not produced immediately.⁵⁷ There was awareness too of the importance

⁵¹ Board of Evangelism annual report 1954-1955: NZBU *Handbook* 1955-1956, 71.

⁵² Christchurch evangelistic committee minutes: NZBA: MA 060, B17/3.

⁵³ Survey response letter of Rev. R.L. Fursdon to Rev. Eric Batts 14 May 1958: NZBA: MA 060, B17.

⁵⁴ NZ *Herald*, 10 May 1956, 12.

⁵⁵ Ivor Powell's report (number 19) on the Hamilton crusade: NZBA: MA 060, B17/3.

⁵⁶ NZB, May 1955, 103-4; December 1955, 290; March 1956, 62; April 1956, 88; May 1956, 116.

⁵⁷ NZB, September 1956, 224.

of follow-up of the new converts. Thus the Hamilton Central minister, when reporting great response from the crusade there, then commented:

Finally the great test is ahead of the local Church, but we are carrying on the offensive with a well-planned and eager follow-up ministry, determined there shall be no hole in the sack.⁵⁸

Were the campaigns successful? This is a matter that is difficult to measure. Given, however, that a significant emphasis was not only to produce conversions but also to boost local Baptist churches, we can look at a sampling of Baptist churches where crusades were held to assess their baptismal figures for the 1950s. One difficulty is that often several Baptist churches co-operated in a combined crusade. There is little way of knowing whether crusade attendances stemmed largely from the primary host church or much more evenly from a number of the involved churches. For the table on the next page I have selected crusade-host Baptist churches that were more at a distance from other Baptist churches, on the basis that crusade baptismal and numerical outcomes would reflect more in that particular Baptist church (acknowledging that the sampling will therefore focus more on provincial centres). I have selected churches where there was sizeable public conversion response to see more easily whether that response shows up in subsequent baptisms and membership additions. These, then, are statistics of annual admissions to membership by baptism:⁵⁹

The figures may suggest that there was major increase at Whangarei, New Plymouth and Nelson as a result of the Powell crusades there. They equally suggest minimal increase at Manurewa, Rotorua, Wanganui and Tauranga. The figures for Hamilton and Te Awamutu are less easy to interpret. The table suggests that there was no necessary correlation between reported conversions and subsequent baptisms and church membership. In all cases the number of baptisms was far less than the number of reported conversions. In some cases the Powell campaign made a major difference; in other cases little difference at all.

⁵⁸ NZB, June 1956, 142.

⁵⁹ The figures come from the monthly reports of Ivor Powell himself. Powell did not include responses from children in his overall conversion figures. The way he reported matters suggests that he counted as converts all who came forward to go into the inquiry room unless through personal counselling he considered they were a 'rededication' rather than a conversion: NZBA: MA 060 B17/3. The emboldened figures indicate which year Powell's crusade was held in their church.

CHURCH (‘decisions’ at Powell mtngs)	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
Whangarei (67)	7	16	6	8	7	27	12	9	13	12
Manurewa (117)	16	5	0	0	7	4	5	3	8	5
Hamilton (208)	20	24	37	7	45	37	21	13	21	19
Te Awamutu (61)	2	9	1	14	8	14	11	14	1	4
Tauranga (42)	12	16	13	16	1	9	16	12	3	10
Rotorua (52)	0	0	5	5	1	6	2	6	4	6
New Plymouth (102)	5	3	16	No Rtn	15	26	10	8	22	24
Wanganui (84)	1	9	9	2	5	7	0	2	1	0
Nelson (179)	10	6	15	9	48	9	3	8	13	22

This mixed outcome is reflected in the outcome of a Board of Evangelism survey done fifteen months after Powell had left the country.⁶⁰ The Board asked each church officers’ court to answer the following questions:

1. We would like to know if it is your considered opinion that the mission in your Church was justified.
2. Are there definite accessions to your membership as a direct result of the mission?
3. Was the type of mission acceptable to your Church?
4. Are there any outstanding lessons you have learned that you would like to pass on to the Board for their information?⁶¹

In all, Powell had conducted about 27 full-length crusades in various locations. Most involved more than one Baptist church. 35 survey replies came in from local churches (about one-third of all the New Zealand Baptist churches). Taken as a whole, the New Zealand Baptist church officers’ long-term view of the crusades would have to be described as ambivalent.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 3 March 1958: NZBA: MA 059.

⁶¹ Minutes of Board of Evangelism file: NZBA: MA 059.

In response to questions whether the crusade they were involved in was justified and whether the crusade approach was acceptable most responded in the affirmative. However, in response to the question of accessions into membership, 12 indicated no such accessions. Most of the no-new-accession churches were not host churches (churches of the local area in which the crusade was held). However host churches Tauranga, Tawa-Linden and Wanganui also gave that response. In all, 15 host churches (about half the total number of host churches) responded to the survey. Several reporting membership additions from the Ivor Powell crusade did not quantify that in any way. A table of host churches that in some way quantified the results is indicated below:

Host church	'Decisions for Christ' from the local Powell crusade	Subsequent crusade-related accessions into membership (1958 survey data)
Timaru	24	1
Tawa-Linden	14	0
Miramar	18	0
Wellington Central	113	'Less than 6'
Mount Albert	170	'A few'
Hastings	60	4
Tauranga	42	0
Tokoroa	40	2
Hamilton	208	12, plus about 17 in other nearby Baptist churches
Te Awamutu	61	9, plus 3 in Otorohanga Baptist
Belmont (North Shore)	69	3
Wanganui	84	0
Epuni & Taita (Hutt Valley)	137	3 at Taita; 0 at Epuni
Oxford Terrace (Christchurch)	159	7, plus c.7 at other Baptist churches
Greymouth	28	1

This shows four of the host churches indicating no accessions into membership as a crusade outcome. One, the Wanganui Baptist Church, seems to have been aware immediately after its crusade with 84 public commitments to Christ, that most of these did not indicate new and thorough conversions:

The response to the appeal made by Mr. Powell was very satisfactory, although it was really the people of our own church who received a tremendous uplift which should prove a wonderful stimulus in the days to come.⁶²

Most of the churches which did have accessions to membership stemming from their crusade stated a small numerical increase (between one and six). Greymouth reported that their one increase was the son of one of their deacons. Three churches reported double figure increases: Te Awamutu (12), Hamilton (12, plus c.12 in other nearby Baptist churches) and Caversham (18-20). While Ivor Powell recorded the 15 host churches above as having a total of 1267 adult 'decisions for Christ', this later survey indicated only about 60 accessions to membership in those churches from the Powell crusade, with likely a similar or lesser number in other Baptist churches. Factoring in the other Baptist churches also participating in the crusades, this may suggest accessions into Baptist membership of maybe 10% of the total 'decisions for Christ'.

Few of the responses were euphoric in tone. Nelson was one of those few, stating, 'The only weakness we could find was in Ivor Powell's determination to handle his personal work alone.' Avondale was another: 'Not in 25 years have I seen such positive results from any mission'. Most responses, however, were cautious. Often the positive affirmation related more to the profile it gave to the Baptist church rather than to the growth of that church. The comments of Rev. Roland Hart, minister of the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church in Christchurch, are an example of this perspective:

We would list the value of the campaign as chiefly witness to the city. It was a demonstration of Baptist strength and of Baptist teaching which had a marked effect on the whole city.⁶³

The most negative response came from the Tauranga church, which had 'no definite accessions to membership':

⁶² Wanganui Baptist Church report in NZB, October 1956, 264.

⁶³ NZBA MA 060 B17/3.

In this particular mission rather too much was made of the films and of merchandising the Evangelist's literature. . . . It would be appreciated and create greater harmony if an Evangelist would co-operate more with local church government in the organisation of a Mission.⁶⁴

This sharply contrasts with a Tauranga report immediately after the mission was held:

Without fear of contradiction it can be said that Mr. Powell is one of the sanest and safest evangelists that has conducted evangelistic campaigns in our land. There has been and will be the minimum, if any, after-mission problems in the Ivor Powell campaigns. In Tauranga there are none.⁶⁵

A number of the other church responses were unhappy with the crusade meetings commonly being held away from church premises in a larger public hall.⁶⁶ The Belmont response summed up that perspective:

A strong feeling here [is] that any such mission should be Church-centred at all costs – it would make the difficulty of tying in the new convert to church life much less.⁶⁷

It is interesting to note rather more negative responses from churches in 1958 that had been much more positive in 1955. Rev. R.L. Fursdon, minister of the Timaru Baptist Church, 1949-1965, is an example of this. Initially Fursdon was very positive about the crusade. Immediately at its end he was rather overwhelmed by how significant it had been (though recognizing that it was 'hard to assess the real results' so soon). He wrote:

It is not easy to sit down calmly and write a report of the Ivor Powell Mission. To say that it has been a stirring time is to put it mildly. . . . The whole church has been very much affected. Mr & Mrs Powell quickly gained the attention and respect of all. Ivor Powell . . . holds the audience spellbound. . . . Do not stint the publicity & advertising – it pays dividends & Ivor Powell will deliver the goods. I anticipate that Hanover St [the culminating location for the Dunedin crusades that followed the Timaru

⁶⁴ NZBA MA 060 B17/3.

⁶⁵ NZB, March 1956, 66.

⁶⁶ See responses of Rotorua, an unnamed congregation, Wanganui, Ponsonby, Tawa-Linden and Belmont.

⁶⁷ NZBA MA 060 B17/3.

crusade] will not contain the crowds when Ivor Powell has been there a month.⁶⁸

Ivor Powell's own report at that time on the Timaru crusade was similarly positive:

My first crusade in the Dominion has just terminated. . . . The mission . . . brought me into contact with my first New Zealand Baptist Church, and I loved what I saw. If subsequent campaigns bring to me as much pleasure as did this initial effort, then I shall forever thank God that He permitted me to visit this country.

In my opinion we did not really touch the outsiders until the mission was nearly at an end; our meetings were packed with hungry Christians. As the news spread through the district, the drawing power of my films began to make an impression. Toward the end of the second week interest deepened and strange faces began appearing in the services. In order to make the most of the new opportunity I offered to stay longer in the town, and the campaign was extended to Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the third week. Right to the end, the meetings were crowded to capacity, and nightly, souls responded to the challenge of the Saviour.⁶⁹

Fursdon was still pastor of the Timaru church when the survey was undertaken three years later. In reporting that the church had had only one accession to membership (other denominations also benefiting), Fursdon recognized that 'Mr Powell's literature, bookstall and films greatly helped the campaign & he knew how to attract the crowds'. In fact 'throughout [the] whole campaign the building was packed to capacity'. However, Fursdon was more critical of Powell's preaching style and content:

His use of graphic word pictures was excellent but it lacked an adequate presentation of the Gospel – Man's sin, God's mercy, lavish Redemption, the Cross, the Risen Church [sic] and the Holy Spirit's power. He relied too much on personal anecdotes to illustrate his addresses. It may have been our fault, but somehow we lacked the sense of God's Spirit in our midst.

Fursdon also expressed reservation about the way Powell handled the counseling of those who had responded in the meetings: 'His manner

⁶⁸ Mission report letter, Rev. R.L. Fursdon to Rev. A.J. Jamieson 10 February 1955: NZBA: MA 060.

⁶⁹ NZB, March 1955, 57.

was abrupt'. He was also negative with regard to the baptismal service that occurred at the end of the crusade:

We are not happy about converts being baptized at [the] end of campaign, or for people to come forward to be baptized 'on the spot'. There should be preparation of candidates and the matter of membership should be clearly stated.

Fursdon must have sensed that his comments may have been ambivalent and 'damning with faint praise'; so he stressed in closing his letter that his comments were 'confidential'.⁷⁰

The crusades had impact in many lives, even if the figures initially reported by Ivor Powell cannot be taken as an accurate indication of long-term change. One example of such change is indicated in a 2006 communication from the wife of a retired Baptist minister:

A very significant event happened in our family at one of the Services, my Father, Frank Holmes committed his life back to the Lord. The change was instant and I remember him giving up smoking straight away and becoming a very enthusiastic serving member of the church.

Ivor Powell also spoke at Finlay Park Easter Camp with over 500 young people in attendance. I remember that as the best out of many wonderful Easter Camps. At that time I had not committed my life to the Lord. Roy Bullen [the Rotorua Baptist minister] used to try and get the opportunity to talk to me and my friend about Jesus but I always evaded the issue. I would say to my friend, 'Just tell him I'm not good enough.' That never did put him off. However, Roy Bullen's efforts were not in vain and I gave my life to the Lord with many other young people at the Sunday night Service when Ivor Powell preached so powerfully.

Mrs. Jack Beck [wife of the Baptist minister at Morrinsville] counselled me and I truly was born again.⁷¹

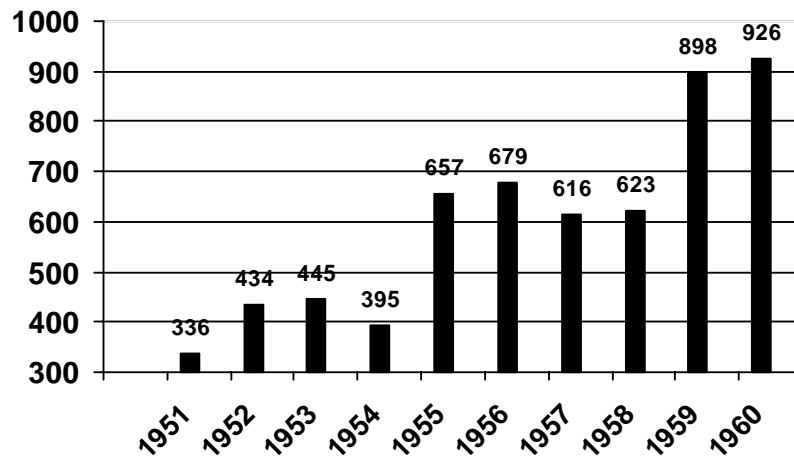
Despite such individual voices, data from individual churches may suggest that the Ivor Powell crusades contributed little to the growth of New Zealand Baptist churches. However, statistical data relating to the denomination as a whole could be read as countering this more negative view. The following graph may suggest that Ivor Powell's ministry in

⁷⁰ Letter R.L. Fursdon to Rev. E. W. Batts dated 14 May 1958: NZBA: MA 060. Rev. R.L. Fursdon died in 1989. The lapse of time since his death suggests that it is now appropriate to make public this aspect of his correspondence.

⁷¹ Email, Beverley Coad to Edgar Rout, 16 February 2006.

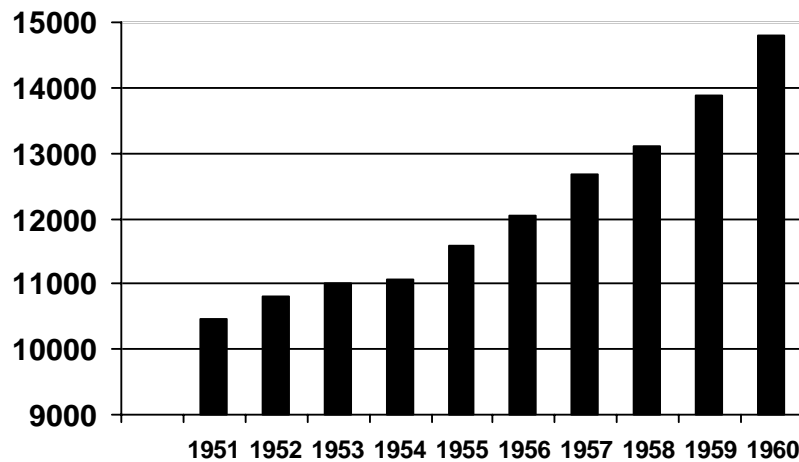
New Zealand ushered in significant annual increase in the number of baptisms performed in the Baptist churches.

Baptisms for membership 1951-1960⁷²



The overall membership figures for that period reflect a similar pattern of growth.

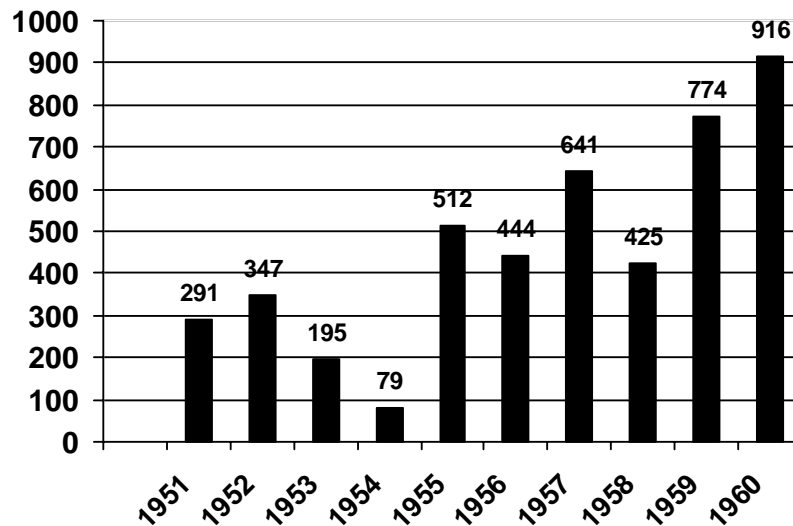
N.Z. Baptist total membership 1951-1960



⁷² This and the following two charts from NZBU *Handbooks*, 1951-1960.

The figures for annual increase in membership bring out very clearly that major growth shift began in and after the years of the Powell campaigns.

Annual increase in Baptist membership 1951-1960



These three graphs point to major increase, roughly from 1955-1956. Of itself this does not indicate any direct link with the Ivor Powell crusades. In fact, similar growth in other churches which were not majorly involved in the Powell crusades or in evangelism of that style suggests that much of this growth was linked to wider trends of the 1950s. Thus in a *Dominion* article in 1954, the Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Congregational churches all reported large congregation numbers, along with general buoyancy and quickening societal religious interest.⁷³

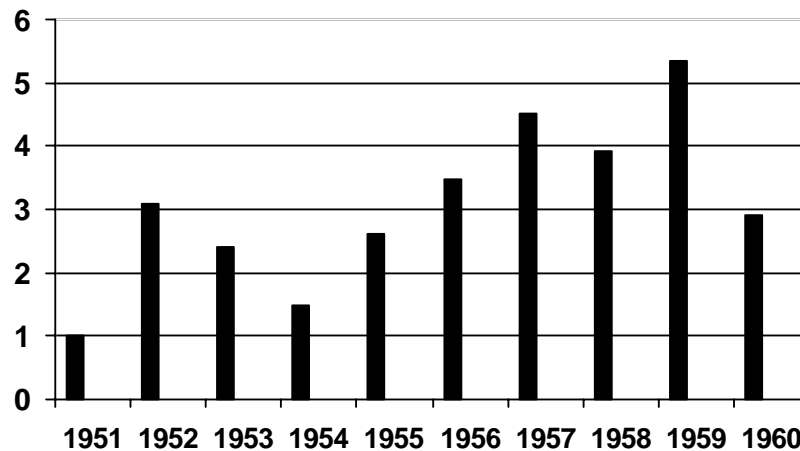
Post World War Two New Zealand was numerically a relatively good time for New Zealand churches of most denominations. At least until 1960 most churches grew at an excellent rate.⁷⁴ The following table

⁷³ 'Quickening of Interest in the Church Evident', *Dominion*, 30 September 1954, 11.

⁷⁴ J.A. Evans, 'Church State Relations in New Zealand 1940-1990 with Particular Reference to the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches', PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1992, 88; J. Veitch, 'Lloyd Geering and the Great Debate: A Water-shed in New Zealand Religious History', in International Religious Studies Conference, August 1983, *Religions and Change* (Wellington: 1983), 568-93

shows that the percentage increase in membership of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in the years 1951-1955 was typically 1-3%, while the percentage increase 1956-1960 was typically 3-5%. Only in 1967 did that church experience its first annual decline in the number of its communicant members since 1939.⁷⁵

Percentage increase in communicant membership roll of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand 1951-1960⁷⁶



Although the Methodist Church suffered the greatest decline of the major churches in twentieth-century New Zealand,⁷⁷ its membership underwent major increase in the 1950s.⁷⁸ The following graph shows that in the years 1951-1954 the annual increase in membership was typically

at 571; Veitch, '1961-1990: Towards the Church for a New Era', in D. McEldowney (ed.), *Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840-1990* (Wellington: Presbyterian Church of N.Z., 1990), 144-82 at 144; H. Mol, *The Fixed and the Fickle: Religion and Identity in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Pilgrims Press, n.d. [1982]), 81, 84.

⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1967, 306a.

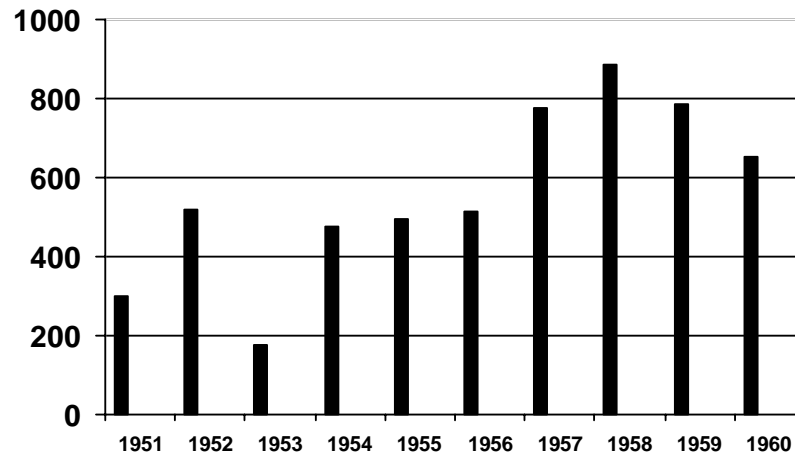
⁷⁶ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1950-1959.

⁷⁷ P.J. Lineham, *New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel: An Interpretation of the Policies and Performance of the Methodist Church of New Zealand* (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society, 1983), 5. See Methodist comment on the church's decline in E.W. Hames, *Coming of Age: New Zealand Methodism 1913-1972* (Auckland: Institute Press, 1974), 132-3, 154.

⁷⁸ Lineham, 26, 45. W.S. Chambers in *The Winds of Change: A Short History of the Methodist Church in North and South Canterbury from 1950-1975* (n.p., 1976), 10, indicated that Methodist membership was at its peak in North Canterbury in 1967, while the membership in South Canterbury peaked nine years earlier.

170-500 persons, whereas in the years 1955-1960 the annual increase in membership was typically 500-900 persons:

Annual increase in the church membership of the Methodist Church of New Zealand 1951-1960⁷⁹



What this shows is that the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist Churches all experienced significant numerical growth in the 1950s and that in each case the growth was significantly higher in the second half of the 1950s than in the first half of the 1950s. Why this similar pattern in the three churches despite their increasingly divergent attitudes and practices in relation to evangelism? The key is likely the baby-boom era, which is commonly reckoned to have begun in 1947. Many baby-boom children were in their early primary school years in the mid-1950s. These children caused a surge in Sunday School rolls and in some cases this brought parents back into church. Overall, there was a mood in the immediate post-war period in New Zealand of people wanting to settle down. This made the 1950s an era of families and major population growth. In that context people were inclined to be more religious. Whether Ivor Powell had come or not, marked Baptist membership growth would likely have occurred around that time.

Let us return to the question, what happened church-wise to the responders of the Powell crusades? One answer could be that they were already affiliated with other churches. Powell's policy was that those already affiliated with other churches be referred back to that church. In responding to the 1958 survey, the secretary of the Wellington Central Baptist Church, where 113 decisions had been recorded, wrote:

⁷⁹ *Minutes of the annual conferences of the Methodists Church of New Zealand, 1950-1959.*

The Missioner's emphasis on converts giving their own Church affiliation so that they could be contacted by their own Minister was also a splendid approach which had the effect of getting the support of other denominations at the meetings. . . . Although definite accessions to our membership did not number more than half-a-dozen, many other Churches, both Baptist and others must have benefited.⁸⁰

In terms of numerical increase, the Hamilton Central report stated that 'other denominations have also gained many', while the Timaru report indicated that 'other denominations benefited'.⁸¹ At the Avondale crusade 9 of the 20 responses were already connected to the Baptist church there and the others appear to have had affiliation with other denominations.⁸² Potential Baptist gain at Tokoroa was higher – 31 out of 40 conversions came under the care of Baptists (20 at Tokoroa itself).⁸³ The Greymouth report indicated that only six of the twenty-eight recorded decisions had Baptist connections. Powell's report on the Napier crusade noted 'keen interest among non-Baptists' such that 'Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans and Brethren . . . every night . . . brought to our services unsaved people'. Powell rejoiced in the Napier decisions but wished 'more of these had been brought by our own Baptists, for naturally I like to see our own church being strengthened'.⁸⁴ Thus churches of other denominations may have received many of the converts.

Another factor may have been that many of the responders were already in fact within the Baptist church and regarded either as already being a Christian or in process of becoming so. Their church might then either not remember them long-term as a convert of the mission or else recognise that they would later have made that response irrespective of whether the mission had been held or not – they were already in process of moving in that direction.⁸⁵ One researcher's conclusion in relation to

⁸⁰ NZBA: MA 060, B17.

⁸¹ NZBA: MA 060, B17.

⁸² Letter Rev. Jack Jensen to Rev. Eric Batts dated 14 March 1958 in response to the Board of Evangelism survey on the Ivor Powell mission: NZBA: MA 060.

⁸³ NZB, May 1956, 123.

⁸⁴ NZB, February 1956, 43.

⁸⁵ This point has been made concerning the Great Awakening in eighteenth century America, based on figures showing that in Connecticut the same proportion of society joined the church in the period 1730-1750 as did so in the period 1700-1730. See Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 97. See also Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1957), 103-105. For similar

the much later Luis Palau Crusade of 1987 in New Zealand was that Palau was preaching to the already converted – his audiences seem to have been drawn almost entirely from the churches.⁸⁶ Powell's detailed descriptions of individual conversions indicate the presence of unchurched people in his 1955-1956 crusades, but it seems likely that much of his audience was also already church.

In terms of subsequent church attendance, the reality is that many of those recording decisions subsequently went nowhere. Awareness of the risk of this is indicated in the frequent stress during the crusade of the importance of follow-up. The Greymouth survey comments gave prominence to this dimension:

A few weeks after the Mission, the Pastor of the Church left for another work, and his leadership and drive were not available to lead the people in the follow-up work. . . . The outstanding lesson in Greymouth is that it is futile having a Mission without organised follow-up work, and without a Pastor, or capable leader to organise follow-up work.⁸⁷

A high drop-off rate seems reflected in 1958 survey comments. Of the 35 returns, ten stressed the need for crusade meetings to be held in the local church building (essentially because there was greater likelihood of the responders continuing to go to that church) and six spoke of the need for better follow-up (reflecting high falling away after the Ivor Powell crusade).⁸⁸ Rev. Arthur Gibbs from Point Chevalier articulated such a perspective:

We appreciated Ivor Powell's ministry but feel we would not again be happy sharing in such a campaign outside our own district. A number of people made decisions at both [Auckland] campaigns who live in our district but we have not been able to get them to church since.⁸⁹

perspective on the early twentieth-century, large urban evangelism of Billy Sunday see William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), 431-2.

⁸⁶ Bryan Gilling, 'Convinced Christians Convinced Christians', in Douglas Pratt (ed.), *Rescue the Perishing: Comparative Perspectives on Evangelism and Revivalism* (Auckland: College Communications, 1989), 77-93; also 52.

⁸⁷ Survey response letter of Rev. Roy Bullen, 15th April 1958: NZBA: MA 060 B17.

⁸⁸ NZBA: MA60 B17.

⁸⁹ NZBA: MA60 B17.

Given that the long-term numerical results of Ivor Powell's crusades seem small, should the Ivor Powell crusades be credited with any of the positive change at all? To that the answer is probably 'yes'. I have indicated how keenly New Zealand Baptists focused on the crusades both before Powell's arrival and during their occurrence. Much of the initial reported Baptist attitude to the crusades was extremely positive. Through the denominational monthly magazine, New Zealand Baptists focused enormously on the Ivor Powell crusades over three years, 1954-1956.⁹⁰ This further fostered a climate of evangelism. New Zealand Baptists were strongly evangelistic in the 1950s. For example, the Auckland Baptist Association utilised Rev. Roland Hart as full-time evangelist from 1952 to 1954. Baptists were very keen to retain Powell for a third year of evangelism beyond his two-year commitment. When that proved not to be possible, the denomination began moves, even before the final Powell crusade had occurred, to appoint a full-time national evangelist.⁹¹ Eventually this led to the Baptist Union having a full-time evangelist, 1959-1967. The evangelistic motivation also meant that Baptists were heavily involved in the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade and the earlier graphs in this paper represent further major growth upswing in that time period.

The Ivor Powell crusades are best viewed in the context of a more responsive 1950s and as part of a wider evangelistic response of various churches, but especially of the New Zealand Baptists, to that responsive climate. In addition, the high profile that Ivor Powell was given provided further impetus to the already highly motivated Baptists and this in turn aided further growth.

A great deal of Powell's preaching, however, was to the already converted. And much of it depended on apparent converts persevering with the decision they had made, helped by the best follow-up program that could be organised. The major concern about follow-up suggests not that it was not done but that it still often failed because of lack of an existing relationship with the responder. This may suggest that the crusade model of evangelism barely worked even in the 1950s. It was heavily dependent on existing relationships with committed Christians. Where those were not present, the drop-off rate was very high indeed.

⁹⁰ For the Board of Evangelism, preparation for the 1955-1956 mission was the main task of the Board in 1954: minutes of Board of Evangelism, annual report 1954: NZBA: MA 059.

⁹¹ Minutes of Board of Evangelism, 1 November 1956: NZBA: MA 059.

This suggests that conversion is commonly more of a process and more relationally based than the 1950s Baptist approach assumed.

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