

## **The N.Z. Baptist as an agent of Denominational Identity 1874-1960**

### **ABSTRACT**

The *New Zealand Baptist* is the oldest continuously running religious periodical in New Zealand. Its place in the history and development of denominational life is profound. This article traces the impact and editorial policies of the newspaper from its beginnings in a scattered, sparsely populated colony to its role in an increasingly confident Baptist community following the second world war. In this time it established itself as a key arbiter of Baptist identity. By the end of the period this was changing, with the New Zealand Baptist becoming more a mirror to the denomination than a window into its world.

When the New Zealand Baptist Union was formed in 1882 it consisted of a mere 25 churches. Not only was the group small but it was scattered across a barely developing colony. Only seven churches exceeded 100 members and these were in five different towns. Roads were poor and the rail network was rudimentary. Most Baptists had in common their English heritage and most of their ministers had trained in English colleges. But New Zealand was not England. It was a new religious, economic and social environment which would require fresh approaches to building denominational identity and unity. This was one of the fledgling Union's ambitions. A key element in that mission was the decision to take responsibility for an existing Baptist paper.

This study examines the ways in which the *N.Z. Baptist* became a vehicle for Baptist identity. It was a long time before it truly began to serve this function. Successive editors took different approaches. It was not until the long (1915-1948) tenure of J.J. North that an overt, hard driving, partisan tone sealed New Zealand Baptists' view of themselves. At the same time, the paper and its editors reflected back what congregations were already thinking on a range of questions. The history of the periodical thus provides a unique record of the development of the denomination. By the middle of the 1950s

Baptists had a strong sense of themselves, much less defensive in nature than in earlier decades.

The present study concludes at the end 1950s. For an examination of the function of the *N.Z. Baptist* this may seem an arbitrary terminus. It was not the conclusion of an editor's tenure (N.R. Wood continued for six more years) neither was there a stark change in style, emphasis or frequency of publication. Yet, beyond mere questions of space, there are reasons for such a division which suggest the subsequent period requires separate treatment. The 1950s was a confident time for Baptists, epitomized by their enthusiastic involvement in the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade, rated a stunning success. It was indeed the decade of greatest growth in Baptist adherence and membership. The going would not be so easy thereafter. The beginnings of charismatic stirrings would have a marked impact on the internal shape of the denomination. Moreover, New Zealand itself began a major transition in the 1960s. In part this had to do with the very issues of identity studied here. Television arrived and the world became bigger, less British. In 1956 the country had little hesitation in joining someone else's conflict, supporting Britain in Malaya. A decade later the issues were not so clear. New Zealand Baptist discourse on the Vietnam war has recently been shown to reflect an ambivalence not found over earlier conflicts.<sup>1</sup> Other factors - ecclesiological, sociological and theological - would play their part in constructing a story of the later twentieth century very different from that which may be identified in the period studied here.

The *New Zealand Baptist* began as a regional effort, designed to support the work of the Canterbury Baptist Association, which had been formed in 1874. This group immediately appointed an evangelist to further what it took to be its principal purpose. Its second initiative was to publish a magazine which, in its various names over the next years would symbolize not only the motivations of the founders but also a gradual shift in focus.

The first issue of the *Canterbury Evangelist* appeared in August 1876. The editor (Robert Morton, pastor at the Hereford Street church in Christchurch) eschewed sectarian bias.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies: New Zealand Baptist Public Discourse on the Vietnam War', *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1/1 (October 2005) 53-70.

Though issuing from a Baptist source, we do not wish to incur the idea that it will be a strictly denominational magazine....

It is the intention of the promoters of the Magazine to make it of some utility amongst all evangelical denominations, meeting the wants of both saint and sinner. We do not by any means propose to represent the Baptist denomination as a whole, and therefore we are not responsible for any outside the Association, whilst, at the same time, we will gladly work with all who will work with us.<sup>2</sup>

This apparent openness reflected the 'loose' Baptist ethos of key Canterbury leaders. Individuals like J.W. Sawle and William Pole may have been convinced Baptists but evangelical fervour was more significant to them than building a denomination.<sup>3</sup> A change in the tone began, however, almost immediately. The second issue (November 1876) opened with the first of a two-part apology by J. Upton Davis on 'Believer's Baptism' which concluded unequivocally that 'the proper subjects [for baptism] can neither be infants nor unbelievers.'<sup>4</sup> The magazine soon began a process by which it became a principal means of establishing identity amongst scattered Baptist groups and individuals. With the May 1877 issue the name underwent the first of series of changes, to *The Canterbury Baptist*. In explanation, the editorial talked of preserving truth 'sadly neglected by other denominations'.<sup>5</sup> This was the voice of a new editor. Charles Dallaston (1852-1934) was now at the helm. Dallaston had just arrived as pastor of the Hereford Street Church, the only large congregation in the province. A young man, trained at Spurgeon's Pastors' College, he would soon show himself to prefer more classically Baptist approaches than those of earlier Canterbury leaders. The magazine henceforth increasingly displayed this 'tight' approach. This would be a Baptist magazine first, and it would increase its role by moving beyond its immediate region. An August 1878 editorial made 'no apology, either for declaring ourselves denominationalists,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Canterbury Evangelist* (August 1876): 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller treatment of the nature of Baptist life in Canterbury see Martin Sutherland 'Baptist Expansion in Colonial New Zealand', *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* 9 (October 2004): 3-23.

<sup>4</sup> J. Upton Davis 'Believers' Baptism', *The Canterbury Evangelist*, November 1876, 25-28 (see also February 1877, 49-51). Davis was Minister at the Dunedin Church and would chair the first Union Conference in 1880.

<sup>5</sup> *The Canterbury Baptist* (May 1877), 1.

or for introducing the subject in our *Magazine*.<sup>6</sup> In January 1880 'Canterbury' was dropped from the title and the major feature in the renamed journal was an 1876 sermon by Rev. A.W. Webb (featured elsewhere in this issue of *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*) which argued that Baptist denominational existence was 'a necessity'.<sup>7</sup> By July the title had reached its final state: *The New Zealand Baptist*. In September 1880 another new editor, William Spencer, was secretary to the conference which resolved to form a colony-wide Union.

The magazine came under the control of the Union in 1883. Charles Bright, one of a number of ministers who had careers in both Australia and New Zealand, served as editor for two years, followed by Alfred North (1884-1887) and Lewis Shackleford (1887-1889). With such a run of short term editors, it is not surprising that no consistent character attached itself to the publication. North, a keen Union supporter, used his editorial control to push for greater centralization and particularly for the formation of a N.Z. Baptist Missionary Society. He would play a significant role in both denominational and mission affairs until his death in 1924. Shackleford was, like North a graduate of Rawdon College. He was also a controversialist who led the charge against the perceived heresies of Rev. Charles Brown, who was eventually censured by the Baptist Union for his views on conditional immortality.<sup>8</sup>

These editors and their successors would struggle to build a sustainable subscriber base. As its initial focus had been local, the *NZ Baptist* had a lot of work to do to achieve a colony-wide readership. Limited distribution meant limited capacity to be an agent for building corporate identity. A desire to increase subscriptions, to get a copy in every Baptist household, was regularly expressed but a major sticking point seems to have been the cost. Low print runs meant high unit cost, creating consumer resistance. In December 1885, a correspondent from Thames wrote of frustration at the price of 4d per copy.

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<sup>6</sup> [Charles Dallaston] 'Denominationalism', *The Canterbury Baptist*, August 1878, 56-59, 56.

<sup>7</sup> A. W. Webb, 'The Baptists: Their Denominational Existence a Necessity', *The Baptist*, January 1880, 3-12.

<sup>8</sup> See M. Sutherland 'Downgrade Down Under: Conflict and Cohesion among New Zealand Baptists' *Baptist Quarterly* XXXVII No. 7 (July 1998), 351-363. Ironically, Shackleford himself had to resign a pastorate in Norwood, Adelaide, after attacking Spurgeon's theology. See

I think it is a *great mistake* not to have reduced the price long before this. I believe the paper would soon double its circulation and you would reach those who won't buy now, for the simple reason that you can get more for your money....Other papers of similar size are twopence and threepence, and why should not the BAPTIST be published at such a price, so that *every family* belonging to our churches would buy it?<sup>9</sup>

The price did not come down – and the circulation did not go up. This problem was noted by the supporters of the N.Z. Baptist Missionary Society which had been formed in 1885. They were in no doubt that widespread support for the new Society was crucial and that the *NZ Baptist* was at that point an inadequate vehicle for promoting this support. The solution was to commence a dedicated newsletter, the first number of which appeared in June 1886. Comprising of (generally) four pages of news from the pages of the *NZ Baptist* itself, *The Missionary Messenger* made no pretence about its *raison d'être*: to reach Society subscribers and to raise funds. Tellingly, it was distributed free. The hope was that it might (in the way that the *NZ Baptist* did not) 'enter every Baptist home in the land, and to awaken in every Baptist heart a response to our appeal for generous aid.'<sup>10</sup>

The *NZ Baptist* meanwhile continued to pursue its mission, however falteringly. From the outset the magazine included 'News of the Churches' - reports from individual congregations. These would become a feature of the publication. Though for many years only one page of sixteen was given to such accounts, their significance cannot be overestimated. In these are the names and activities of ordinary Baptists who otherwise would not be noticed and who certainly would have been unlikely ever to have left a published account of their lives. It is, moreover, in these short notices that the experience of 'being Baptist' in New Zealand is truly encountered. Social gatherings, controversies, deaths, births, baptisms, visiting speakers, these small moments add up to a rounded vision of Baptist life. News of them also, crucially, encouraged groups to identify with congregations in other parts of the colony.

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<sup>9</sup> M. Whitehead 'The Price of 'The Baptist': To the Editor', *NZB* (January 1886) 10 (emphasis original).

<sup>10</sup> *The Missionary Messenger* (June 1886): 1

In May 1889 Lewis Shackleford left for Australia. His replacement was Arthur Dewdney. Dewdney had trained at Spurgeon's Pastors' College. Like his predecessor he was not averse to controversy. In an early editorial (critical of F.W. Walker, a Baptist minister at Nelson who had 'seceded to the Anglican Church') he protested 'surely truth and principle are of more value than ease and popularity.'<sup>11</sup> Dewdney was quite prepared to use the pages of the *NZ Baptist* for Christian activism, though his would be the activism of individual piety, typical of English Baptists at the end of the nineteenth century.

The race if not to uplifted *en masse* by any social schemes, however well devised and carefully guarded.

The new mission is the old: the old mission is the new. 'Into all the world and preach the gospel.' The regeneration of the individual man by the power of the Holy Spirit through the grace of God and the love of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

In these years the *NZ Baptist* typically consisted of 16 pages of foolscap. It carried advertisements, largely from Baptist businesses, and much of its content was reprinted material from overseas, especially English sources. The Union Annual Report for 1888 noted with satisfaction that the paper was showing a small surplus of income over expenditure.<sup>13</sup> By 1890 however the publication was in slight deficit and it was suggested that 'another 60 subscribers would enable the paper to be published without loss.'<sup>14</sup> A year later, a proposal that the paper move to weekly publication was seriously considered. Ultimately no change was deemed feasible.<sup>15</sup> By now it was increasingly acknowledged that the publication 'constitutes a bond of union between the widely scattered churches' and in 1893 the Union was prepared to subsidise the paper by 10 pounds.<sup>16</sup> In the Annual Report of 1896 it was noted with some satisfaction that 'the *Baptist* is now, as far as we can learn, the oldest religious periodical in the Colony.'<sup>17</sup> In late 1897 it was signaled that new procedures and layout would be adopted to speed publication and appeal to a wider

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<sup>11</sup> *NZB* (August 1889), 120.

<sup>12</sup> *NZB* (February 1892) 17. See also Dewdney's comment on 'Christians and Social Reform', *NZB* (November 1893), 168-9.

<sup>13</sup> Supplement to the *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1889), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *NZB* (December 1890), 183.

<sup>15</sup> *NZB* (December 1891), 183. See also *NZB* (December 1892), 184.

<sup>16</sup> Supplement to the *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1892) 4; (January 1894), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Supplement to the *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1897), 5.

range of Baptists, particularly the young. However, little, if any, change to the format resulted.

In June 1889 Dewdney, on taking up a new ministry at Thames, concluded his ten years as editor of the *NZ Baptist*. Reflecting on his contribution he concluded

this much may be said: that our churches know more about each other, and are more deeply interested in each other's welfare than before, while the bonds that unite us have been drawn closer, and we are beginning, at any rate, to be aroused to the wider interests of our denominational life.<sup>18</sup>

Dewdney was succeeded by a very different personality. Frank W. Boreham was already well on his way to international recognition as a Christian writer. His most successful work appeared outside the pages of the *NZ Baptist*. However, a lighter tone entered the paper during his seven-year term. Editorial pages began to be appear with headlines such as 'Scribblings by the Seaside' and 'The Moral Significance of Cricket' and a regular feature of 'Bits for Preachers and Teachers' featured the often quaint anecdotes for which Boreham would be famous.<sup>19</sup>

In at least one case, Boreham's ironic style led to more serious debate than he might have anticipated. In the early years of the new century, denominational amalgamation on a number of levels was much debated. In May 1901 Boreham noted that the religious weekly *The Outlook*, which already represented both Presbyterians and Congregationalists, had recently added a Methodist connection. 'We congratulate our excellent contemporary upon its marvelous performance; but we counsel it, with friendly, and perhaps nervous, entreaty, not to try to swallow anything else.' Sparring further with his competing editor, Boreham suggested, a month later that, as Methodists now had only to subscribe to one periodical, they might feel compelled to expend the saved subscription on a monthly copy of the *NZ Baptist*.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps to Boreham's surprise, Harold Peters, a former business manager of the *N.Z. Baptist*, suggested that a merger of the papers was in fact worth considering. His central argument was one of scale, or the lack of it.

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<sup>18</sup> NZB (June 1899), 88.

<sup>19</sup> NZB (March 1901), 33; (September 1901), 129.

<sup>20</sup> NZB (May 1901), 73; (June 1901), 89. On the *Outlook* see E.W. Hames *Out of the Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era 1840-1913* (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society, 1972), 134-5.

That we should lose some present advantages is certain. The question is whether we should not gain others of more value. One outstanding feature of the suggested arrangement that must commend itself is that our people would have a weekly instead of a monthly paper. It would be far better for us to have a journal of some thirty pages of reading come into our homes once a week than one of sixteen pages once a month.<sup>21</sup>

Over the next three issues the question was debated, with the correspondence overwhelmingly against Peters' proposal. Nevertheless a concern that did emerge in a number of letters concerned the price of the *NZ Baptist*, which, at 4s. 6d. per annum, posted (unchanged for two decades), was still seen to be a brake on subscription growth.<sup>22</sup>

The expansion of *The Outlook* and the debate engendered by Peters caused a fresh look at the impact of the *NZ Baptist*. The annual report of the paper pointed out that the distribution had been slowly rising but that nonetheless only 630 copies were paid for each month. 'Does this not seem a very small number, when it is considered that there are 16,035 Baptists in the Colony, according to the latest census?'<sup>23</sup> The Conference agreed and a committee was set up, charged with identifying ways of increasing the paying readership. A year later the situation had worsened. Fully a third of subscriptions were in arrears and the printer was owed the substantial sum of 55 pounds. The enterprise was technically insolvent, as liabilities exceeded assets. The printer (T.E. Fraser of Christchurch) had in effect been carrying the paper for several years. Something had to be done and a series of bold steps were taken immediately. A tinted cover to carry advertisements was added and an advertising manager appointed. Most significantly the price was reduced to 2s. 6d. per annum, in the conviction that this would result in a significant lift in subscriptions.<sup>24</sup> The risk met with reward. By November 1905 subscriptions had doubled and in 1906 the size was increased to twenty pages.<sup>25</sup>

Boreham, however, was by then about to move on. In June 1906 he departed to take up a new ministry in Hobart. R.S. Gray of

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<sup>21</sup> *NZB* (August 1901), 118.

<sup>22</sup> *NZB* (September 1901), 131-32; (October 1901), 148-49; (November 1901), 164.

<sup>23</sup> Supplement to the *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1902), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Supplement to the *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1903), 7, 11, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *NZB* (November 1905) 171-2.



Christchurch took over as interim editor until, at the November Conference, H.H. Driver was appointed to the permanent role.

Driver, like Boreham, had studied at Pastors' College. He was, however, a very different personality, with a much less lively style. His own preaching ministry had been cut short by problems with his throat and he had begun a new career as a bookseller. He was thus a literate, well read figure, but he lacked Boreham's verve and spark. It is hard to argue with Ayson Clifford's assessment that 'his attempts at humour were seldom successful.'<sup>26</sup> Driver claimed 'no feigned humility' in taking up the post 'with no little self-distrust and anxiety'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, he did manage and produce his paper efficiently. It continued to achieve its aim of adding to the cohesion of a still scattered Baptist community and better technology allowed the increasing use of photographs and other illustrations.

Like Dewdney, like Boreham, Driver was a conservative. He was critical of the unions in the Shipping strike of 1913.<sup>28</sup> In September 1914 (the first issue which responded to the outbreak of World War One) the editorial material unequivocally took the part of the British Empire. 'To Arms!' was Driver's first sub-heading and the willing response of potential combatants across the empire was celebrated. 'This spontaneous outburst of patriotism is of priceless worth....While Britain commands such universal and fervid patriotism her supremacy and perpetuity are assured.'<sup>29</sup> But running a monthly newspaper under wartime conditions was never going to be easy and the pressure seems to have told on Driver. He chose to retire from the editorship in 1915. A popular figure, he was given a warm and generous send-off at the 1915 conference.<sup>30</sup> His departure, however, had created a big problem for the denominational leadership. Finding a suitable replacement was in one sense easy - there was an outstanding potential candidate - but would he want the job?

J.J. North was by 1915, already the leading figure in the denomination. He was minister of the Oxford Terrace Church in Christchurch, one of the 'big four' central city churches along with Wellington (which North had already served as Pastor) the Auckland

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<sup>26</sup> A Clifford, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of The Baptist Union of N.Z.* Vol 2., 1882-1914. (Wellington: Baptist Union of NZ) 1982, 95.

<sup>27</sup> NZB (November 1906), 21.

<sup>28</sup> NZB (December 1913), 225-6.

<sup>29</sup> NZB (September 1914), 171-173.

<sup>30</sup> NZB (November 1915), 209-10.

Tabernacle and Hanover St in Dunedin. He had served on every major body of the Union and Missionary Society, had been a regular contributor to the *NZ Baptist* for twenty years and, never shy of controversy, was building a reputation as a public figure. In many ways a new task was the last thing he needed. 'I have undertaken, beginning with the next issue, the Editorship of the paper. I have added this to my many pressing engagements at the urgent request of the Executive.' Typically, however, he immediately announced measures to increase the number of contributions, including two book prizes per month for the best writing.<sup>31</sup>

Underlying these measures was the usual anxiety to generate an increase in subscriptions. Progress was not spectacular on this front. In 1917 the figure was 1800, a slight lift, but by 1920 it had dropped back to 1700. The business manager, W.H. Hinton, noted in frustration that, although prizes had been offered for the boy and girl who brought in the greatest number of new subscribers, only one child had even entered the competition!<sup>32</sup> The publication was hamstrung by production difficulties. The war had led to a shortage of paper. Expected supplies did not always turn up.<sup>33</sup> This seems to have continued in the period after the war. In December 1920, the printers were changed and the format was altered from foolscap to the smaller quarto. At the same time pages were reduced from sixteen to just twelve. This was, however, just a temporary setback. As times improved so did the size of the newspaper. By 1923 issues were 20 pages long; 26 by the end of 1924; 28 by 1929 and 36 in 1930, before the economic depression of the 1930s forced a reduction back to 32. By now circulation had nudged above 2000, where it would plateau for a decade before gradually rising again during the 1940s.

In part this seems to have been the result of North's energetic editorship. He carried the editorial duties largely alone until October 1922, when, in anticipation of a year's travel, he stepped down temporarily from the post. North was succeeded for the year by W.S. Rollings who handled the 'editorial' material. He was assisted by Samuel Morris, who, in the new role of Sub-Editor, received with the 'news' items, such as reports from camps, meetings and churches. North picked up the reins again from Rollings in November 1923 but Morris continued in the Sub-Editing role until his death in October 1925. L.B.J. Smith filled in until April 1926. He was followed by Eric

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<sup>31</sup> NZB (November 1915), 210.

<sup>32</sup> *Annual Report of the N.Z. Baptist Union, 1920*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Annual Report of the N.Z. Baptist Union, 1917*, 32-33.

Evans (1926-28), Stanley Jenkin (1928-32), H.R. Turner (1933—41), W.J. Gibbs for five months in 1941, then J.T. Crozier who, in November 1941, began a near thirty-year stint. All these men were based in Dunedin, where the *NZ Baptist* was printed from December 1921. With North first in Christchurch and then in Auckland, the major part of seeing the paper through production lay with the Sub-Editor.

The division in the editorship soon proved essential. In 1926 North began as founding Principal of the new Baptist College. For the next two decades he thus filled two crucial opinion-forming roles in the denomination.

Though a prodigious writer and commentator, North was no social radical. The *NZ Baptist* did not suddenly become an anti-war or pro-labour publication on his appointment. Yet in a manner unimaginable from Driver, North would think outside the square, often tackling the nuances of issues with gusto. An example is his position on conscientious objection. In 1916, though eschewing the very notion of neutrality, he nonetheless avowed

we are winning this war. We can win it without surrendering the precious gains of the past....Conscientious objectors can be given tasks more useful to the Nation than martyrdom. They can be retained at peaceful, yet essential tasks, and can be regarded as the prophets of the golden year which we earnestly hope is 'at the door'.<sup>34</sup>

When the war ended he warned against vindictive demands on Germany.

We confess to great anxiety as to the terms that shall be imposed on the fallen Fatherland. The problems of victory are not going to be easy of solution. We know perfectly well that it is only too possible to impose such a peace as shall be an immediate incentive to the next war....We want to see peace terms that contain no seed of future wars.<sup>35</sup>

North would be editor for over thirty years. Although he would regularly comment on public affairs, it was vigorous engagement with religious and denominational controversy which marked his editorship. He was a harsh critic of Roman Catholicism and Plymouth Brethrenism alike, finding in both a conscience-limiting

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<sup>34</sup> *NZB* (August 1916), 150-52.

<sup>35</sup> *NZB* (December 1918), 177-8.

authoritarianism which he saw as inimical to Baptist principles. Increasingly the *NZ Baptist* became a vehicle for debate and argument in which correspondents would at times take umbrage at North's positions and would receive a riposte in similar tone.

At times this pugnacious approach could land North in hot water. In the early 1930s tensions arose in the Baptist church in Napier, a city on the east coast of the North Island. The economic impact of the 1931 earthquake raised the question as to whether the congregation could any longer sustain its minister. Rev. O. MacHattie, however, who had served in a number of short pastorates, was not about to concede to circumstances. Machattie launched an aggressive campaign to ensure his ministry was retained. After receiving a number of appeals for intervention the Union took the then unprecedented step of constituting a Commission of Enquiry. Machattie's name was eventually removed from the official list, though by questionable procedure.

Machattie was not going to bend meekly to such pressure. In July 1932 he drafted 24 notices of motion about the controversy for the consideration of the Annual Assembly, set for October that year. These were sent to every church in the country. In 1934 he filed for a Writ of Mandamus ordering his restoration to the ministerial list. After a hearing in which the judge indicated sympathy with Machattie's position, the Union was forced into a settlement in December 1934. Machattie was returned to the official list and copies of the 1932 Commission's report were to be destroyed.<sup>36</sup> By this the Union hoped to 'bury the whole matter'. However to the frustration of the Union and its Solicitors the matter was very nearly blown open again by the editorializing of J.J. North. It has been expected that the terms of the settlement would be printed without comment in the *N.Z. Baptist*. North, however, was not one for diplomatic silence. He added a lengthy preface to the official statement and thereby provoked further threats from Machattie. These, fortunately for the Union (and North), were not pursued.<sup>37</sup>

A decade later North was forced into court. In 1942 the Baptist Union was taking its first practical steps in ecumenical

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<sup>36</sup> Apparently at least one Executive member did not adhere to this part of the agreement, as a copy of the Commission's findings is in the files of correspondence associated with the Machattie case - NZBRHS N.2/14.

<sup>37</sup> These, fortunately for the Union, were not pursued. See *N.Z. Baptist* February 1935 and correspondence from the same month in NZBRHS N.2/14.

cooperation. As a member of the newly formed National Council of Churches (N.C.C.) Baptists joined the 'Campaign for Christian Order'. This was an ambitious venture aimed at Christian social reconstruction.<sup>38</sup> The name, it seems, was not covered by copyright. In the December *N.Z. Baptist*, North excoriated a group that had appropriated the name for very different ends.

In times like these prophets of the impudent type pop up....A brazen Auckland group, seizing piratically on the term 'Campaign for Christian Order,' advertised in the 'Herald' that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming to take up his kingdom on 17 July 1944,' – a little less than two years from now. They have offices in Exchange Lane and invite dupes to call or write to them. We say 'dupes' advisedly....What are all such dates but defiance of our Lord's word?<sup>39</sup>

The strength of this denunciation was not unusual from North. However, the group concerned took severe umbrage and sued the Baptist Union for libel. The case was heard in May 1943 and was a public curiosity, not least for the unusual nature of the evidence for the plaintiffs, who represented themselves. In the midst of war news the case achieved some notoriety, with daily papers reporting the details of the 'strange libel action'. The action failed. For the Baptist Union this victory was crucial and not merely because of the 500 pounds damages sought. None of the other denominations in the N.C.C. felt the need to criticize the group in the public manner that North had.<sup>40</sup> Baptists, with a vigorous anti-modernist wing, were perhaps the most exposed to bizarre theological schemas.<sup>41</sup> For

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<sup>38</sup> On the campaign see A.K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), 121.

<sup>39</sup> *N.Z. Baptist* (December 1942): 321.

<sup>40</sup> The Associated Churches of Christ took the next most public action but this consisted merely of reprinting North's condemnation in its publication of February 1943. From the official campaign, Rev. J.D. Smith approached the group in person.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, the excesses of 'Brethrenism' had been of concern on the edge of Baptist life since early days in the colony. J.J. North was particularly suspicious of Plymouth Brethren (see e.g. *N.Z. Baptist* (December 1942): 322). For the impact of the Brethren on Baptist life in Nelson, Canterbury and Wellington see P. Tonson *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.*, Vol. 1 (Wellington: NZBRHS, 1982), 34-5, 47, 88; and G.H. Scholefield, (ed.), *The Richmond Atkinson Papers*, Vol. 2 (Wellington: Govt. Print, 1960), 31. See also Martin Sutherland, 'Cohesion and Conflict

North, the need to dissociate from such 'impudent prophets' was paramount. Baptists were not to be regarded as on the 'fringe', lunatic or otherwise. They had gained a place at the main table and they wanted to remain there. Reviewing the outcome of the case in the July 1943 *N.Z. Baptist*, North noted with satisfaction that 'the general view, voiced by Archbishop Averill, was that the N.Z.B. had done a notable service to Church and State. For that we are very glad. We want to be useful.'<sup>42</sup>

The primary function of the newspaper, however, remained the building of cohesion within the denomination. Reports from churches and from missionaries continued as a principal feature of each issue. To this building and maintenance of identity North made a profound contribution. His commitment to a strong Baptist stance is evidenced in the evolution of the mastheads used during his editorship. In their position at the top of the first page of each issue they sent a powerful party signal. Where, under Driver, it was merely noted that the periodical was 'Published under the Auspices of the New Zealand Baptist Union' under North this was changed to a description of the paper as 'The Organ of the Baptist Union'. North went much further, however, than this closer association with the organisation. He introduced a doctrinal declaration which itself underwent a series of telling changes, each sharpening and strengthening the sectarian points of difference.

The first of these statements first appeared in North's fourth issue, March 1916, and read as follows:

The Baptist Church, which has an enrolled membership of upwards of 7,000,000 holds the Evangelical Faith. It believes that Infant Baptism is unscriptural and an impediment to the Gospel. It teaches that Baptism is 'the good confession' which follows Faith.

In 1923 North was overseas for some months. A highlight of his trip was his attendance at the July Baptist World Alliance Congress in Stockholm, Sweden, where he chaired a session. This appears to have been a very significant experience. In the first issue he edited on his return (December 1923) the masthead statement was shifted up a gear.

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in 1880s Cambridge,' *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research*, Vol. 4 (October 1999): 3-21.

<sup>42</sup> *N.Z. Baptist* (July 1943): 150.

Churches which have no distinctive message have no right to exist. The Baptist Church separates from other churches on matters of the first moment. There are to-day 9,000,000 enrolled members in Baptist Churches in 30 different countries, and there is a total community of 20,000,000. They all say this one thing – salvation is by faith in Christ alone. No sacrament can save. Baptism is the confession of faith when faith is reached. Infant baptism has no place in the Gospel of Christ.

A month later, North was more pointed still.

SETTLE WHAT BAPTISM IS AND YOU SETTLE MOST  
OF THE QUESTIONS VEXING CHRISTENDOM

Baptism is inseparably connected in the Testament with conversion and the second birth. What is the connection? Two explanations are offered. The Catholic, which declares that Baptism causes second birth; and the Baptist, which declares that Baptism proclaims it. No other theory has any connection with Scripture. The Catholic theory makes Salvation depend upon a ceremony and so is not ethical. The reflection it makes on the character of God is unbearable. The Baptist theory makes Baptism the most radiant thing in the world. It is the first act of a new convert.

This was the final form of the masthead that North would use for the next twenty years. It was not until January 1944 that it ceased to appear. By then, North's editorship was approaching its end. More importantly, the denominational leadership was moving in a new, ecumenical direction which made such provocative sectarian positions unattractive.

North retired from the editorship in failing health in 1948. The last few of the issues nominally under his care were in fact put together by J.T. Crozier. N.R. Wood became the next editor. Wood had trained as an early student of North at the Baptist College. He declared himself determined to carry forward the Baptist witness of the newspaper.

To the Church, in its various branches, the people called Baptists bear their witness to the true nature of the Church of Christ, to the competency of the individual soul in all matters of religion and to the true nature of baptism. The fact that the barriers separating the churches are being broken down does

not make any less urgent the obligation upon Baptists to bear their testimony.<sup>43</sup>

For all this, Wood's would be a softer sectarianism than North's had been. In keeping with the spirit of post-war New Zealand, the tone was organizational and institutional, with major denominational initiatives often the natural focus of the content. Finances were difficult. In 1951-2 the issue size was reduced to 24 pages and the subscription rate increased from 6s to 7s 6d. The trend to make more of the covers (begun in 1944) continued, with large images on the front displacing advertising, which was soon eliminated from the body of the paper altogether, reducing available space to just three pages of the cover. Subscriptions hovered around 3300, never threatening the hoped-for 4000 which was the focus of a familiar sounding campaign to get "The Baptist" in every Baptist home'.

Yet there were other signs. The reports from churches grew in profile, at times taking up 40% of each number. The financial responsibility began a shift towards the denomination and away from subscription. By 1955 a substantial annual subsidy was embedded in the accounts. The 1950s was a decade of confidence and expansion for New Zealand Baptists and the paper reflected that mood. Wood had been an activist and self-identified moderate pacifist in earlier years. His stance seems to have shifted by the time he became editor.

After the first World War the Church rediscovered the social gospel. It was an attempt to help a bewildered society find a new foundation. Pacifism and socialism appeared to many as certain doors into the Kingdom of God. The events of the fourth decade have shattered these rosy dreams. The challenge to religion is now largely from the economic angle. The souls of men are being drugged by social security. Their outlook may not altogether unfairly be described as that of 'beer and bread; races and sex.'<sup>44</sup>

A search of the pages of the first seven years of Wood's editorship reveals no significant editorial reflection on the Korean conflict or on pacifism. On the other hand there was much which signaled loyalty - that is: national loyalty. Queen Elizabeth II featured on three covers in less than two years. In April 1955 the cover was given over to the ship which would take the New Zealand delegates to the B.W.A. Congress in London. Three months later the British

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<sup>43</sup> NZB (February 1949): 29.

<sup>44</sup> NZB (January 1950): 2.



Houses of Parliament were shown with the by-line 'The Heart of Empire: Home of the Baptist Congress'.<sup>45</sup>

The magazine thus continued through its ninth decade as a key element in Baptist identity. An important shift had, however, begun. Under North's early editorship, its messages vigorously attempted to build, shape and strengthen Baptists' view of themselves. The impression one gets of the magazine in the 1950s is more that it reflected, rather than drove its community. This decade saw the largest percentage growth (45%) of Baptist members and an even bigger increase in the take-up of the *NZ Baptist* (66%).<sup>46</sup> There is a likely link between these factors. The newly confident denomination was more comfortable with its place in New Zealand church life. It had less need for a paper which aggressively staked out new ground. Rather, what it wanted was to see its image in the pages of a family album. By the end of the 1950s that was the principal role of the *NZ Baptist*. Rapid changes in Baptist life over subsequent decades would call that cosy function into question.

## Conclusion

The very survival of the *N.Z. Baptist* is a testimony to its importance in the story of the denomination in New Zealand. Larger bodies were unable to maintain continuous publication of their periodical. Whatever the reasons for the demise of other titles (some of them positive, such as attempts at unity in the joint publication of the *Outlook*), for thinly spread Baptists the newspaper enabled communication and the gradual shaping of identity. In such a small group, the role of individuals is often crucial. This is certainly evident in the editorship of the *N.Z. Baptist*. J.J. North's strong advocacy of Baptist principles contributed to the emergence of a confident post-WWII denomination. Ironically, North may have overdone it. With confidence came greater introspection, a fascination with itself, also reflected in the 'family magazine', which arguably made New Zealand Baptists ill-prepared to face the challenges of the radical sixties.

## Martin Sutherland

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<sup>45</sup> See the covers of the *NZB* March 1952; June 1953; January 1954; April 1955; July 1955.

<sup>46</sup> Figures taken from the Baptist Union *Annual Reports*.