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Heads in the Sand: New Zealand Baptists and the Tour Debate

ABSTRACT

This essay traces the contribution of Baptists to the public debate in New Zealand regarding rugby tours to and from South Africa. First, it outlines 'official' Baptist discourse: statements by the Baptist Public Questions Committee (PQC) and formal resolutions by the annual Baptist Assembly. These will be compared briefly with statements by the New Zealand Presbyterian Church to provide a sense of the trajectory of Baptist discourse at this level.[1] The second part of the paper examines the 'unofficial' discourse carried by editorials, articles and letters in the denominational magazine, the *New Zealand Baptist*, to identify why Baptists in New Zealand took the course that they did.[2]

In February 1985 a frustrated correspondent wrote to the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* complaining that the annual Assembly had once again sidestepped the issue of apartheid:

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[1] No attempt is made to draw significant conclusions about the Presbyterian Church. That church's discourse on the tours is noted for comparative purposes only.

[2] For this approach of dividing Baptist public discourse into 'official' and 'unofficial' I am indebted to Andrew Picard, who adopts a similar approach in his study of Baptist discourse on the Vietnam War. A number of connections can be drawn between Baptist engagement with both debates. See A. Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies: New Zealand Baptist Public Discourse on the Vietnam War', *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 1:1 (October 2006): 53-70.

> So we are at it again. Good old head-in-the-sand Baptists. At Assembly we move on to other business, leaving apartheid, one of the major issues facing the world community, buried in procedural nonsense. When will we learn that a world that increasingly sees the church as an irrelevant pimple on the rump of life, has this opinion strengthened and solidified by the actions of a denomination that will not exercise the one prophetic ministry with which those outside its doors can identify?[3]

The question of apartheid and sports contact with South Africa was one of the major issues dividing New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s but, as the writer indicated, Baptists in New Zealand struggled to speak clearly and prophetically on the issue. Indeed it appears that the denomination was deeply divided over the very essence of the Christian gospel and Baptist identity. During the seventies and eighties that fault line opened up increasingly under the pressure of broader cultural and theological shifts within New Zealand society. Under these circumstances, the ecclesiological bedrock of the Baptist church proved to be an unstable foundation upon which to build a significant contribution to the tour debate.

Public debate in New Zealand on rugby tours to and from South Africa evolved roughly in three stages. Until the mid sixties the question was whether Maoris should be able to play against South Africa. Since 1928 All Black tours to South Africa were 'all white' in deference to racialist attitudes in South Africa. The exclusion of Maori players from such tours was never popular, but it was not until the 1960 tour that a sustained nation-wide debate emerged. The focus of that debate is evident in a resolution passed by the 1958 Baptist Assembly opposing the tour on the grounds that Maori were excluded. It states: 'We are of this conviction because of our deep desire for preserving and deepening the happy relationship between, and essential unity of, Maori and European people as fellow citizens of this country, a unity essential to the welfare of our nation.'[4] During the mid to late sixties, the focus of debate shifted from the

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[3] *New Zealand Baptist* (hereafter *NZB*), February 1985, 2.

[4] Public Questions Committee Papers 1990-1994, New Zealand Baptist Historical Society Archives (NZBHSA): File A/N 1254, MS No. 1005979. In 1959 the Baptist Assembly again passed a resolution protesting against the exclusion of Maoris from the tour. See *NZB*, January 1960, 12.

treatment of New Zealand Maori to the treatment of South African blacks, and whether South Africa should be forced to field a racially integrated team. So in 1964 the Baptist PQC was starting to think about 'the attitude we should have towards sports teams visiting New Zealand whose so-called representative teams are not chosen solely on the grounds of skill.'[5] But from the late 1960s or early 1970s the focus shifted again, from the composition of South African teams to the configuration of South African society, and whether it was right to have any sports contact at all with a state that supported apartheid.

This was a much more controversial – and divisive – question. Rugby was the national sport of New Zealand and South Africa. It was followed religiously by large sections of both countries. A blanket ban on all tests between these two leading rugby playing nations was unthinkable for many New Zealanders, especially as a number of them remained unconvinced about the evils of apartheid. And for those who were convinced, it did not necessarily follow that sports boycotts were the best response. An alternative and, for many, equally legitimate Christian response, was to build bridges rather than shut doors, and undermine apartheid by positive example. Some pointed to the inconsistency of New Zealand cutting sports ties with South Africa while it maintained economic relations with that country. Others argued that it was unfair to subject South Africa to special treatment without examining our relationship with other countries with records of human rights violations.[6] The people of New Zealand were deeply divided over the issue.[7]

This level of controversy was reflected in the official Baptist response to the issue during the 1970s and 80s. While earlier Assemblies had debated and passed resolutions on tours to South Africa, in 1969, with another All Black tour to South Africa looming, the Baptist PQC chose not to raise the issue at the annual Assembly. In 1972, with a Springbok tour to New Zealand scheduled for the following year, the PQC declined to participate in a protest led by the

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[5] New Zealand Baptist Union Yearbook, 1964-5.

[6] See, for example, *NZB*, February 1981, 6.

[7] For example, a Heylen poll conducted in May 1981 revealed that 51% of the population were opposed to the tour taking place. Tom Newnham, *By Batons and Barbed Wire: a Response to the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand* (Auckland: Real Pictures, 1981), 7.

Methodist Church.[8] It decided instead to release a bland statement 'outlining the issues to be considered, but leaving people to decide from the information given what they feel the Christian attitude should be.' The Committee was actually empowered to speak in its own name, but it declined to do so because, it claimed, 'The view of Baptists as a whole on such a matter may be expressed only by Assembly, which has not considered the tour question.' So, the Committee 'did not feel able to present one Baptist opinion about the tour.'[9] In fact, the draft statement acknowledges that the Committee very much doubted that such a unified opinion existed.[10] The members of the Committee realised that any statement they made was bound to be highly unpopular and divisive. So the Committee passed the buck – or the ball – to Assembly.

After a 'vigorous debate' on an anti-tour resolution, the 1972 Assembly chose, because of 'the very wide division of opinion', not to take a vote but simply to move on to the next business.[11] That appears to have included motions calling on Baptists to lead lives of personal righteousness and sexual purity. By contrast, these motions were passed with ease.[12] As Andrew Picard has observed in his study of New Zealand Baptist discourse on the Vietnam War, 'Baptists could be generally assured of denominational unity on issues of personal morality', like sex, but 'such harmony collapsed when it came to volatile issues of systemic morality', like apartheid.[13] So while Baptists could speak out loudly on the declining standards of personal morality, they fell silent when it came to broader social issues.

Throughout the 1970s the tour debate became increasingly politicised. After the Kirk Labour government forced the cancellation of the 1973 tour, Muldoon and the National Party campaigned in the 1975 election on a pro-tour platform. The increasing radicalism of protest groups like Halt All Racist Tours (HART), regarded by some as left-leaning 'Marxists', and labelled by the government as 'traitors',[14] made it ever more difficult for conservative churches to align themselves with the no-tour cause. This was clearly the case

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[8] Minutes of PQC meeting, 14 March 1972, Vivienne Boyd Papers: NZBHSA, File A/N 1552.
[9] *NZB*, May 1972, 14.
[10] Draft statement: Vivienne Boyd Papers, NZBHSA, File A/N 1552.
[11] *NZB*, May 1973, 7.
[12] *NZB*, December 1972, 12.
[13] Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies', 53.
[14] *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1978, section 1, page 5.

with the Baptist Church, which tended towards the conservative end of the political spectrum.[15] Before the 1976 tour, the only statement its annual Assembly made in regards to apartheid was to criticise the National Council of Churches (NCC) for making token grants to activist organisations like HART and CARE (Citizens' Association for Racial Equality). This was followed up by the President of the Baptist Union attacking those organisations for what he called their 'negative' approach to apartheid in South Africa.[16] The tour itself was ignored. Despite this, there were more liberal elements within the Baptist church, especially among the leadership. During this period, for example, the Baptist Union Council was chaired by the Rev Angus MacLeod, General Secretary of the NCC, and a determined leader of the anti-tour movement.[17] Under his leadership, but at the eleventh hour – reluctantly, it seems – the Union Council eventually issued a statement opposing the tour.[18] But overall, the tone of Baptist discourse could not be described as daring or radical. Preaching the Union Sermon at Assembly later that year, the Rev Barry Denholm confessed in regards the tour debate: 'You can't say our denomination has given much of a lead. … We've let some individuals and some groups fight issues which we should have been leading'.[19]

The mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church tended to provide a stronger lead. By mid-1980, these churches had all come out against the forthcoming Springbok tour.[20] In July the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches invited the Baptist PQC to distribute literature opposing the tour. The offer, however,

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[15] Paul Reynolds, 'Religion and Politics in Auckland: A Study of the Socio-Economic Composition, Voting and Religious and Political Attitudes of Activists in a Sample of Auckland Nonconformist Churches' (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1970), 50-52.

[16] *NZB*, April 1976, 13.

[17] The Executive of the Council also included the Rev Barry Hibbert, Rev Tom Cadman and Rev Dr Stan Edgar, all of whom were of a more liberal persuasion.

[18] *NZB*, July 1976, 7.

[19] *NZB*, February 1977, 1-2.

[20] Christopher Nichol and Jim Veitch, 'Rucking for Justice: Apartheid, the Churches, and the 1981 Springbok Tour', in *Religion in New Zealand*, ed. C. Nichol and J. Veitch (Wellington: Tertiary Christian Studies Programme, 2nd ed 1983), 287-312, 299.

was declined.[21] The Committee said it was divided as to 'whether we have the right to try and influence South African internal politics, and whether we should support Christian leaders who have been imprisoned for what may be seen by some as political involvements rather than spiritual matters'.[22] These were questions the mainstream and more liberal churches appear to have resolved some time ago. But by November a majority of the Committee had come to the conclusion that the church needed to make a decision one way or the other and urged the annual Assembly to pass a resolution. It called on the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU) 'to withdraw its invitation to the Springboks as an expression of opposition to apartheid and of solidarity with oppressed people in South Africa' and urged the government 'to take more active steps to discourage the tour'.[23] The resolution did not go as far as the statements of some other churches in actually calling on the government to force the cancellation of the tour by withholding visas for the tour.[24] But it was a clear and decisive motion and, somewhat remarkably, it was carried. It appears that the Assembly delegates were profoundly stirred by a visiting black South African, Mr Ramsamy, who set out the implications of the tour for his people and pleaded for isolation of South Africa as the only effective instrument for changing apartheid.[25]

This was the high point of official Baptist discourse on the tour issue. It was the only tour resolution that Assembly passed in the 1970s or 1980s. As Laurie Guy observes, 'Baptist heart was probably not in the stop-the-tour campaign'.[26] This is borne out by subsequent events. In 1984, the Baptist Union Council decided to oppose the tour planned for the following year because, it said, 'in the current

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[21] Letter Rev Gordon Duncan to Rev John Murray dated 29 July 1980: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

[22] Minutes of the PQC, 16 July 1980: NZBHSA, MA 701, File B9/86.

[23] See paper entitled 'Responsibilities to South Africa's Oppressed': NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88. On the basis of this resolution, a strong letter was sent to the Prime Minister urging him to stop the tour a few months before it was due to start. See *NZB*, July 1981, 1.

[24] See, for example, the statement by Anglican Archbishop Paul Reeves in the NCC Special News Supplement, May 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

[25] *NZB*, December 1980, 8.

[26] Laurie Guy, *Baptists in Twentieth Century New Zealand: Documents Illustrating Baptist Life And Development* (Auckland: NZ Baptist Research & Historical Society, 2005), 136-138.

climate any tour will be seen as support for apartheid.'[27] But at Assembly the delegates declined, once again, to vote on a motion opposing the tour. Instead, they passed two other resolutions about South Africa, one condemning apartheid in principle, the other congratulating Bishop Tutu for his Nobel Peace Prize. This was clearly an attempt to register Baptist opposition to apartheid without addressing the forthcoming tour and offending those Baptists who supported it. It was a compromise designed to preserve denominational harmony. But the result, according to one of the delegates, was a couple of 'meaningless, marshmallow resolutions' that effectively said nothing.[28] Indeed, it earned the following headline in the *Waikato Times*: 'Baptists Sidestep Rugby Tour Issue'.[29] So while official Baptist discourse on the tour question may have preserved a false kind of unity at the denominational level, it came at the cost of preventing Baptists from exercising a truly prophetic ministry in regards the issue.

Before the 1983 Assembly, the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* made a plea for debate, even disagreement, at Assembly. He wrote:

> Assembly is … a laboratory of the Spirit. In any growing and diverse community there inevitably arises tensions, disagreements, different understandings of the Christian faith and life and even radically different approaches to our understanding of the church, life in the community and our response as Christians to the great issues bedevilling mankind. In the Assembly we have an opportunity to distil from such diverse elements, wisdom for living in the church and the world and to share that wisdom with one another.[30]

In Baptist tradition the gathered church is the site of Christ's presence and the means of discerning his will.[31] It is 'in the midst of a believing, praying people' that his Spirit's guidance can be most

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[27] NZBA, A/N 1611, MS No. 1006272.
[28] Rev Paul Tonson, *NZB*, December 1984, 2.
[29] Quoted in *NZB*, December 1984, 2.
[30] *NZB*, November 1983, 2.
[31] Paul Fiddes, *A Leading Question: The Structure and Authority of Leadership in the Local Church* (London: Baptist Publications, nd.), 50. See also Martin Sutherland, 'On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*', in *Talking Theology: 2001-2002 Proceedings*, ed. Martin Sutherland, 120-129 (Auckland: Carey Baptist College, 2003), 127. Sutherland goes so far as to suggest that in Baptist tradition 'there is only one true sacrament: the sacrament of gathering'.

clearly known.[32] In this sense, a gathering like Assembly is the 'laboratory of the Spirit'. So refusal by consecutive Assemblies to tackle the tour issue and endure disharmony deprived Baptists of a forum in which to express their views and so discern among themselves the Spirit's leading. According to the PQC it 'left our people unprepared for the decisions which were so recently forced upon them.'[33]

By contrast, the official discourse of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church was much more detailed and definitive. Its Assemblies debated and passed increasingly forceful resolutions on every tour from 1970 onwards.[34] Its PQC was proactive and decisive. As early as 1972 it was arguing that the time had come to 'demonstrate in some tangible and unequivocal way our objection to the principle of apartheid and our concern for and support of the non-white population in South Africa.'[35] And the Church's moderators issued a number of very direct anti-tour statements. In 1981, for example, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church urged his members 'to express opposition to the Tour in the hope that it may yet be called off; and to avoid involvement with it of any kind, whether by participation or by following the games on TV or radio should it take place.'[36] Compared to its Baptist cousin, the Presbyterian Church spoke with much greater clarity and conviction. Why was that?

Insofar as the Baptist Church is concerned, the 'unofficial' tour discourse running through the pages of the denominational magazine, the *New Zealand Baptist*, offers some answers. The magazine's editors encouraged debate on the respective tours, particularly Rev H.E. Whitten. As early as 1970 he took a strikingly radical anti-tour position. In February 1970, annoyed at Assembly's silence on the issue, Whitten declared that, 'All sporting ties between this country and South Africa should be broken. This is not to mix sport with

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[32] Report by Rev. L.A. North in the *Year Book of the New Zealand Baptist Union for 1964-5*, 28. See also Gene Bartlett, 'Shall We Speak Out On Social Issues?', *NZB*, February 1976, 1.

[33] Paper by Rev Dr Stan Edgar, 'Following the Springbok Tour', 21 September 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

[34] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New* Zealand, 1969, 116; 1972, 143; 1975, 107; 1980, 126; 1984, 126.

[35] *Proceedings,* 1972, 135.

[36] NCC Special News Supplement, May 1981: NZBHSA, MA701, File B1/88.

politics. It is not a matter of politics at all. It is simply to refuse to let this country's participation in sport be interpreted as an endorsement of that shocking negation of human rights which is apartheid.'[37] This attempt to rouse the Baptist social conscience drew no response. But an even more forthright editorial in June[38] elicited two letters of criticism.[39] In 1972 Whitten responded to the news of a planned Springbok tour by criticising the Government for its Pilate-like hand-washing attitude, the NZRU for making a god of their game at the expense of human rights, and the silent majority of New Zealanders who, he said, 'obviously don't care a damn about anything that doesn't affect them personally.'[40] This generated four letters: one in support of Whitten, two in defence of apartheid, and one protesting the use of a four-letter word.[41] The intensity of debate was surely, if slowly, increasing.

When the Baptist PQC published its bland statement on the proposed 1973 tour, one irritated correspondent observed that New Zealand Baptists seem to have an eleventh commandment: 'Thou shall not rock the boat'.[42] This accusation surfaced again when the Assembly chose not to make a pronouncement on the tour by passing on to other business. The columnist, 'Boanerges', castigated the delegates for resorting to dubious debating tactics 'simply to avoid upheaval, a bad image in the press or a poor report on television.' Public Questions, he said, 'are always controversial things, but then controversy is the child of truth.'[43] The March 1973 *Baptist* devoted its front page to the upcoming tour, with a picture of a rugby scrum and the heading, 'A Matter of Christian Concern.' The feature article quoted Dante: 'The hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in a time of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality,' and argued

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[37] *NZB*, January 1970, 2; June 1970, 2.

[38] Whitten insisted that the forthcoming tour 'will demonstrate clearly to the world in general that, for the NZRU and its supporters, rugby is more important than human rights' and that 'in this country self-interest takes precedence over any real sense of responsibility towards others. It will convince other peoples that, in spite of our repeated boasting to the contrary, we have no real concern about racial discrimination. They will see this tour as deliberate political support for the apartheid policies of the South African and Rhodesian governments.' *NZB*, June 1970, 2.

[39] *NZB*, August 1970, 4-5.

[40] *NZB*, April 1972, 5.

[41] *NZB*, June 1972, 6-7.

[42] *NZB*, October 1972, 7.

[43] *NZB*, December 1972, 28.

that the moral position was that of boycotts not bridges.[44] Whitten's editorial called on pusillanimous Baptists to 'stand up and be counted on the side of righteousness and love and abhorrence of anything that helps us to perpetuate the crime of apartheid.'[45]

Responses to this provocative edition of the *Baptist* revealed just how divided its readers were. One disappointed correspondent, for example, wrote, 'The church would be better to confine its appeal to strictly spiritual issues on which she is better informed and on which she is entitled to speak with more authority.'[46] This was a common cry.[47] But another correspondent replied that that 'is simply twentieth century monasticism and it indicates a thinking about the Church which does not square with that which we are given in the New Testament. Here we are told quite clearly that we *are* in the world'.[48] James Belich has argued generally that the two sides of the tour debate were basically defending two different definitions of a New Zealand identity that seemed under threat.[49] Baptists, for their part, were contesting two very different definitions of the gospel and Christian identity. For some, talk about the tour was a vital expression of the gospel. For others, it was a tragic betrayal of the gospel. The debate exposed a deep theological fault line running through the denomination in regards the essence of the Christian message. It became increasingly apparent that the collision of these two perspectives was something that many preferred to avoid. For them 'the *pax ecclesiae* [was] more important than justice at ecclesiastical cost'.[50] As Angus MacLeod recalls, for Baptists the 'fear of dividing a very small denomination was always a very strong thing.'[51]

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[44] *NZB*, March 1973, 14-15.
[45] *NZB*, March 1973, 4.
[46] *NZB*, May 1973, 7.
[47] One correspondent expressed his 'distaste for the moral indecision of Assembly in refusing to come to terms with the South African tour question' in the following terms: 'These are much bigger questions really than the so-called crisis of Sunday sport of a few years ago, yet our denomination which found plenty to say on that topic at that time, can now dismiss these ones as irrelevant… I am extremely disappointed.' *NZB*, February 1973, 7.
[48] *NZB*, July 1973, 6.
[49] James Belich. *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001), 518.
[50] Nichol and Veitch, 'Rucking for Justice', 306.
[51] Angus MacLeod, interview by author, digital recording, Auckland, 13 August 2007.

But the division was not just theological. In 1976, astonished that Assembly would again fail to address the tour issue, an angry correspondent wrote to the *Baptist*: 'When was the Baptist voice last raised on behalf of the oppressed peoples of the world for whom Jesus died … [such as] the oppressed black majorities in Rhodesia and South Africa?'[52] This drew a sharp and interesting response from someone arguing that the black majority in Rhodesia and South Africa were not being oppressed. But, he said, 'Let us not be in a hurry to abandon Rhodesia and South Africa to the control of atheistic communism. If that ever happens, oppression will be the right word to use.'[53] This concern about the influence of 'atheistic' communism protrudes several times in the debate.[54] The linking of atheism with communism and Christianity with the democratic west exposes unspoken assumptions that were fundamental to people's worldviews and perspectives on South African apartheid. The tour debate revealed that Baptists were fundamentally divided by ideological, as well as theological, fault lines. As with Vietnam, beneath the war of words was a war of ideologies.'[55]

But these theological and ideological divisions were not unique to Baptists. Articles and letters in the *Outlook*, the denominational magazine of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church, reveal that the Presbyterians also faced considerable internal disharmony over the issue. Fraser Paterson observes that attitudes hardened into 'something of a wartime mentality' as time progressed.[56] In the end, 'people on both sides were claiming that they were ashamed to be Presbyterians: one group because the Church hadn't done enough, the other because it had done too much.'[57] Some even threatened to leave the Church because they were disgusted with its anti-tour attitude, and a number probably did.[58] Yet, at the official level,

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[52] *NZB*, April 1976, 13.
[53] *NZB*, June 1976, 4.
[54] One reader, for example, expressed the concern that, 'South Africa's mineral wealth is worth manipulating for [sic] and if the communists control all the sea routes how far will the oil travel? A very easy way to cripple the western world!' *NZB*, February 1981, 6.
[55] Picard, 'A Conflict of Ideologies', 66-67.
[56] J.F. Paterson, 'An Historical Analysis of Issues within the Presbyterian Church, 1945-1985' (M.Th. thesis, University of Otago, 1985), 163-4.
[57] Ibid., 165. See *Outlook*, September 1981, 3; October 1981, 27; November 1981, 3.
[58] *Outlook*, May 1981, 11, 16; June 1981, 4; September 1981, 3; November 1981, 4.

Presbyterian leaders spoke with much greater clarity and conviction than did Baptists. There were clearly other forces at work.

In the 1970s and 80s the tremors of the charismatic movement were felt throughout the church in New Zealand. The Baptist denomination was no exception. It has been claimed that by the middle of the 1970s 25 percent of all Baptist ministers had been 'baptised in the Spirit', and that the majority of Baptist theological students were products of the renewal.[59] One report indicates that by 1975 as many as 50 percent of the younger generation of Baptists were 'charismatic'.[60] By 1989 69 percent of Baptist churches identified with the charismatic movement.[61] So Elaine Bolitho claims, 'Despite initial misgivings and often strong opposition, there is no doubt that the church influenced the most by the charismatic movement was the Baptist church.'[62] This may be an overstatement, but the Baptist church was clearly impacted more than most.

This is significant. Several commentators have observed that the charismatic movement tended to foster a 'pietistic individualised spirituality'.[63] This is evident in the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* during this period. In 1973 Rev Gordon Hambly criticised the charismatic renewal for generating 'an un-Biblical other-worldliness'. 'Many,' he said, 'make the elaborate effort to create their own world

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[59] Colin Brown, *Forty Years On: A History of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand 1941-1981* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1981), 177. A paper presented by Mr G.E. Lee to the Baptist Union Council on 18 June 1975 stated that the student body of the Baptist Theological College 'shows a strong leaning in this direction.' Union Council Minutes, June 1975 - November 1978: NZBHSA, MA385.

[60] Rev Dr R.J. Thompson, 'A New Image for New Zealand Baptists?', a paper presented to the Baptist Union Council on 18 June 1975. Union Council Minutes, June 1975 - November 1978: NZBHSA, MA385.

[61] E.E. Bolitho, *Meet the Baptists: Post-war Personalities and Perspectives* (Wellington: Christian Research Association, 1993), 37.

[62] Ibid.

[63] A.K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New* Zealand (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), 173. C. Brown, 'How Significant is the Charismatic Movement,' in *Religion in New Zealand Society*, 2nd ed., ed. Brian Colless and Peter Donovan (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1985), 107. See also Peter Lineham, 'The Voice of Inspiration? Religious Contributions to Social Policy,' in *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, ed. B. Dalley and M. Tennant (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2004), 57-73, 69.

instead of living in the real world as it is, painful as that may be.'[64] In a 1978 editorial, Rev Barry Hibbert commented: 'Most of my charismatic friends get full marks for brightness, but don't score so well when it comes to breadth. … If anything, they tend to be more inward looking, more restricted, more world-denying.'[65] Then again, in 1983, Rev Walter Lang lamented that, 'So often renewed churches have become introverted and could be described as "bless me clubs" where the emphasis is exclusively on the individual's spiritual growth and enjoyment of worship, instead of leading to evangelism and social concern…'[66] Whatever else it achieved, the charismatic movement served to lift the conservative side of the Baptist church into ascendancy. It pushed the Baptist denomination as a whole in a more pietistic direction and away from social issues like apartheid.

But there were broader sociological forces impacting the Baptist church during this period. These decades witnessed the breakdown of values that had existed for a century or more.[67] In this period New Zealand 'passed, like Alice slipping through the looking glass, into a new world'.[68] One outcome of these shifting beliefs and values was a huge decline in church membership and attendance. Presbyterian church attendance, for example, collapsed from 119,041 per week in 1960 to 55,062 in 1988, while in the same period its Sunday school roll went from 76,030 to 10,983.[69] From the 1960s there was an increasing sense that Christianity was losing its influence on society. According to Michael Hill there were two main responses from the church: the 'minority' response, where people kept their beliefs intact by walling themselves off from a hostile society, and the

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[64] *NZB*, September 1973, 16-17.
[65] *NZB*, June 1978, 2.
[66] *NZB*, November 1983, 5.
[67] James Belich, 'Presenting Past', a paper for the Knowledge Wave Conference (2001). Quoted in Quoted in Kevin Ward, 'Losing my Religion? An Examination of Church Decline, Growth and Change in New Zealand 1960 to 1999, with Particular Reference to Christchurch' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2003), 252.
[68] Walter Anderson, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3.
[69] Jim Veitch, '1961-1990: Towards the Church for a New Era', in *Presbyterians in Aotearoa, 1840-1990*, ed. D. McEldowney (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, 1990), 151; quoted in Laurie Guy, 'Between a Hard Rock and Shifting Sands: Churches and the Issue of Homosexuality in New Zealand, 1960-1986', *Journal of Religious History* 30:1 (2006): 61-76, 70.

'mainstream' response, where a church chose to modify its beliefs to maintain resonance with broader social patterns and expectations.[70] This meant shifting from a more 'vertical' view of religion (focusing on God and the unseen world) to a more 'horizontal' view of religion (focusing on humanity and the needs of this world).[71]

Lloyd Geering, principal of Knox College, the theological college of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, epitomised this second approach in the 1960s. He argued that 'the Christian faith must be radically reoriented and concern itself not with an unseen world but with this world…'[72] For Geering this meant that there was no longer any 'infallible source of knowledge' and one could 'no longer draw a clear line between what is orthodox and what is not'.[73] Indeed, God himself had no relevance in the modern world: God was 'dead'. Geering was simply echoing international shifts and the 'death of God' theology, which involved a turning away from transcendence towards the renewing of this world.[74] But, as the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* testify, this neo-liberalism provoked a fierce reaction from theological conservatives in defence of traditional formulations of the Christian faith.[75] So the 1960s and 70s witnessed 'a much greater liberal-conservative ecclesiastical divide, leading to a 'collapse of the theological middle'.'[76] As a result, New Zealand Baptists were 'more retreatist, more pietistic and more narrow in their understanding of the gospel'.[77] This is evident in Baptist discourse on the tour. After the Baptist Assembly voted to oppose the 1981 tour, one correspondent to the *New Zealand Baptist* wrote that he was deeply concerned:

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[70] Michael Hill, 'Religion and Society: Cement or Ferment?' in *Religion in New Zealand*, ed. C. Nichol and J. Veitch (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1980), 209.

[71] Hill 'Religion and Society', 205-9.

[72] L. Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand 1960-1986* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002), 63-4.

[73] J. Veitch, 'A Controversy Revisited: 1966-70 and All That', *Forum*, XXXVII 3 (April 1984), 3-8, 4.

[74] Guy, *Worlds in* Collision, 64.

[75] See, for example, the correspondence in *NZB*, December 1966, 318-9. One of Geering's most prominent public opponents was the leading Baptist layman and Professor of Classics at Auckland University, E.M. Blaiklock, who responded with a *Layman's Answer: An Examination of the New Theology* (London: Hodder & Soughton, 1968).

[76] Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 62

[77] Guy, *Baptists in Twentieth Century New Zealand*, xiv.

> at our denomination going the same liberal socio-political road as one Church where I was actively engaged for over twenty years. Once it was spiritually virile, but now it is scrambling for Union with anyone, just to survive. … May we not conform to that which the world would have us be: a political WCC-type organisation, forgetting our Lord's commission to preach, and teach a spiritual Gospel to all the world.[78]

In the minds of many Baptists, the socio-political action of mainstream Protestant churches was associated with the liberal theology and the numerical decline of those same churches. The influx of conservative refugees from those more liberal mainline churches served only to strengthen that conviction.

The volume of unofficial tour discourse in the *Baptist* magazine peaked in the winter of 1981. When the July issue of the magazine came out, with its front page carrying the text of a letter from the Baptist Union calling on the Prime Minister to force the tour's cancellation, it triggered a number of angry responses. One correspondent protested that the letter did 'not necessarily represent the feelings at 'grass root' level. Before such letters are sent on behalf of the denomination on a matter which so deeply affects our nation, a referendum of members should be held.'[79] Another expressed 'moral outrage' that the Baptist Union executive should 'take the liberty to write this letter on behalf of Baptist people and churches within the union', and declared, 'Please do not write any more letters on my behalf on the subject of Apartheid or anything else in the future without my prior instruction.'[80] These correspondents were simply articulating basic Baptist ecclesiology. The principles of freedom of conscience, congregational government, and the autonomy of the local church meant that the denomination's leaders could not speak on behalf of their people without clear majority support expressed in a church meeting or assembly. The problem was that such support was a long time coming, and difficult to prove – short of a referendum of members. A radically flat participatory church polity made it much harder for Baptist leaders to contribute to the tour debate than for the leaders of churches with more hierarchical structures, such as the Presbyterian Church.

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[78] *NZB*, February 1981, 6.
[79] *NZB*, September 1981, 6.
[80] *NZB*, November 1981, 6.

By comparison, official Baptist discourse on the question of rugby relations with South Africa was muted. Baptists could speak out boldly on issues of personal morality, like sex or Sunday sport, but they were deeply divided over issues of systemic morality. For Baptists, the debate about apartheid exposed much deeper divisions about the nature of the Gospel, the mission of the church, and the ideology of communism. So like tectonic plates, the two sides of the church collided over the issue. To avoid dividing the denomination, the Baptist PQC and Assembly delegates chose mostly to plaster over the cracks by sidestepping the tour debate altogether or producing compromise resolutions that said nothing. While this may have preserved the appearance of denominational unity, it deprived Baptists of a forum in which to express their views to one another, gain a sense of Christ's mind among the gathered community, and speak confidently and clearly on its behalf. In the vacuum, the *New Zealand Baptist* magazine provided something of a forum for unofficial discourse on apartheid and the tour. Its pages reveal that broad theological shifts occurring during the period of this debate tended to lift the conservative side of the Baptist church into a position of ascendancy. The charismatic renewal movement and the growing liberal-conservative ecclesiastical divide served to move the Baptists as a whole in a pietistic direction. Given the radically flat shape of Baptist ecclesiology, this was significant. The result was that, on issues like apartheid, the New Zealand Baptist Church did appear to be 'head-in-the-sand' – either unwilling or unable to make its voice heard.

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