

## **A.H. Collins' Ministry at Ponsonby Baptist Church 1893-1902**

### **ABSTRACT**

This essay examines the words and work of Rev Archibald Henry Collins during his years of ministry at Ponsonby Baptist Church, 1893-1902. It comprises two parts. A description of conditions in New Zealand in the 1890s is followed by an outline of the words and work of Rev Collins, providing a summary history and a synopsis of his theology and practice of ministry. Part Two undertakes a critical analysis of Collins, critiquing his theology and practice of ministry and identifying his emphases in this period. The essay calls into question interpretations of Collins which emphasise social concern over piety as his primary focus in this early part of his career.

### **Introduction**

A.H. Collins (1853-1930) has been presented as an advocate and activist in regard to social justice; a notable and early proponent of such views in New Zealand Baptist history. Martin Sutherland suggests that as 'one of the group of social radicals in the denomination at the time, Collins made a strong stand on Baptist principles but also on the rights of labour.'<sup>1</sup> Ayson Clifford observes Collins' support of the new Liberal government: 'He arrived early in the Liberal reign and must have rejoiced in its reforms. He was a vigorous advocate of trade unions and did not hesitate to lambast capitalism and exploitation from the pulpit.'<sup>2</sup> Brian Smith adds that

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Sutherland, *Baptists in Colonial New Zealand* (Auckland: New Zealand Baptist Research and Historical Society, 2002), 212.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ayson Clifford, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of New Zealand* (Wellington: New Zealand Baptist Research and Historical Society, 1982), 109.

Collins was '[a] pungent preacher with an outspoken sympathy for the poor.'<sup>3</sup> These views will be challenged in this essay, with the proposal that Collins discerned that the church needed to focus on a greater need than social action in the period 1893-1902. Personal piety, Collins believed, was the great need of the age.

### **Part One**

The 1890s represented a new day in New Zealand culture and society. It was a decade of change in ways both obvious and concealed. With observable changes such as the new direction given to labour and land laws there came a rising tide of optimism and security. The political leaders of this time were the driving force of this change. The Liberals enjoyed a long and successful season in power, the longest term in office New Zealand has known.

The new Liberal party was elected with a mandate for change. "The Liberals were pledged to 'politics of development,'"<sup>4</sup> and led the nation in a series of changes in property ownership and the rights of the working class.

W.P. Reeves was instrumental in New Zealand's philosophical and political development. As Minister of Labour he was the architect of legislation to improve conditions for workers, to encourage trade unions and for compulsory arbitration between employers and employees.<sup>5</sup> The Department of Labour was established under Reeves' leadership. This government department had considerable significance for the labour force in New Zealand in the 1890s. J. Martin asserts that it

was among the early pioneers of such institutions internationally, and took on functions that made it perhaps the most powerful and all-embracing government body concerned with the 'labour problem'.... The department clearly made an essential contribution to the improvement of wages and working

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Smith, 'New Zealand Baptists and the 'Labour Question,'" *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 4 (1999): 26.

<sup>4</sup> L. Barber, *New Zealand: A Short History* (Wellington: Century Barber, 1989), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon McLauchlan, *A Short History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2004), 105.

conditions, gave protection to the wage-earner and promoted the position of the disadvantaged in the labour market....<sup>6</sup>

The Liberals were characterised by a considerable optimism. They saw the role of the state as integral to the life and hope of the nation and set forth in the expectation of opening the door to Utopia. Sinclair observes, 'For all of [the Liberals], the final object was the fullest possible consummation of the individual life. The state was to create a generalized sense of individual worth, in a word: equality.'<sup>7</sup>

Reeves personified this idealistic attitude. In the *Independent Review*, in 1903, he posed a question which the Liberals sought to answer in the affirmative:

Is it possible to have a civilization which is no mere lacquer on the surface of society? Can a community be civilized throughout, and trained to consist of educated, vigorous men and women; efficient workers, yet not lacking in the essentials of refinement?<sup>8</sup>

This is the environment A.H. Collins entered on his arrival in New Zealand in 1893.

Born in Worcester, England, in 1853, Collins was educated in his native town. He studied for the ministry and moved to London to complete his training at Spurgeon's College. He settled at Milton, Oxfordshire, where he ministered for three years (1876-1880). At the request of the C.H. Spurgeon he then ministered at Selly Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, a post he held for 12 years (1881-1893). During this ministry he took an active role in a campaign of radical civic reform, inaugurated by the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain. Due to failing health Collins decided to go to Melbourne, but while on his way there he accepted a call by cable to Ponsonby Baptist Church.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John E. Martin, *Holding the Balance: A History of New Zealand's Department of Labour 1891-1995* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1996), 11, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), 175.

<sup>8</sup> Sinclair, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Details are not available as to his reasons for accepting this call, or of what other options were open to him. *Evening Post* 22 October 1930, Newspaper cutting, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland n.p.; *Otago Daily Times* 24 October 1930, *New Zealand Obituaries* 16: 637; Sutherland, *Baptists in Colonial New Zealand*, 212.

During his ministry at Ponsonby he served for seven years as secretary to the Baptist Union (1894-1900), resigning to take up the position of Union President (1900/1). He also served as secretary on the Evangelical Christian Council and was chairman of the Conciliation Board for the northern industrial district for four years.<sup>10</sup>

At the conclusion of his ministry at Ponsonby Collins moved to Australia where he filled two pastorates in Victoria (Fitzroy and Kyneton 1902-1908), was for 12 years minister of Parkside Church, Adelaide (1908-1921), and served as president of the Baptist Union of South Australia (1914). He returned to New Zealand in 1921 as Pastor of New Plymouth Baptist Church, serving there for five and a half years (1921-1926). Collins was married in 1881 and had three daughters. He died in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, on 21 October 1930.<sup>11</sup>

### **Theology**

What of Collins' theology and practice of ministry? Collins published several sermons during the period covered in this essay. His later years in ministry saw the output of published material rise dramatically; some 500 sermons printed in a New Plymouth newspaper and preserved in scrapbooks are available;<sup>12</sup> unfortunately the pool of information from sermons and lectures from 1893-1902 is much smaller. From this period there are approximately 20 sermons, lectures or articles either referred to or published in various forms. This smaller resource does, however, leave us with many important clues to his theological convictions. Notable among these are three addresses given to the annual Baptist Conference. With opportunities such as these, how did Collins seek to influence the denomination to which he was so committed?

Collins was strongly evangelical in his theological convictions. David Bebbington defines four tenets of evangelicalism: conversion,

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<sup>10</sup> *Evening Post* 22 October 1930, Newspaper cutting, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland n.p.; *Otago Daily Times* 24 October 1930, *New Zealand Obituaries* 16: 637; Sutherland, *Baptists in Colonial New Zealand*, 212.

<sup>11</sup> *Otago Daily Times* 24 October, 1930, *New Zealand Obituaries* 16: 637; 'The Dominion' 22 October 1930, *New Zealand Obituaries* 16: 639; Sutherland, *Baptists in Colonial New Zealand*, 212.

<sup>12</sup> Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland.

or 'the belief that lives need to be changed'; the Bible, or the 'belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages'; activism, or the dedication of all believers to lives of service for God; and crucicentrism, or the conviction that Christ's death was the crucial matter in providing atonement for sin.<sup>13</sup> These tenets are easily identifiable in Collins' sermons.

### Conversion

A ministry that sought to bring personal faith to others was held in the highest regard by Collins. In 1894 Collins was called upon to give an address to Sunday School teachers, where he encouraged them in their work, stating, 'you... who make the salvation of the children your life's aim, I have no doubt when I say that your work is of the supremest importance.'<sup>14</sup>

Collins' sermons are frequently emotive, often coloured with appeal to the individual, particularly in the call to conversion.

Adopt the straight course, and forge straight ahead. Take the word of God as the guide of your life, and let the will of God be your final court of appeal. If as yet you have never definitely taken upon you the vows of God, if you have never received Jesus Christ as your example and Saviour, do so now, and believe me that the path of 'glory, honour, and immortality' is the path of personal devotion to Him who loved you and gave Himself for you.<sup>15</sup>

But what of ourselves? We touch men daily whom we know to be out of Christ, and our eyes are dry, our hearts cold. 'O Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us!' The cure for such guilty coldness? The only cure is in the Holy Spirit of pity and sacrifice. For this great blessing let us unitedly cry to God.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-17, quotations 3, 12, cited in Mark Noll *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>14</sup> *New Zealand Baptist [NZB]* May 1894, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Archibald Henry Collins, *A Hero in Babylon: A Sermon, Preached In The Ponsonby Baptist Church, On Sunday Evening, October 20, 1895* (Auckland: Wright and Jaques, 1895), 8.

<sup>16</sup> *NZB*, December 1901, 182.

An important role of the church, for Collins, was evangelism and mission. In an address to the Annual Meeting of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society he stated that 'Every Christian is a born evangelist. The Church which is not missionary in its spirit and sympathy, is to that extent unfaithful to its vocation.'<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the entire period under study personal holiness emerges as the major theme. (Holiness is a pervasive theme in Evangelical thought and practice and will be discussed here under the heading of Conversion.) Teaching on personal piety and depth of Christian character was an intention of Collins from his first arrival in New Zealand. In 'News of the Churches' in the *New Zealand Baptist* after his acceptance of the call to Ponsonby he stated his convictions. 'A man might ably recite the most perfect creed in Christendom, but it would be of no avail unless crystallised in his life and character.'<sup>18</sup> His presidential address to the annual Baptist conference only weeks before his resignation as minister of Ponsonby Baptist (and subsequent departure from New Zealand) was dedicated to personal and corporate spirituality.

Personal holiness was of such concern for Collins that he dealt with this topic thoroughly and eagerly. In a sermon preached to young men the whole outline emerges from the theme of personal character: 'My first anchor I shall call, A steady, determined Industry; second – Honesty of Principle; third – Purity; fourth – True Godliness.'<sup>19</sup>

Collins advocated an unashamedly high standard in personal holiness.

The great and commanding truth of this story [of Daniel and his commitment to purity through dietary restrictions] is that definite, personal religion should regulate the smallest details of life; and that it is not overscrupulousness or pharisaism when a man puts his foot down about a small matter and says, 'No, I dare not do it, trifling as it may seem and pleasant as it may be, for in doing thus I should act against convictions, and sin against God.' Beware of yielding in apparently trivial matters where

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<sup>17</sup> NZB, March 1894, 34.

<sup>18</sup> NZB, August 1893, 118.

<sup>19</sup> NZB, November 1894, 171.

principle is involved. There is nothing trivial in the realm of morals.<sup>20</sup>

The depth of importance of personal holiness to Collins can be seen in his understanding that piety was not simply an end in itself. He understood personal piety to be a means of redemption in both the lives of others and, indeed, the whole of society. In another opportunity to address the annual Baptist conference, Collins again turns to personal piety and spirituality for his theme. Using a favourite character, Daniel ‘the Puritan of Babylon’, Collins colourfully exhorts his audience, the leaders of the Baptist movement in New Zealand, to embrace personal spirituality in the pursuit of a godly society.

What then was it that saved the Puritan of Babylon from the deadening influences of a vast and obtrusive materialism; What kept his companions in the captivity from becoming mere airy bubbles drifting on the stream of godless pleasure? What was the power which not only saved them from being sucked under in the whirling maelstrom of a conquest-seeking people, but helped them so to use the hour of trial and adversity that when they came out of captivity into their own national possession, it found them, for the first time, rid of idolatry and devoted to a pure monotheistic faith? What, I say, effected this national regeneration? The answer is plain. It was the habit of daily prayer; it was the fond and faithful recollection of the City of Solemnities; it was this reverence for conscience, for truth, and for God.<sup>21</sup>

#### The Bible

Collins was definite in his commitment to the Bible as the living word of God, believing in the sole sufficiency of Scripture as the rule of faith and conduct.<sup>22</sup> He was passionate about the Bible, stating that it ‘is the most optimistic book in the world.’<sup>23</sup>

His views on the Bible were a reflection of his times, where he could assume thorough Bible knowledge in most of his congregation. The following quotation comes from one of the seven sermons preached at Ponsonby Baptist now available, published in booklet

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<sup>20</sup> Collins, *A Hero in Babylon*, 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> NZB, January 1901, 3.

<sup>22</sup> NZB, December 1901, 177.

<sup>23</sup> NZB, January 1895, 1.

form between 1893 and 1902. In this sermon one can detect a strong Bible culture amongst the laity and a belief in the Bible and its teachings as nothing less than the primary hope for the future of civilization.

If you touch upon one of [the Bible's] narratives, everyone knows what you mean. If you allude to one of its characters or scenes, the reader's memory supplies an instant picture to illuminate the point. And, so long as its words are studied by little children at their mother's knee, and recognised by high critics as the model of pure English, we may be sure that neither the jargon of science nor the slang of ignorance will be able to create a shibboleth to divide the people of our common race.<sup>24</sup>

### Activism

An overriding theme of Collins' life's work was social concern. In the terms of the 1890s this commitment to social action was described as 'Christian socialism', a 'full-gospel' or 'liberalism'. These terms are amorphous and are applied differently today. For the purposes of this essay, when Collins is spoken of as 'liberal' or 'a Christian socialist' this needs to be understood as a concern for the poor and underprivileged, with a commitment to social justice.

Before we look at the evidence of this theme in the 1890s it is important to note that these convictions were with Collins through all his years of ministry with notable examples in both his earlier and later years. As noted above, during his ministry at Birmingham (1881-1893), Collins was heavily involved in a 'campaign of radical civic reform' that was inaugurated by the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>25</sup> In his last pastorate, at New Plymouth in the 1920s, his commitment to social concern had not abated.

The cross fastened to the gable of a poor man's hut is the essential spirit of Christianity. The Cross means salvation for social service. The Cross must be planted on the homes of men, planted on factory and shop, fastened on the tools of trade, on schools and universities, and legislative halls. We may not stamp the Cross on the cover of our Bibles and keep it off our ledger

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<sup>24</sup> Archibald Henry Collins, *The Literary Merit of the Bible: A Sermon, Preached In The Ponsonby Baptist Church, on Sunday, June 10, 1894* (Auckland: Wright and Jaques, 1894), 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Evening Post*, 22 October 1930, Newspaper cutting, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland.



and day book, off our banking account and off our recreations. The Cross is crucial. The Cross is ethical. The Cross means redemption for social service.<sup>26</sup>

R.W. Dale was a key influence on Collins in his ministry years in England. The following quotation comes from a sermon given at Ponsonby in memoriam of Dale; it is quoted here at length because of its insight into the influence of Dale, Collins' commitment to social action and the way in which this is prompted by a deep commitment to holiness in the way of Christ.

The Gospel requires us to carry the law of Christ into our civil, our social, and our political relationship. 'Behave as citizens.' [Philippians 1.27]... There are men who make it their boast that they never register their vote, never sit on School Board or City Council, never champion any great public cause, never appear on a public platform.... And these men, who reckon themselves very eminent saints, instead of blushing for their laziness, lay the flattering unction to their souls, that it was of such as they are that the Lord Christ thought when He offered His intercessory prayer. But when our Lord prayed that His followers may be kept from the evil of the world, He intended that they should be in the world, in the thick of the fight, but be preserved from the world's spirit, the world's lust, the world's sin. His prayer was that they should learn to walk white in black places.... Dr. Dale... said this in days when men had not learned to talk so freely about 'the Civic Church;' he expounded from his pulpit the duty and responsibility of citizenship....<sup>27</sup>

Collins had a considerable personal involvement in the pursuit of social justice. One notable example of this is his involvement on the Auckland Conciliation Board. The Conciliation Boards were created in the 1890s as a means to implement the new Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (ICA) Act (1894). 'The arbitration

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<sup>26</sup> Archibald Henry Collins 'The Cross on the Gable' Newspaper cutting, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, c.1920s, n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Archibald Henry Collins, *A Good Citizen: A Sermon, Preached in the Ponsonby Baptist Church, on Sunday Evening, March 24, 1895, by Rev. A.H. Collins, In Memoriam of the late R.W. Dale, of Birmingham* (Christchurch: T.E. Fraser, 1895), 9.

system was absolutely crucial in organising both employers and workers’;<sup>28</sup> the ICA Act ushered in a new era of industrial relations.

Under the Act, any group of [five or more workers] could form a union and take a dispute to be dealt with under the ICA Act. Groups of employers could form equivalent associations. A dispute would first go before a Conciliation Board which would issue recommendations as a basis for a contract or ‘industrial agreement’ between the parties.... If not satisfied with the recommendation of a Conciliation Board either party could refer the dispute to the Arbitration Court for a binding judgment....<sup>29</sup>

McLean notes that ‘Reeves’ greatest achievement was the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration... Act, which transformed New Zealand’s industrial relations and trade unionism,<sup>30</sup> which was established in 1894, one year after Collins’ arrival in New Zealand. J. Martin notes that Reeves’ Department of Labour was ‘among the early pioneers of such institutions internationally, and took on functions that made it perhaps the most powerful and all-embracing government body concerned with the ‘labour problem’.<sup>31</sup>

Little is known about Collins’ involvement on the Conciliation Board; Board minutes are, unfortunately, not available. The Department of Labour was responsible for appointing Conciliation Boards,<sup>32</sup> and Collins’ influence was such that he was appointed Board Chairman for Auckland. The Auckland Conciliation Board was involved in at least three disputes in the 1890s (Bakers, Painters and Seamen), one of these going before the Court of Arbitration.<sup>33</sup> The *New Zealand Baptist* notes ‘[in] his labours on the Conciliation Board, requiring judgement and tact in a high degree, we believe Mr Collins to have gained the respect of the various parties to the Trade disputes.’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Martin, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Martin, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Gavin McLean, ‘God’s Own Country, 1878-1913,’ in *Frontier of Dreams: The Story of New Zealand*, ed. Bronwyn Dally and Gavin McLean, (Auckland: Hodder Moa, 2005), 199.

<sup>31</sup> Martin, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Martin, 11.

<sup>33</sup> ‘New Zealand Journal of the Department of Labour’ 1898, 3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, iii.

<sup>34</sup> NZB, January 1902, 11.

### Crucicentrism

In Christ Collins saw all the elements of true Christian living. At the acceptance of his call to Ponsonby it was written in the Church News column in the *New Zealand Baptist*, '[Collins] would preach a full Gospel and the brotherhood of man, in the cause of Him... who loved little children, who denounced oppression, emancipated the slave, and elevated womanhood to its true dignity.'<sup>35</sup>

Collins' conviction was that the crucifixion was the primary means of interpreting Christ, his example and mission. In the concluding months at his time in Ponsonby, Collins declared to the Baptist Conference,

'Back to Christ!' is the cry which in these modern days has often assailed our ears. Nor would we neglect the call, provided what is meant thereby does not end with the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount, but carries us to 'the place called Calvary,' where the bramble spikes ran red, and the Son of God 'put away sin, by the sacrifice of Himself.'<sup>36</sup>

Collins served at Ponsonby Baptist Church in a time of political and cultural change. He was an avid supporter of the Liberal Government and its reforms. Collins' theology and practice of ministry may be described as thoroughly Evangelical.

## Part II: Crisis and Social Concern

In this second part of the essay I will argue that Collins was overwhelmed by his adherence to the predominant values of growth and industry. Indeed, in his dedication to church and society, in his social concern and in his desire to fulfill the Liberal dream of consummation of the individual life, Collins was overworked, to the detriment of his health and ministry.

Although committed to social concern, Collins discerned that social action was not the predominant need in either his denomination or in New Zealand in the 1890s; of greater importance was the pursuit of personal faith and holiness. Collins was singularly focused in communicating this message to his denomination. This

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<sup>35</sup> NZB, August 1893, 118.

<sup>36</sup> NZB, December 1901, 179.

conclusion brings into question a number of assertions made by historians of Collins in his period of ministry at Ponsonby.

Collins appears to have suffered from what in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we now call 'burn-out'. The conclusion of Collins' ministry in Birmingham came about due to ill health. His Obituary in the *Evening Post* states, 'Owing to failing health... Mr Collins decided to go to Melbourne, but while on his way he received by cable a call to the Ponsonby Baptist Church.'<sup>37</sup> Collins also suffered from continuing ill health during his time at Ponsonby, sometimes having to rest for weeks at a time.<sup>38</sup>

The late nineteenth century saw a significant rise of formal associations – boards, councils and unions. Although Collins questioned the wisdom of so many boards and committees he was a keen participator and a victim of church and community 'machinery'. Collins decried the rise and predominance of such organizations, lamenting, 'Oh, the sick hurry of these busy days, with committees, discussions, and conventions, ever multiplying!'<sup>39</sup>

Collins had first-hand experience of how the rapid and demanding pace of life robbed people of joy and the presence of God. This was evident in both his own life and work and in the community and city in which he lived. Ponsonby looked over Auckland's ship yards and was itself the focus of much industrial and suburban development.

In our day, competition is fierce and cruel, the pace of life is fast, and the temptation is to throw the whole being into business. The din of the street, the roar and rattle of machinery, has drowned the still, small voice of God. Jaded, weary and disgusted, men run fussily about, sickened with life's excitement, yet seeking, and in vain, to find new pleasure.<sup>40</sup>

Collins believed that piety was compromised in such a busy routine, confessing his own ministry was hindered in this way, 'I have no right to speak to you, save the right that comes of a shamed and humbled heart... I would nevertheless press the question, Do we pray as we should?... Do we not need to be alone with God more than we

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<sup>37</sup> *Evening Post* 22 October 1930, newspaper cutting, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland.

<sup>38</sup> 'Ponsonby Baptist Church Minute Book and Church Roll 1892-1899' Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, n.p.

<sup>39</sup> NZB, January 1901, 3.

<sup>40</sup> NZB, January 1901, 3.

are?’<sup>41</sup> ‘Our best work bears evidence of hurry and haste which all too plainly indicates a lack of inward serenity and sublime confidence.’<sup>42</sup>

Collins took on a very demanding level of responsibility. He held prominent positions on many groups during the 1890s including: Ponsonby Baptist Choir (president) and Board (chairman), Conciliation Board (chairman), The Evangelical Christian Church Council (secretary), Mutual Improvement Society (president), Auckland Baptist Association (secretary), Baptist Union of New Zealand (secretary and president 1901) and served on the local school committee.

With his regular pastoral duties, together with his numerous responsibilities serving on a host of community boards, councils, committees and associations, and adding to these his history of ill health, we may conclude that a pace of life susceptible to burn-out was a weakness for Collins.

Collins was committed to the improvement of others. The Liberal dream was the fullest possible consummation – the fulfilment or perfection – of the individual life.<sup>43</sup> J. Coker observes that a commitment to self-improvement was a characteristic of nineteenth-century Baptists, stating that ‘[an] important force that contributed to the Baptists’ social conscience taking the form that it did was their commitment to the potential for human self-improvement.’<sup>44</sup> Collins was a Baptist and a Liberal supporter and advocated the ideal of self improvement in his life and ministry, giving much attention to the improvement of others. Collins sought the improvement of others in both spiritual and civil efforts. Individual perfection could thus be communicated in Christian/ spiritual terms. In a sermon delivered at Ponsonby Baptist he implored his listeners to ‘give your life to God. He only can make the best of you.... Let Him make the best of you.’<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the significance of Collins’ involvement on the Conciliation Board. This position demonstrates Collins’ social concern and was an excellent means for him to participate in the social development of his time. Collins arrived in New Zealand as the initiatives of the new Liberal government were

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<sup>41</sup> NZB, January 1901, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. December 1901, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Sinclair, 175.

<sup>44</sup> Joe L. Coker, ‘Social Conscience and Political Power among Nineteenth-Century English Baptists,’ *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1:1 (2005): 32.

<sup>45</sup> Collins, *A Hero in Babylon*, 10-11.

starting to take effect. The Conciliation Boards were created to implement the ICA Act, and given that Collins was 'chairman of the Conciliation Board for the northern industrial district for four years,'<sup>46</sup> this placed him at the forefront of a world-leading social development initiative, an initiative which was successfully and strategically targeting one of the greatest needs facing Western society, the labour problem.

Although Collins gave his personal time and effort to matters of social concern this does not emerge as the major focus for Collins in his years at Ponsonby Baptist. Of approximately 20 different sermons, lectures and articles published or referred to during the period 1893-1902 only three take up the theme of social concern. If Collins was such a devotee to social action, and so involved himself, why was he so quiet on this subject in his public addresses? Of Collins' later ministries we know that he was often outspoken on social matters. K. Manly observes that Collins was described as "the one avowed socialist in the Australian Baptist Ministry" and preached and wrote regularly advocating Christian Socialism.<sup>47</sup> Collins addressed the annual Baptist conference three times, in 1894, 1900 and 1901 (1901 as Union President). These three addresses, recorded in the *New Zealand Baptist*, are particularly noteworthy. None of these conference addresses covers the theme of social action. Given these prime opportunities to address and influence the leaders of the Baptist denomination why did Collins not turn to the theme of social concern?

We may conclude that Collins did not discern that social action was the greatest need in either his denomination or in New Zealand in the 1890s. The biggest concern facing both church and society was personal faith and holiness. This focus on individual piety was focused at church leaders ('Perhaps one reason why we do not enjoy more success in influencing others for good is, that we ourselves are not alone with the Master as we should be');<sup>48</sup> and also focused toward church mission ('The great concern of the Church is not with the 'masses,' it is with individual men.')

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<sup>46</sup> *Otago Daily Times* 24 October 1930, *New Zealand Obituaries* 16: 637.

<sup>47</sup> K.R. Manly, *From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity': A History of Australian Baptists* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 361.

<sup>48</sup> NZB, May 1894, 163.

<sup>49</sup> NZB, May 1894, 164.

This dedication to the need of personal piety is particularly evident in Collins' three conference addresses. Given the opportunity to address the leaders of the Baptist denomination Collins chose piety as his central theme every time. In 1894 he decried the 'liberty of thought' that 'is leading men perilously near to license'<sup>50</sup> and called his listeners to minister to the needs of the age with the words of Christ. He stated,

if our spiritual nature is not to be sacrificed at the shrine of worldly success; if we are to be saved from missing life's great mark, and losing its most glorious prize, we must cherish and cultivate the spirit of devotion. 'We must cultivate in the Church, and out of it, the power to be quiet – quiet thought, quiet feeling, quiet prayer, the rest of the soul in God.' We cannot give to others, unless we have something in ourselves to give. Our work will be weak and foolish, and lose its quickening influence, if we neglect our inner life.<sup>51</sup>

In 1900 he implored the conference to pursue a devotional life. This kind of life requires hard work like the runner training for a marathon.<sup>52</sup> He remarked,

Why have I spoken in this strain? I have spoken so under a deep and solemn conviction that here lies our greatest need. Some of you are teachers in the Sunday-school, and the question that often presses is this: How can we best serve the cause of the children? Does not the answer lie in the deepening and freshening of our own inner life?<sup>53</sup>

In 1901 as Union President he questioned the effectiveness of the churches endeavours stating, 'Are we not sensible of a dull ache at the heart, when we reckon up the net result of our labours... The services on which we spend so much thought and care seldom leave behind them a heritage of light and power.'<sup>54</sup> In this address he made a lengthy appeal to seek the Spirit of God and called the church to be devoted to prayer and to be in tune with God.

if... there be not the presence and energy of the Spirit of God, our Churches will be nothing better than social clubs... our

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<sup>50</sup> NZB, January 1895, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> NZB, January 1895, 3.

<sup>52</sup> NZB, January 1901, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> NZB, January 1901, 3.

<sup>54</sup> NZB, December 1901, 178-179.

pulpits lifeless echoes of truths that once had meaning, and our sermons, however faultless in doctrine and in diction, only as the flowers that decorate a corpse.<sup>55</sup>

Did Collins discern that personal piety was the ‘greatest need’ of the age by observing his own human limitations and struggles? The four quotes above could well attest to Collins’ own personal frustrations as he considered the net results of his own labours, his busy life leaving him to feel an innate lack of ‘inner life’.

One likely reason why Collins discerned piety to be a greater need than social action was the extent and significance of the Liberal Government’s reforms. It is reasonable to conclude that Collins’ Christian socialist values were being fulfilled in what was happening in the wider New Zealand context. Clifford was right in his observation: ‘He arrived early in the Liberal reign and must have rejoiced in its reforms.’<sup>56</sup> Collins’ convictions regarding social concern were being realised in his own life and by the nation’s leaders: he arrived in New Zealand with world-leading social reforms coming to fruition; and by taking a position of leadership in the outworking of these reforms on the Conciliation Board he was committing himself to a position of significant and practical social action.

If so, this brings into question the assertions of other historians. Four historians comment on Collins’ commitment to social concern during his period of ministry at Ponsonby Baptist. Davison, Clifford, Smith and Sutherland all use a single quote from Collins’ ministry at Parkside Baptist Church (c.1908-1921) to make assertions of Collins in the 1890s. This popular reference from a sermon titled ‘Capital and Labor’ is quoted here, followed by comment on its use by these historians.

False political economy has made distinction between capital, the instrument of production, and labor, the hand which controls the instrument. The distinction is destined one day to disappear. In the days that are to be capital will become the friendly co-worker, if not, indeed, the willing servant of labor’s hand and brain instead of being its hard task-master, to starve men’s bodies and degrade men’s souls. The time will come when the capitalist, as such, will cease out of the land. The skilled manager, the talented organiser will remain at the head of the industrial army; but the capitalist, who lives only on the fruits of other men’s toil, will be

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<sup>55</sup> NZB, December 1901, 179.

<sup>56</sup> Clifford, 109.



extinct as the dodo. Labor is the rent we owe for the right of living on the earth. Old Adam Smith got to the root of this matter when he said that 'the wages for labor are the fruits of labor.' St. Paul said the same thing better when he declared that he who would not work should not eat. At present the law is too often reversed and defied. They who work most have least to eat, and they who work not at all 'live wantonly on the earth' and 'speak loftily' about 'the improvidence of the working classes.'<sup>57</sup>

Davison observes that Collins 'remained forceful and clearcut in condemning any exploitation of the poor... and challenged his congregation.' To support this claim Davison quotes from a later ministry, from 'Capital and Labor' (an extract from the above quotation, but cited in 'Ponsonby Baptist Church' without date or reference) stating 'This sermon extract typifies his thinking.'<sup>58</sup>

Clifford affirms Collins' Christian socialism, asserting that Collins, in the 1890s, 'did not hesitate to lambast capitalism and exploitation from the pulpit.' To support this claim Clifford quotes from Davison's undated quotation of 'Capital and Labor', 'The time will come when the capitalist will cease out of the land....'<sup>59</sup>

Smith observes the watershed nature of the 1890s in New Zealand's political and social history, and asserts that '[a] strong Baptist voice in this period was that of the Rev A.H. Collins... A pungent preacher with an outspoken sympathy for the poor.'<sup>60</sup> To support this claim Smith quotes Collins from 1911, '[The Bible] is the true Radical's guide, God's everlasting witness against oppression, cruelty and idleness,' and from 'Capital and Labor': 'The time will come when the capitalist, as such, will cease out of the land....'<sup>61</sup> Again, these quotes fall outside of Collins' time at Ponsonby.

Finally, Sutherland discusses Free Church thinking in the late nineteenth century asserting that 'Free Church thinking might have led to a radical form of church, prepared to stand over and against both the state and the prevailing structures of society.' To support

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<sup>57</sup> Archibald Henry Collins, 'Capital and Labor: The Golden Rule: Sermon Preached at Parkside Baptist Church', Newspaper Cutting, c.1908-1921, Archive, Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, n.p.

<sup>58</sup> M. Davison, 'Ponsonby Baptist Church' (Auckland: Ayson Clifford Library, 1980), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Clifford, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, 'New Zealand Baptists and the 'Labour Question,' 26.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 27.

this claim Sutherland also cites Davison's undated quotation from 'Capital and Labor': 'Collins for instance looked for a time 'when the capitalist will cease out of the land.''<sup>62</sup> Sutherland asks the question, 'Why did... Free Church social radicalism... fail to flower in New Zealand?' He observes that

In 1893 Collins had just arrived from Britain... [Collins and others] found surprisingly little fertile ground for their radical visions and lost heart in their chances of propagating them among New Zealand Baptists.<sup>63</sup>

There are problems with these interpretations. Not least, they rely on Collins' later pronouncements. Smith himself makes this clear, 'Unfortunately the records we have for his preaching come largely from his Adelaide ministry rather than his time at Ponsonby.'<sup>64</sup> Arguments from silence are difficult and one could assume that Collins addressed the issue of social concern in his eight years at Ponsonby more than the three records we have available. It remains significant, however, that Collins had three opportunities to address the Baptist leaders of New Zealand at the annual conference, each are published in full in the *New Zealand Baptist*, thus reaching a wide Baptist audience in his day, and yet he did not turn to social concern as his theme. If Collins was looking for 'fertile ground' to cast his 'radical visions' these conference addresses would be just that opportunity. Collins, however, chose personal piety as his theme every time. One cannot conclude from this evidence that Collins 'lost heart' with New Zealand Baptists' commitment to social concern. Nor is it reasonable to conclude of Collins in the 1890s that he was a 'pungent preacher with an outspoken sympathy for the poor,' but rather, from the evidence available, Collins was a pungent preacher with a largely unspoken sympathy for the poor.

## Conclusion

A.H. Collins' 'Baptist voice' on social concern was not as strong as has been suggested during his period of ministry at Ponsonby. This aspect to his ministry grew later, in his pastorates in Australia. Rather, Collins discerned a greater need for the church and for New Zealand

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<sup>62</sup> Martin Sutherland, 'Free Church Ecclesiology and Public Policy in New Zealand 1890-1914,' *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1:1 (2005) 49.

<sup>63</sup> Sutherland, 'Free Church Ecclesiology', 50.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, 29.

society. In an environment in which New Zealand was leading the world in social reform – in which Collins was playing a leading and significant role – he perceived that the greatest need in the Church in New Zealand and in wider society was a pietistic commitment to personal faith and holiness.

**Phillip Larking**