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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SABBATH IN NEW ZEALAND 1860-2000

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on church voices striving in the public arena to preserve a weekly 'holy day'. However, by 2000 Sunday was simply part of a weekend 'holiday'. The first part of the article highlights the ongoing strength of church voices on the sabbath issue in the earlier part of the twentieth century even as the sabbath concept was slowly eroding. The second part of the article notes an accelerating secularisation of Sunday in the later part of the twentieth century and the gradual disappearance of sabbatarian voices in public debate.

An overview of the sabbath in early settler New Zealand:

New Zealand settler society significantly operated on a six-plus-one (or five-plus-one-plus-one) weekly rhythm for at least its first century. Certain activities on Sunday faced legal restraint up into the 1960s and beyond. Builders could not undertake construction work on Sundays – working at one's trade in view of a public place was a breach of the Police Offences Act 1927. Parliament did not sit on Sundays and a parliamentary standing order of 1930 required the adjournment of parliamentary sittings at midnight on Saturdays. Shopping was largely off-limits. The Licensing Act 1908 required the closing of licensed premises on Sundays. Court procedures were largely prohibited on Sundays, such that the service or execution of a legal writ on a Sunday was invalid under the Judicature Act 1908. Numerous other seemingly petty prohibitions persisted, signs either that society wanted one quiet or sacred day in seven or that the prohibitions were left-over regulations from a former era when society really did have such a sabbatarian desire.[1]

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[1] I.L.M. Richardson, *Religion and the Law*, Wellington: Sweet & Maxwell, 1962, 17-18.

In our more recent 24/7 world, the notion that people would give one day in seven essentially over to God and/or to rest may seem astonishing and archaic. Particularly astonishing is the fact that proponents of sabbath observance might even attack the practice of Christians visiting friends or of farmers delivering milk to customers on that holy day.[2] A century ago, even people who were not particularly religious commonly valued Sunday as 'the quiet day'. No wonder that many children of that era later reacted strongly against a Sunday that they had experienced as extremely drab and colourless.[3]

The immediate roots of New Zealand sabbatarianism

New Zealand sabbatarianism had its roots in Britain, the place of origin of most of the colonial settlers. The Lord's Day Observance Society (an Anglican-promoted body) had formed in England in 1831. England subsequently experienced an intensification of sabbatarian struggle to proscribe Sunday amusements and recreation. Sabbatarian victories in the mid-nineteenth century included the Post Office ceasing all Sunday labour for a time in 1849, and the stopping of the opening of both the Crystal Palace on Sundays in 1852 and the British Museum on Sundays in the 1850s. Around this time, pious members of the upper classes ate cold meat on Sundays to give their servants a rest; took their families to church on foot; and banished secular reading, drawing, needlework, riding and driving from their household for the rest of the day.[4]

Scotland was even more sabbatarian in outlook than England at this time. Strict observance of the Sabbath was seen as a fundamental bulwark of the faith. Sunday travellers were regarded as shameless violators of the Divine Law. Public pressure led to the stopping of Sunday trains between Edinburgh and Glasgow for a period of twenty years from 1846. Public houses were closed on Sundays from 1853. A

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[2] For denunciation of pleasure-seeking on the Lord's Day, in particular of 'driving, riding, shooting, Sabbath visiting, train and 'bus travelling', see Report of the Committee on the State of Religion and Morals (Appendix VII) in *General Proceedings of the [Northern] Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1892, 64. For controversy over milk deliveries see *Outlook* [publication of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand], 21 November 1903, 33.

[3] Letter of 'Farri' in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3; letter of William Cooper in *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2; also Paul Hawker, *Secret Affairs of the Soul*, Kelowna, B.C: Northstone, 2000, 16-17.

[4] J. Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980, 83.

proposal in 1863 to open the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens on Sundays produced a hue and cry, with 14,000 petitioning for opening and 36,000 against. Parliament kept the gates closed.[5]

Part One: Keeping the sabbath quiet: voices of the churches in New Zealand, 1860-1930

The early New Zealand sabbath

Sabbatarian issues in Britain spilled over into New Zealand. Because struggles over sabbatarianism were at their peak in mid-to-late nineteenth century Britain, especially with the emergence in that period of the concept of a pleasurable and potentially sabbath-challenging 'weekend',[6] it was inevitable that early settlers to New Zealand brought Sunday observance issues with them. While around half of that early population were not regular church-goers, society in general had a significant degree of sympathy with the notion that Sunday was a different day from the rest of the week and that Sunday worship was an important part of that day. Such a view was reflected in the Masters and Apprentices Act, 1865, section 8 specifying that there be a covenant between masters and apprentices which, *inter alia*, would require that the apprentice 'shall attend divine service when practicable at least once on every Sunday'. In addition to societal support for public worship, there was also strong societal support for a non-working Sunday. Thus the Police Offences Act, 1884 (section 16) and its successor Acts criminalised working at one's trade, transacting business, or exposing goods for sale on a Sunday.

Late-nineteenth-century New Zealand society had a strong sense that it was building a new and purer nation, a 'better Britain'.[7] 'Better Britain' sentiment commonly meant that while Britain was good, it could be better – in New Zealand. For sabbatarians that included the implementation of a purer (stricter) sabbath. The sabbath practices of good Britain were often contrasted with the evils of other countries. Thus residual sabbatarianism in Britain contrasted favourably with the dreaded 'continental Sunday' of countries such as France and Germany.

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[5] J.R. Fleming, *A History of the Church in Scotland 1843-1874*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1927, 5, 155.

[6] The term 'weekend', reflecting a week of five days plus two instead of the Old Testament week of six days plus one, emerged in the late 1870s: H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987, 114.

[7] On this concept see James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, Part 1.

Those 'wicked' nations held to a perspective that encouraged people to attend Sunday worship but left the rest of the day free for their own pleasures. The outcome (viewed through the lens of strict sabbatarianism) was a day of noise, stress and hedonism: 'cars rushing at full speed, bells clanging, dust flying, men swearing, and all a perfect pandemonium'.[8]

Major sabbatarian measures deeply affected both society and church in nineteenth- century New Zealand. There was no public transport on Sundays in Auckland in 1880 and the museum, art gallery and library were all closed.[9] New Zealand Baptist attitudes expressed in their fledgling newspaper reflected their intense concern to maintain sabbatarian principle and practice. A *New Zealand Baptist* article of 1882 listed sabbath breaking as a major sin alongside riotous living, drunkenness and licentiousness.[10] That same year an article pitched to 'our young folk' moralised in relation to a girl in London: 'She had a wicked father – a Sabbath-breaker, a swearer, and a drunkard.'[11]

Sabbath issues in early Dunedin

Sabbatarian issues were markedly to the fore in Dunedin which had begun as a Free-Church, Presbyterian-associated, settlement in 1848. Sabbath-keeping was part of the initial vision to plant a 'well-ordered, God-fearing community'.[12] However, the colony proved not to be exclusively Free Church or godly. This was particularly the case with the onset of the gold rushes of the 1860s. As many as 50,000 footloose young men swarmed into Central Otago in the period 1861-1863. Otago's population swelled from about 12,600 in 1860 to over 67,000 in 1864. One by-product was a flood of prostitutes into Dunedin – 200 in 1864 according to one contemporary source.[13] Nevertheless, church

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[8] 'B.L.' in letter to the editor, *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2.
[9] Michael J. Powell, 'The Church in Auckland Society, 1880-1886', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1970, 123-24.
[10] *New Zealand Baptist* (NZB), March 1882, 45.
[11] NZB, December, 1882, 190.
[12] Letter, Thomas Burns to William Cargill, dated 28 December 1844, in *Outlook*, 6 March 1940, 36. Burns and Cargill were co-leaders of the colony-planting venture.
[13] Erik Olssen, 'Families and the Gendering of New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840-1880', in Carolyn Daley & Deborah Montgomerie (eds), Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999, 37-62 at 44, 48.

influence remained strong. In 1866 Thomas Burns could still rejoice in the wonderful Otago sabbath, when addressing the Presbyterian Synod:

> The stillness of our Sabbath and the crowded state of our churches, and the highly respectable and becoming appearance of our congregations, I have been told by visitors (strangers from the neighbouring colonies) are not to be paralleled anywhere out of Scotland, more especially in our country congregations. But even in Dunedin itself, with its large amount of irreligion and ungodliness, with which we of late have been flooded, it is impossible to walk our streets at the time when our forenoon congregations of all denominations are coming out of Church without being struck with a very agreeable kind of surprise at the appearance of the very large proportion of the inhabitants who have just been paying their Sabbath homage to the God of the Sabbath.[14]

In that era it was common for devout families to attend two services a Sunday and to devote the balance of the day to such things as rest, family relationships and wholesome reading. Such families avoided all work, apart from works of 'necessity' and 'mercy'. Thus Sunday food was often prepared as much as possible on Saturday, firewood likewise, and shoes were cleaned on Saturday. Sunday's dirty dishes might well be left over for washing until Monday.[15] In the words of historian Hugh Jackson, 'For those in the Puritan tradition Sunday observance was a test of vital religion, almost a sacrament.'[16]

A major question for Christians was the extent to which sabbatarian principles should be imposed on society as a whole. Although both society and churches were diverse and not of one mind in relation to the sabbath, pious Christians, commonly led by their church ministers, sought to implement and/or enforce a strict Sabbath for society as a whole. This was particularly the case within Presbyterianism. We need to remember Dunedin's Free-Church-related beginnings and the fact that the Free Church had split off from the more 'lax' Church of Scotland only five years prior to the Dunedin colonisation and that the

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[14] Alison Clarke, 'A Godly Rhythm: Keeping the Sabbath in Otago 1870-1890', in John Stenhouse & Jane Thomson (eds), *Building God's Own Country: Historical Essays on Religions in New Zealand*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2004, 46-59 at 47-48.

[15] Ibid., 50-51.

[16] H.R. Jackson, *Churches & People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987, 109.

over-arching Free Church vision was that society, itself, and not merely the church, should be godly.[17]

Churches commonly argued for a sabbath throughout society on bases such as:

- The sabbath was perpetually binding, either as a biblical injunction or as a natural law
- Sabbath observance was a foundational principle of society
- Sabbath observance brought blessing to a people, but sabbath desecration brought divine judgment
- A laxly-observed sabbath resulted in others being forced to work and not getting their day of worship and rest
- If people made Sunday a day for pleasure, this would weaken church attendance (and the influence of the church)

On the other hand, should the views of some be forced on all in society? Wasn't the strict view a kill-joy view? Where did individual conscience and individual liberty come into all of this? Rev. George Sutherland, while minister of First (Free Presbyterian) Church, Dunedin, complained in 1871 of Sunday steamer excursions, other travel, and mail sorting, warning that Sabbath breakers were 'an element of danger to our city' because history had shown the Sabbath to be a 'bulwark of public morality and practical religion'.[18] In response, one 'N' vehemently protested against the minister's attempt to 'lay down the law' for the whole community.[19] The issue of whether the church should dictate to society was heightened in Dunedin because of its origins as a church-related settlement.

An additional complication in relation to the enforcement of the observance of religious holy days was that while the Presbyterians (and, to a great extent, the other evangelical churches) held to strict sabbatarian views, they commonly ignored or treated lightly Christmas and Easter, viewing them as man-made inventions, not as sacred days. In contrast, Catholics and many Anglicans might well have a looser attitude towards Sunday observance, coupled with a deeper reverence for the

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[17] John McKean, *The Road to Secularisation in Presbyterian Dunedin: The First Fifty Years of the Otago Settlement*, Dunedin: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1993, 2.
[18] *Otago Daily Times*, 16 May 1871, 3.
[19] *Otago Daily Times*, 23 May 1871, 3.

holiness of Christmas and Easter.[20] At times Christians from one side or the other of this divide ignored or even undermined what the other side counted as sacred.

Perhaps the most striking sabbath-related issue in nineteenth-century Otago was the Athenaeum dispute of 1874. This involved the question of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute (a type of mutual improvement society) opening its reading room on Sunday afternoons. Its library was important in a city that did not have its own public library until 1908. Heated debate over a proposal to open the reading room took place at the Athenaeum's annual meeting on 30 January 1874. The proposal was carried by 91 votes to 83. The sabbatarians protested that due process had not been followed. The outcome was a further fiery meeting a fortnight later with 500 of the 800 Athenaeum members present. At the second meeting a letter was quoted from the Superintendent of the province, that 'the maintenance of the Sabbath in its integrity [is] one of the bulwarks of civil and religious liberty'. A major expressed concern of the sabbatarians was that opening the Athenaeum library on the sabbath would force an employee to work on that day – opening and manning the reading room. The 'liberals' circumvented this stated difficulty by indicating that the reading room would be staffed by volunteers on Sundays. The sabbatarians lost again at this second meeting – 252 votes to 242.[21] The narrowness of the loss indicates the residual strength of sabbatarian influence in nineteenth century Otago society. A year later, a report indicated that Sunday was the most patronised day for the reading room and that a paid employee was in attendance. Society had spoken – strict sabbatarianism was weakening.

A major sabbatarian issue in late-nineteenth-century New Zealand was that of public transport. The annual Baptist assembly expressed concern at the 'grievous extent of Sabbath desecration' in 1890, an example of which was the running of excursion steamers on Sunday mornings to visit men-of-war when they were in port.[22] A difficulty that churches faced was that their own members were significant users of Sunday public transport. The Dunedin Ministers' Association, made up of the evangelical (non-Anglican) ministers, including the Baptists, sent

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[20] Alison Jane Clarke, 'Feasts and Fasts: Holidays, Religion and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Otago', PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2003, 74-75, 98, 109 *et passim*.

[21] For a full report on the debate, see *Otago Daily Times*, 12 February 1874, 2-3.

[22] NZB, December 1890, 187.

the following circular to its ministers in 1898 with the request that the issue be brought before each congregation:

> Our attention has been called to the fact that there is a very large amount of Sunday-travelling in Dunedin and the suburbs, especially by the trams and drags. Inquiry from authoritative sources reveals the fact, also that these conveyances are largely used by the Church-going public and that were the Church-going community to abstain from using the conveyances, the evil would be greatly minimised. As this Sunday-travelling constitutes a breach of the Divine Law, and as it deprives the men employed on the vehicles of their day of rest and their opportunity of Christian worship, the Dunedin Ministers' Association would ask the Christian community to seriously consider these facts, and whether it be not their duty to abstain from the use of these vehicles on the Lord's Day.[23]

Early twentieth-century New Zealand society was rapidly being confronted with the benefits and threats of numerous new inventions and developments. Notwithstanding the patent advantages of progress, arch-conservatives saw many of the developments as threats, challenging old patterns and values. One challenge was to the sacred and quiet Sunday. From a twentieth-first century perspective, we may deride such viscerally-held views as a 'hissy fit', as much ado about nothing. This, however, is to fail to consider the values that shaped that mindset and to realise that the debate about apparently small things was in fact a debate about the sort of society that New Zealand should be.[24] In historian James Belich's terminology, was it to be a 'tighter' or a 'looser' society?[25]

The Auckland Sunday trams issue

The 1903 debate over the running of electric trams in Auckland on Sundays is helpfully understood within this societal, tighter/looser, conceptual framework. The Sunday tram issue was already longstanding in 1903. In 1887 the Auckland Tramway Company sought permission from the Auckland Council to run trams on Sundays. Although the *NZ Herald* strongly opposed the application, this was not on the basis that it

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[23] NZB, October 1898, 156.

[24] For similar comment in relation to later debates over sexuality, see Jeffrey Weeks, 'Sexuality and History Revisited: A Reader', in Kim M. Phillips & Barry Reay (eds), *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, New York, 2002, 27-41 at 34.

[25] For Belich on 'tight' New Zealand society, see his *Paradise Reforged*, 121ff.

was a religious or theological issue, but the newspaper's concern was rather over the well-being of workers who would be forced to work on Sunday if the application succeeded. The work-free-Sunday principle was 'an unspeakable boon' to workers that should be carefully guarded. Thus the work-free-Sunday principle should not be compromised unless 'absolutely necessary'.[26]

By way of context we should note that a feature of New Zealand at this time was widespread concern for fairness and justice for workers, exemplified in the heroic stature given to Samuel Parnell who successfully fought for an eight-hour working day in the early 1840s. The importance of this matter was evident in the large Labour Day parades, celebrating the eight-hour day and workers' rights, that began to be held in New Zealand from 1890, and which then led on to making Labour Day a statutory public holiday from 1899. We should not underestimate the strength of feeling over work on Sunday that surrounded the 1903 debate – nor should we view it simply as a narrow religious issue.

In addition to the labour issue, the 1887 *NZ Herald* article highlighted the lifestyle issue. Sunday was a different day, a quiet day. Let the Sunday trams begin, and that quiet would be replaced by a 'bustle and hurrying to and fro in our streets'. Arguments of labour and lifestyle were against the trams.[27]

While the Sunday tram application failed in 1887, the matter resurfaced in 1903. This time the matter was to be settled by a referendum of Auckland ratepayers and householders. And this time the *NZ Herald* stance was different – because the world was now different. New Zealand's other major cities had Sunday trams.[28] Auckland itself had some Sunday transport, with Sunday ferries and a Sunday suburban train service from Onehunga. Moreover, modern city life was a different life. Walking was becoming a lost art. The 'pleasures of contemplation' had given way to a 'strange restlessness that marks the city dweller'. The different world meant that there was now rising public demand for public transport. This mood was unstoppable. Thus 'the referendum is not really whether we shall or shall not have Sunday trams in Auckland, but . . . whether we will let them run at once or will delay them for a little longer'.[29]

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[26] *NZ Herald* (NZH), 26 April 1887, 4.
[27] NZH, 26 April 1887, 4.
[28] Noted by 'Advance Auckland' letter in NZH, 16 September 1903, 7.
[29] NZH, 28 September 1903, 4.

Notwithstanding the calmness and clarity expressed in the *NZ Herald*, the issue aroused passionate debate. A number of large public meetings, mainly in opposition to the proposal, were held.[30] Scores of letters were written to the newspapers. On the day before the poll the *Auckland Star* had an entire page of letters, another column and a half of editorial, and a further half column of more general comment, all on the imminent poll.[31]

The fact that there was markedly a religious dimension to the poll is indicated in the content of the *Auckland Star's* full page on Monday 28 September on the imminent poll. Most of that page consisted of excerpts from sermons on the topic preached at ten services around the city (Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational, Churches of Christ, Unitarian and Roman Catholic). There were also comments from four public anti-tram meetings which seem to have been dominated by clergy. The non-Anglican evangelical churches were adamantly against Sunday trams. The two reported Anglican speakers were also against the idea. One, Archdeacon Calder, articulated his concern in terms of the need to protect workers. The other, Canon MacMurray, clearly took a moderate stance: running trams on Sunday should not be seen as a sin, but it would put a strain on tramway workers who needed a regular day of rest. It is striking that all four reported Catholic clergy were strongly in favour of Sunday trams. The duty of Christians on that day was simply to attend church. What they did in terms of relaxation and innocent pleasure after church was their business. Rev. Fr. Benedict could not resist having a crack at sourpuss Protestantism:

> The people on the continent went to early mass, and for the remainder of the day they enjoyed themselves, and the superb happiness portrayed on their faces who [sic, probably 'was'] in marked contrast to the sanctimonious Englishmen who went to service late, and searched the streets for material to talk about and scandalise.[32]

The Rev. Joseph Clark, minister of the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle (the central Baptist church of Auckland) was in the centre of the fray. At an anti-Sunday tram meeting attended by 'thousands', he was mover of a motion urging voters to vote against trams in order to 'conserve the weekly rest day'. The newspaper summary of his speech in support of his motion included the following:

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[30] See, for example, NZH, 14 September 1903, 7.
[31] *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2, 5.
[32] *Auckland Star*, 28 September 1903, 3.

> Writers in the newspapers had charged the opponents of the Sunday running of the trams with Puritanism. Well, they were right, and he for one was proud to be so called. (Applause.) The people of New Zealand would be the better for a little more of the Puritan spirit. (A voice: 'Amen! Amen!). . . . He gave a description of the Continental Sunday, and said that something had been said about the trams bringing people from the suburbs into the city to the churches. Well, he supposed his church would benefit by such an arrangement, so many of his people living at a distance, but better the churches be empty, he said, than that the trams run to fill them. As the citizens loved their homes and their children, let them vote against the running of the trams on Sunday.[33]

Clark preached an impassioned sermon to his congregation the following day. Denouncing the 'commercial tyranny' of the profit-seeking tramway company, he asserted:

> If Continental people were not contented with the quiet Auckland Sabbath let them go home and not come to ruin the Church of Christ and blast and ruin the homes of the people. Motormen had nerves, and six days a week was sufficient for them to be at their post. 'We have been given six days in which to work,' he concluded, 'and they want to rob us of the seventh. Determine before high Heaven that this war shall bring defeat upon the enemies of God.'[34]

The actual referendum language was expressed in terms of whether to approve trams running 'on the Lord's Day' [not 'Sunday']. Thus it is hardly surprising that the anti-tram people commonly couched their opposition in religious terms.[35] The fourth commandment of the Decalogue ('remember the sabbath day to keep it holy') was enough reason for some: 'the Creator ordained a seventh day of rest, which has never been abrogated'.[36] At the same time much of the case for having a tram-free Sunday was expressed in terms of worker concern. An extreme statement of this point was that if the tramways men finished up working seven days a week, 'the deprivation of their most needful rest would

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[33] NZH, 28 September 1903, 6.
[34] *Auckland Star*, 28 September 1903, 3.
[35] *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 5.
[36] 'Veritas' letter in NZH, 22 September 1903, 3; 'Common Sense', letter in NZH, 25 September 1903, 6; 'Southern Cross', letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3.

undoubtedly, sooner or later, end in both mental and bodily collapse, and are not our asylums already overcrowded?'[37] It was a form of selfishness not to forego one's desire for fresh air and pleasure in order to ensure tramways workers had their day of rest.[38]

Supporters of trams queried the motivation of those who said they cared for the workers and opposed unnecessary work on the sabbath. If they really had compassion, why did these 'psalm-singers' not have cold food on Sundays instead of making some poor servant girl cook a roast dinner?[39] And where was their care for the 'long-suffering' horses that currently pulled 'buses' seven days a week and which would gradually be spelled by Sunday trams?[40] Displacement of horse-drawn transport on Sundays with trams would in fact lead to reduced numbers of men working on Sundays, fewer men being needed for trams than for horse-drawn transport.[41] It was the middle class and the rich who opposed the Sunday trams – well they could, with their ability to afford their own horses and traps.[42]

Similar comments were made about anti-tram concern for a 'quiet Sunday' and 'nonsense' about the noise and dust of trams.[43] Tram noise was as nothing 'compared to the fiendish din made on Sundays by the religious communities in Cathedral Square, Christchurch – the band of the Salvation Army, the harmonium of some sect, the choir of another, and the frenzied speakers of all (who, by the way, preach only death, never life)'.[44]

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[37] 'Diogenes', letter in *Auckland Star*, 23 September 1903, 3.
[38] 'Veritas', letter in NZH, 22 September 1903, 3.
[39] 'Common-Sense', letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 53.
[40] A. Seaton, letter in *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 5; 'Farri', letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3.
[41] 'Reformer', letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3.
[42] 'Grey Lynn', letter in *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2.
[43] For advocacy of a quiet Sunday, see 'Consistent', letter in NZH, 30 September 1932, 7; William Rattray and 'A Visitor', letters in NZH, 30 September 1932, 6. For argued concern about noise and dust, see 'Common sense', letter in NZH, 25 September 1932, 6; 'Diogenes', letter in *Auckland Star*, 23 September 1903, 3; 'Colorado', letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3.
[44] 'Fresh Air', letter in *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1903, 2.

A lot of fear language was used by anti-tram people: fear of a 'continental Sunday',[45] fear of Sunday sport,[46] fear of increased drinking,[47] fear of national decay.[48] It was all too much for some of the pro-tram people. Significant anti-church feeling surfaced. Those who did not wish to use trams on Sunday had no right to stop others who took a contrary view.[49] The religious objectors were 'narrow-minded' people who sought to put others under the bondage of their church-driven laws.[50] William Cooper bitterly attacked sabbatarians for the recent past when they criticised people who kissed their spouse, cut their finger nails, or read Shakespeare on Sunday. Cooper himself had been reproved as a child for whistling on Sunday, noting though that such whistling was treated as a less serious matter if the music was of a sacred nature.[51] Opponents of sabbatarianism in 1903 depicted the anti-tram people as the 'Pharisaical party', with a negative and hair-splitting approach to life:

> The issue is one of narrower religious sentiment *versus* public convenience. . . . The stricter sabbatarians . . . have been equally narrow and vindictive in the past against the proposals to open the museums, public libraries and parks to the people, and they would allow no music to be played on the sacred day except that furnished in the churches. . . . To them, Sunday must always be a dismal day of gloom and wretchedness, instead of being what the Almighty intended, the happiest day of the week.[52]

The anti-tram people needed to become progressive, move with the times and stop delaying 'Auckland's progress and modernisation'.[53] Sunday trams would be good for outings and innocent recreation.[54]

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[45] NZH, 14 September 1903, 7; 16 September 1903, 7; 22 September 1903, 2; 28 September 1903, 6; 29 September 1903, 3; *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2.
[46] NZH, 29 September 1903, 3;
[47] NZH, 14 September 1903, 7; A. Daldy, letter in NZH, 29 September 1932, 3.
[48] NZH, 25 September 1903, 6.
[49] James Salinger, letter in NZH 22 September 1903, 3.
[50] 'Fresh Air', letter in *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1903, 2; John C. Earl, letter in *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1903, 3.
[51] *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2.
[52] Editorial in the *Observer*, 26 September 1903, 2.
[53] 'Anti-Sanctimony', letter in NZH, 28 September 1903, 6.
[54] James Salinger, letter in NZH, 22 September 1903, 3; 'A Visitor', letter in NZH, 30 September 1903, 6.

Much of the anti-tram fear was not simply what the Sunday trams themselves would do, but rather the precedent that they would set. They would become the thin edge of the wedge that would progressively secularise the sabbath. Subsequent activities would include Sunday sport (football and horse racing),[55] Sunday shopping[56] and Sunday work.[57] It was the threat to the six-day working week that particularly bothered an editorial writer in the *Auckland Star*: 'One kind of work leads rapidly and inevitably to another. . . . We prefer to think not only of to-day, but of the future in the distance'. This was not a religious argument: 'Entirely apart from its religious significance, the observance of Sunday as a day of rest from work and exciting amusement is of grave importance to every man and woman in Auckland'. In our 24/7 world we are likely to snort at the making of a mountain out of a molehill. From the point of view of 1903, however, there was a fear that the 24/7 world would emerge, a world that would need to invent a hitherto unknown term – 'burn-out'. Did they get that aspect wrong?

The 1903 referendum climax proved to be a cliff-hanger:

> 12,301 eligible voters
>
> 8,024 voted
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> 136 informal votes were cast
>
> 3,955 voted for the Sunday trams
>
> 3,933 voted against the Sunday tram[58]

It was a victory for the trams. What is remarkable is the closeness of the result, a majority of only twenty-two for the Sunday trams out of 8000 odd votes. It suggests that the church argument had major support in the community, even amongst many who were not churchgoers. Perhaps it was also the result of a coalescing of church and worker interests. Either way it does indicate remarkable church influence in the affairs of that era.

One sabbatarian concern was that the tram issue would be a precursor to increasing erosion of the sabbath. Although the tramways

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55 A. Daldy, letter in NZH, 29 September 1903, 3; W. Barraclough, letter in *Auckland Star*, 25 September 1903, 3.
56 'N.Z.', letter in NZH, 29 September 1903, 3.
57 Fred A. G. Cotterell, letter in *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1903, 2; 'Sunday Rest', letter in *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1903, 2; editorial in *Auckland Star*, 1 October 1903, 4.
58 NZH, 1 October 1903, 5.

company had given an assurance that the apparently noisy trams would not run during church service times, subsequent demand for a full Sunday service led to a further referendum (for a continuous Sunday service) in February 1916. This time there was relatively little heat in the arguments.[59] Because the focus this time was not one of sabbatarianism, but rather of noise interference with church services, this time all ministers (even including the Roman Catholic bishop) opposed the extension.[60] However, as 'F.H.W.' pointed out, places of entertainment (theatres, concert halls etc) seemed not to be troubled by tram noise. So the simple test should be 'the convenience of the majority'.[61] The result was hardly in doubt:

31,183 eligible voters

10,306 votes

6,581 votes for continuous service

3,595 votes against the proposal[62]

Clearly, future Sunday public transport would be determined by public demand, not by religious opposition.

Churches fighting a losing battle

For at least the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Presbyterian Church (supported by other evangelical allies) was probably the doughty fighter *par excellence* on the sabbath issue. Its General Assembly resolved in 1907 'that the Assembly earnestly take up the question of Sabbath desecration in the Dominion; that they endeavour to obtain legislation in the subject, and that a Standing Committee . . . be appointed and report each year.'[63] There was a lot to be concerned about: Sunday movies, Sunday transport, Sunday sport, Sunday pleasure generally. The committee's 1911 report, for example, articulated Westland presbytery concern at Sunday evening picture shows and Waikato presbytery concern at Sunday picnics.

In 1911 the convenor of the Sabbath Day Observance Committee of the Presbyterian Church called together a meeting of concern relating

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[59] NZH, 16 February 1916, 6.
[60] NZH, 10 February 1916, 9; 12 February 1916, 9; 16 February 1916, 4.
[61] NZH, 15 February 1916, 9.
[62] NZH, 17 February 1916, 9.
[63] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1907, 55.

to the use of Sunday. Representatives of all the main Protestant churches (including the Church of England) were present. An outcome of the meeting was the formation of a Lord's Day Alliance of New Zealand, having the object: 'to promote a better religious observance of the Lord's Day, and to secure it as a Day of Rest for the whole community'.[64] This quickly catalysed the formation of an opposing 'Sports Defence League' with a primary object 'to oppose any restriction of the enjoyment by individuals of reasonable recreation on the Sunday'. The seriousness with which the League viewed the church threat can be seen in its employing a full-time secretary at £500 per annum plus travelling expenses to organise branches throughout the country.[65]

The Presbyterian Sabbath Observance Committee had to report in 1913 that the vision of a national Lord's Day Alliance was largely a failure. Its strength was limited to the Auckland branch, which was headed by the bishop of Auckland and had wide church support. Beyond Auckland there was little support, though a few branches were set up elsewhere.[66] All was not bad news for the Sabbath Observance Committee in 1913. It is true that it did have to back away from putting pressure on the Police Department where some police were receiving only one Sunday in thirteen off duty. But its backing away was only because it was temporarily inadvisable to proceed further, 'in view . . of certain circumstances existing at the time' [namely the major industrial unrest]. However, the committee was able to report the defeat of a proposal to play Sunday tennis at a club, the defeat of an attempt to open a bowling green on Sundays 'largely through the strength of the Presbyterian element', and an assurance that Sunday working of an oil-bore at New Plymouth would cease. One gains the impression that the committee saw itself as a perpetual watchdog, seeking to turn back the waves of Sunday erosion. But are tides stoppable?

The tides were within the church as well as without. As early as 1902 the Presbyterian Church was shocked to find that the heavy demand for Dunedin's Sunday trams was largely church-going demand. How dare Christians deprive the tramways workers of their Sunday rest

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[64] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1911, 156. The 1911 New Zealand Baptist assembly passed a motion in support of the proposed Lord's Day Alliance: New Zealand Baptist Union Handbook 1912, 23.

[65] Ibid., 158.

[66] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1913, 124-26.

and foster the 'sin of Sabbath-breaking'? Christians should refrain from using the Sunday trams.[67]

Two prominent Baptist families in Auckland shared this view. The Turners and Penmans, living at Mount Albert, walked to and from the Mount Eden Baptist church (a distance of around eight kilometres each way) twice a Sunday because they declined to use public transport. Eventually wearying of this, they started a fellowship at Mount Albert in 1913 which grew into the thriving Mount Albert Baptist Church.[68]

The usefulness of Sunday transport meant that the Presbyterian sabbatarian view was increasingly eroding, even within the church. To Presbyterian chagrin, Scots College, a Presbyterian-sponsored school, was bussing its boarders to church parades on Sundays in 1919. The General Assembly was forced to recognise that the school had a free hand on such matters, but it did urge that 'care be taken to impose no unnecessary Sunday work'.[69] Such sentiment was whistling in the wind. Three years later the Presbyterian Church had to recognise that Sundays were increasingly becoming devoted to activities such as picnics, games, sport, concerts, entertainments and political meetings. The rot was in church as well as society: church young people 'think it no derogation to their religion to spend the hours of Sunday afternoon in playing tennis or other games'. What could be done?

> The Assembly calls upon its faithful people to remember the Lord's Day to keep it holy, and enjoins upon its ministers the duty of frequently impressing upon their congregations the sacredness and obligations of the day which is at once the charter of man's freedom and, next to the Gospel, the Church's chief instrument for the salvation of the world.[70]

The following year, 1923, saw the Presbyterian Church plugging away again at its losing internal struggle. Its solution was greater discipline and education, a calling on its members to 'uphold the Lord's

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[67] 'The Sunday Train Scandal', *Outlook*, 13 September 1902, 21.

[68] J. Ayson Clifford, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.: Volume 2 – 1882-1914*, Wellington: New Zealand Baptist Historical Society, 1992, 78; W.H. Edgar, *Auckland Baptist Association: One Hundred Years 1892-1992*, Auckland: New Zealand Baptist Historical Society, 1993, 27.

[69] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1919, 41.

[70] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1922, 168-69.

Day as a day of rest and worship' and an enjoining of its ministers to 'read this resolution to their congregations on the first Lord's Day of October and to preach on the subject of Lord's Day observance'.[71] This proved, however, to be inadequate sandbagging against the eroding leisure tides that were continuing to creep across the sabbath sands.

Did the matter need a rethink? The Anglican Church, which had never been fully convinced anyway about the need for a strict sabbath, certainly thought so. Its Sessional Committee on Social Service, in calling for higher standards in society in 1922, was wary about being negative and attempting to solve problems by repressive rules and legislation:

> Your Committee believes that, while repressive measures are necessary, and to some extent effective, the ultimate cure of these evils is of a totally different kind. The only way to get the darkness out of a room is to let in the light. Evil must be overcome with good. . . . Your Committee feels that in many ways there is need for a reform in the presentation of Christianity. We need, for example, an enlightened view of Sunday observance which, while emphasizing the duty and worth of worship, will recognise reasonable demands for recreation on this weekly day of rest.[72]

Where the Anglican Church went on this point, other churches were later to follow – but not immediately. Residual sabbatarianism remained strong in the interwar era.[73] We close this part of the article in 1930. Two contrasting incidents in 1930 show that sabbatarianism was still significant in society. In 1930 the Protestant ministers of Thames called on the Borough Council to lock up swings and other equipment in the children's playground on Sundays. The 'sanctity of the day' was more important than the 'playthings' of the children. Fortunately for bored children, the council saw things differently.[74] However, the Auckland City councillors of the same time period declined a Rationalist Association petition to make council play apparatus available to children on Sundays. One of the stated reasons in declining the petition was that it would have involved further Sunday work. However, another influencing factor was that some councillors viewed the Rationalists as

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[71] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1923, 40.

[72] *Proceedings of the General Synod of the Church of the Province of New Zealand*, 1922, 62.

[73] See, for example, minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, 1929, 65, referring to 'the evil of Sunday railway excursions'.

[74] NZH, 24 January 1930, 12.

an anti-religious organisation. The two councillors who supported the petition saw the council decision as 'narrow and puritanical'.[75] Right or wrong, the churches' sabbatarian stance was still influencing society.

New Zealand Baptists may not have been as prominent as the Presbyterians in the public arena in urging sabbatarian views on society – probably because they had less of a tradition generally in so speaking and because they lacked much of the strong Presbyterian national committees that fostered Presbyterian speaking out on public issues. Yet early-twentieth-century Baptist sermons and writings indicate a deeply embedded sabbatarian perspective. This raises two questions that are particularly pertinent to core Baptist perspectives. The first question is whether it was 'Baptist' to seek to impose their sabbatarian views on society on a whole, especially given Baptist emphasis on liberty of conscience. The second question is whether it was wise to arouse the ire of non-sabbatarians and create a perception of Christianity being a kill-joy religion, when a primary driver of the early Baptists was evangelism. Irrespective of whether sabbatarianism was right or wrong, the early-twentieth-century Baptist anti-sabbatarian public stance seems opposed to Baptist principles and to Baptist evangelistic objectives.

Part Two: Sunday or fun-day? The voices of the churches in New Zealand, 1931-2000

Early twentieth-century threat to the sabbath related significantly to transport and to private amusement. Increasingly from the 1930s the issue related to public pleasure. It might be becoming rather less of a sin for a father and son to kick a ball together on a Sunday? But what of thirty players (and a referee) in a Sunday rugby match? Was the first day of the week to remain Sunday or was it to become fun-day?[76]

The mystery train saga, 1932

Debate over Sunday transport and the use of Sunday broke out with renewed vigour at the height of the great depression in September 1932. This was a time when many people were in desperate need of hope and cheer in their lives. The railways sought to provide this hope and cheer

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[75] *Sun*, 29 August 1930, 13.

[76] I remember this catchy slogan, printed in a Baptist Bible Class booklet in the early 1960s, being the basis of argument for a non-sport Sunday.

(and add another profitable string to their bow) by initiating the use of Sunday 'mystery trains'. These would take people out of Auckland to some recreational but unannounced destination. Effectively such trains would become hikers' trains. Immediately, public controversy erupted. During September 1932 the *NZ Herald* published 52 letters on the topic. Why the fuss when, as we have seen, Sunday trams had now been around for almost thirty years? The difference likely lay in the purpose of the travel. For many of the earlier Sunday users, trams provided transport to church. Obviously many used them for other reasons as well, but the linkage of the trams with an arguably legitimate sabbath purpose took some of the sting out of their operation. This was not the case with the new innovation. The mystery trains were not taking people to church. Just the opposite, they were taking them away from it. It was creating a counter-attraction to church. The mystery trains did not facilitate worship. Their clear purpose was rather to contribute to pleasure.

Thus to strict sabbatarians the new practice of mystery trains was an unequivocal breaking of the sabbath. It was a patent violation of one of the Ten Commandments: 'the Sunday pleasure seeker has no right . . . to tamper with God's law to suit his own sordid ends any more than the thief or the murderer has'.[77] In such a worldview, widespread breaking the Sabbath would bring God's judgment on the nation as a whole.[78] 'H.T.' thundered in the vein of an Old Testament prophet:

> God who made this world and created us, has given us certain laws to keep, which, if we break we must bear the punishment. And one law is 'that we should remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.' We have a right to protest against any who break the laws of this country, and so we have equal right to protest against any who break the law of the Sabbath, lest the wrath of God come upon us also.[79]

'Churchman' went so far as to attribute the current depression to this type of breach of God's laws: 'Without much doubt, our troubles to-day in New Zealand are largely attributable to the fact that for 50 years we have been sowing the seeds of a Godless nation, and to-day we are reaping.'[80] If on the other hand, according to some sabbatarians, our

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[77] *NZ Herald* (NZH), 10 September 1932, 14.
[78] NZH, 10 September 1932, 14; 15 September 1932, 13; NZH, 16 September 1932, 15; NZH, 17 September 1932, 15.
[79] NZH, 15 September 1932, 13.
[80] NZH, 17 September 1932, 15.

behaviour was different and we kept the Sabbath more faithfully, this would bring great benefit and blessing to the nation. In fact it might even solve the depression crisis. 'A.M.G.' boldly asserted, 'I believe the surest way of ending the present depression is to get back to God by obedience to His Commandments.'[81] If pleasure was not a legitimate usage of Sunday, there was no need for Sunday hikers' trains. Pleasure trains should rather run on Saturday afternoons (the appropriate time for leisure).[82]

One of the arguments of sabbatarians was that developments such as Sunday trains created pressures on railway workers who could not enjoy a regular day of rest and refreshment each week. The question remained, however, whether that concern lay at the heart of the church objection or whether it was an argument from expediency designed to attract wider support to the churches' sabbatarian cause. One correspondent seemed to sense a lack of real care towards workers. So he laid down a challenge: if the churches really cared that workers got sunshine and refreshment, then let them show it by providing support for a five-day working week, thus creating opportunity for Saturday hiking instead.[83]

Many citizens opposed the sabbatarian stance of the mystery train opponents. Some of the anti-sabbatarians retained sympathy for the fostering of worship on Sunday. However it was possible both to go on a mystery train excursion and also to worship – trains returned to the departure point in time for those inclined to worship to attend an evening service.[84]

Moreover, ministers should start to think laterally. Rather than expect to have everybody come to them, why not go to the people? In particular, they could easily join the hikers with their train and take a religious service along the way.[85] One surprising aspect of this suggestion is that it assumed that hikers would not find such a service obtrusive. 'Non-hiker' was sure that such a service 'would be participated in and appreciated by all'.[86] E.H. Batchelar, in speaking of his resentment at attempted interference with his hiking freedom, encouraged ministers to come along with them and hold an outdoor service: 'there will be many

[81] NZH, 14 September 1932, 13.
[82] NZH, 12 September 1932, 13.
[83] NZH, 7 September 1932, 12; 14 September 1932, 13.
[84] NZH, 12 September 1932, 13; 15 September 1932, 13.
[85] NZH, 10 September 1932, 14; 13 September 1932, 13; 16 September 1932, 15; NZH, 17 September 1932, 15.
[86] NZH, 10 September 1932, 14.

among our thousands or so who never darken the doors of a place of worship, but who would enjoy an open-air service'.[87]

Some of the opponents of sabbatarianism were themselves church people. A major concern of such people was the effect on the image of the church – attacking people's pleasures and freedoms risked needlessly alienating the sympathy of good citizens.[88] The church's sabbatarian stance was far too oppositional and negative: 'Let us rather appeal to the best in our hiking friends than to aggravate the worst.'[89]

Perhaps, too, the church's stance was too narrow, in insisting on consecrated buildings as being the only place for worship on Sundays. A better response was to love both God and nature, and to value the worship of God in nature as well as in church.[90] There was a wonderful goodness in nature, and to spend time there was conducive to worship of God. 'H.R.' asserted: 'I have yet to learn that an occasional Sunday morning's country walk, enjoying and contemplating the wonderful works of God, can be regarded as a desecration of the Sabbath.'[91] In fact, to one church-goer, 'a man-made church is a very trivial thing [compared] to our beautifully-clad ranges'.[92]

One significant feature of the debate was the restrained nature of the challenge to religious opposition to the development. A few critics did query any church attempt to get people to church by cutting off counter-attractions. 'Shellback', for example, noted that 'intolerance of those who do not [go to church] has in the past caused much pain and suffering'.[93] 'True Sport' was quite blunt: 'When. . people . . . start to interfere with what other people care to do on the Sunday I feel constrained to point out to them that they would be doing more good to mind their own business'.[94] On the whole, however, there was little anti-clerical mood to tell the church to 'get lost' in its attempt to prescribe for all citizens. The tenor of the debate rather assumed that the church remained a significant institution and that it was a good thing to go to church (even though the correspondent might personally not do so). Further, while it was obtrusive of the church to shut down the hikers' trains, it would not be obtrusive for clergy to come along and hold a

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87 NZH, 17 September 1932, 15.
88 NZH, 16 September 1932, 15; 17 September 1932, 15.
89 NZH, 13 September 1932, 13.
90 NZH, 16 September 1932, 15.
91 NZH, 12 September 1932, 13; also NZH, 15 September 1932, 13.
92 NZH, 17 September 1932, 15.
93 NZH, 7 September 1932, 12.
94 NZH, 8 September 1932, 13.

service either on the train or somewhere along the trail. The seriousness of the debate and the restrained expression of the anti-sabbatarians both point both to the continuing influence of the sabbatarian argument and to the continuing influence of the church in society.

While sabbatarians might continue to fulminate against Sunday transport they could not do anything about it. The signs were clear in the mystery trains debate that the battle was lost. Another indicator of this was the failed prosecution in 1932 of officials of the Auckland Aero Club for flying for hire on Sundays under section 18 of the Police Offences Act 1927, which banned business transactions on that day. The magistrate saw the prosecution as 'absurd' and dismissed the case. If a taxicab could legitimately be hired to drive around the waterfront, then it would be absurd not to be allowed to fly over it.[95] Society was increasingly unwilling to put up with hair-splitting 'nonsense'.

New Zealand Baptists, however, maintained their rearguard attempt to preserve the sabbath in society. A resolution was passed at their 1932 annual national gathering:

> The Conference is gravely concerned with the attack on the quiet Sunday by the Railway Department. Their deliberate encouragement of Sunday travel for holiday purposes is, in the opinion of the Conference a menace to the most precious of the possessions of the Nation, to wit, the quiet Sunday. Conference calls on the nation to maintain that priceless legacy from the past.[96]

In the course of the debate, Dr J.J. North, principal of the denomination's theological college and then president of the Baptist Union, weighed in:

> The unprincipled action of the Railway Department, not in meeting a demand, but deliberately creating one, is an attempt—I might almost say a dastardly attempt—to infringe on the day of rest of working people. . . . No one desires to force people to go to church, but the quiet Sunday, at least, is the happy heritage of the British people. This is an attempt to destroy one of the most sacred rights of British democracy.[97]

The rhetoric may, to a subsequent generation, seem 'over the top'. However, it does indicate the passion with which New Zealand Baptists

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[95] NZH, 17 September 1932, 13.
[96] New Zealand Baptist Union Handbook, 1932-1933, 28.
[97] *New Zealand Baptist*, November 1932, 345; NZH, 18 October 1932, 11.

sought to keep Sunday from becoming fun-day. North wrote an editorial in the *New Zealand Baptist* in 1934, noting 'a steady growth of Sunday travel and of Sunday sport' and lamenting the nation's 'losing a pearl of great price', namely 'the quiet Sunday'. He agreed that there was no basis in New Zealand for a 'compulsory Sabbatarianism'. However, in his view, '[a] triumphant case can be made out for a compulsory and unanimous day of rest'.[98]

Clamp-down on Sunday movies

Although Sunday public transport was here to stay by the 1930s, this was not the case with Sunday movies. Screening movies was a good way to draw a crowd or to make money. Sections of the church were early to get into the showing of movies (sometimes on Sundays, sometimes on other days), with the Mount Eden Congregational Church being innovatory in this way as early as 1926.[99] 'Scrim' (Rev. C.G. Scrimgeour, whose commitment was much more to humanity and much less to Christian doctrine or to his Methodist Church) screened Sunday night non-religious 'feature movies' to crowds topping 1500 in his Auckland City Missioner role in 1929-1930 and his Anglican counterpart followed suit.[100] Soon seven or eight theatres with a total seating capacity of more than 13,000 were doing the same. One of these was that adversary of religion, the Rationalist Association, whose goals included 'the abrogation of all laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for the purpose of culture and recreation'.[101] Methodist and Anglican sabbatarian pressures eventually forced the closure of their own missioner-fostered movie sessions. Had this not been done, the churches would have no basis to oppose Sunday films more generally. Once Scrim's films stopped, his Sunday night congregations shrank from 1500 to 100.[102] It was entertainment not religion that the crowds were seeking. A few weeks later the City Council prohibited Sunday 'entertainments'.

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98 *New Zealand Baptist*, June 1934, 166.
99 *Auckland Star*, 17 April 1926, 4.
100 Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, 1930, 118-19.
101 Bill Cooke, *Heathen in Godzone: Seventy Years of Rationalism in New Zealand*, Auckland: NZ Association of Rationalists & Humanists, 1998, 27, 32, 48.
102 Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, 1931, 134-36; Ian F. Faulkner, *The Decisive Decade: Some Aspects of the Development and Character of the Methodist Central Mission, Auckland, 1927-1937*, circulated as No. 37 of the proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 1982.

NZ Herald expressed full support for the ban: there was a need for continuing 'fidelity to what is central in the religion of the nation', lest there be a 'levelling of Sunday to weekday standards'. The purpose of Sunday was not simply rest and recreation, but the 'culture of the soul [was] its chief purpose'. So it was appropriate for the council to step in with its ban.[103]

The Council ban soon led to legal moves against the Rationalists. Although the Rationalist program included a lecture as well as a film, the Rationalist organisation was prosecuted and fined. A subsequent appeal to the Supreme Court [today's High Court] failed.[104] The fact that the Supreme Court judge, Justice Herdman, saw fit to label the Rationalists as a 'cult' suggests that significant, mainstream-society sympathy still remained with the church and was hostile to its adversaries. Financial stringencies resulting from revenue loss and proceedings costs forced the New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Rationalism to close and then to re-commence as the Rationalist Association and Sunday Freedom League.[105] That very name is indicative of the fact that the greatest way in which the church then impinged on the lives of ordinary citizens was probably through its sabbatarianism.

The Sunday-movies approach of Auckland City paralleled that of other bodies at that time. Roman Catholic Father J.J. O'Byrne, priest in a church untroubled about having a tight sabbath, had managed to get a permit to screen the sacred film, *King of Kings*, in Mount Eden in 1932, even though the issuing of this permit was contrary to the Mount Eden Borough Council's policy. In defence, it was pointed out that admission to the theatre was by voluntary donation and the total proceeds went to charity. A fiery discussion then ensued at a meeting of the borough councillors, with the mayor having the last word: 'As far as I am concerned, there will never be another picture shown on Sunday in Mount Eden.'[106]

Tight control on the issue of Sunday movies persisted well into the 1950s. When the Auckland City Council decided to relax its absolute

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[103] NZH, 22 November 1930, 10. A year later, the Council defined entertainments more closely, permitting concerts but specifically banning programs that included dancing or movies: NZH, 16 October 1931, 5.

[104] For reports on the successful prosecution see *Auckland Star*, 12 June 1931, 5; 16 September 1931, 9; 21 September 1931, 9.

[105] Cooke, 32-34. An *NZ Observer* editorial also suggested that the City Council move to stop movies was partly motivated by anti-Rationalist feeling: *NZ Observer*, 6 November 1930, 2-3.

[106] NZH, 13 July 1932, 10.

ban in 1935, only bona fide organisations not aiming for private profit could screen movies. In addition, these organisations had first to get the permission of a council committee chairman who would also act as censor of what was screened.[107] While one movie theatre was opened during World War Two as a concession to the needs of visiting servicemen, this outlet was closed as the war came to an end.[108] The 1950s, however, saw a bit of loosening, with commercial operators now being allowed to screen Sunday movies at two city locations, but the operators were careful to screen only films approved for general exhibition.[109]

Wellington had also loosened its ban on the screening of movies in World War Two to give some entertainment relief to servicemen on leave. However, a condition was that a clergyman should give a five-minute address prior to each Sunday afternoon screening. This practice continued into the 1950s with the Rev. Lloyd Geering, then serving as a Presbyterian minister, undertaking that role for a fee around 1951.[110]

Elsewhere bans on Sunday movie screening continued throughout the 1950s. In 1958 the Pukekohe Ministers' Fraternal (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist) sent a delegation to the Pukekohe Borough Council, objecting to a recent council decision to allow the showing of commercial films on Sunday nights. The ministers argued that the Ten Commandments (including the fourth one on keeping the sabbath holy) were 'the foundation of civilisation as we know it', bring blessing for the obedient and retribution for the disobedient. They warned:

> Lose Sunday and you lose Christianity; lose Christianity and you lose Christian morality, sooner or later, in this generation or the next. And where does the loss of Christianity lead? The Communist rule, atheist and amoral, is the end of this downward trail. Lose this book [the Bible], the faith it contains and the day for its preservation and you lose all that we count dearest.

In case these arguments did not sufficiently sway the councillors, the deputation reminded the councillors that the delegation 'voiced the opinion of above 1,000 responsible citizens of Pukekohe' [ignoring such

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[107] NZH, 28 June 1935, 13.
[108] *Auckland Star*, 6 April 1945, 3.
[109] NZH, 27 May 1958, 10; for earlier indication of Sunday theatre entertainment see Auckland City Council minutes 5 February 1953, 55.
[110] Lloyd Geering, *Wrestling with God: The Story of My Life*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2006, 106.

a sizeable group could threaten re-election prospects]. The councillors were swayed, resolving 'that permission to screen commercial pictures in Pukekohe on Sundays be suspended for 12 months'.[111]

All this indicates that it took up until the 1960s for the last vestiges of sabbatarian control of Sunday movies to disappear throughout New Zealand. Increasingly it was the end of a non-Sunday-entertainment era generally. Auckland night-clubs, despite being a 'menace' and a threat to morality,[112] were able to push their closing beyond midnight until 1 a.m. on Sunday from 1945, and until 2 a.m. from 1962.[113] With the 1 a.m. extension, churches lobbied hard to have the innovation rescinded, but to no avail.[114] It was another thin end of the wedge: the quiet Sunday was on its way out.

Sunday sport and the fading of the 'quiet Sunday'

By the late 1920s there was increasing demand for Sunday sport. Almost all golf clubs were open on that day. Tennis clubs were also moving in the same direction.[115] By 1934 three-quarters of Auckland's tennis clubs had Sunday play. Some of the others were located on Auckland City Council ground and subject to a Sunday ban. This ban was revoked in April 1934 by 10 votes to 9. It looks likely that intense lobbying of councillors occurred, for the matter was re-opened a month later. This time the ban was re-imposed in relation to council-owned locations by 11 votes to 10. The council decision displayed hair-splitting distinctions that commonly characterised the ongoing sabbath struggles (activity A ought not to be banned, but activity B, which looked like A, should be banned because of some narrow distinction). In this instance the mayor, Mr G.W. Hutchison, made this sort of distinction. In his view there were two types of council-located tennis clubs: those in public parks and those on council land used solely for tennis. He was not prepared to sanction play in the former context because players there would be amongst other

111 *Franklin Times*, 18 July 1958, 4; 22 July 1958, 5; *NZ Baptist*, October 1958, 554.
112 Editorial in *Board and Council: Local Authorities Review*, 23 February 1944, 1.
113 Auckland City Council minutes 1 November 1945, 731-32; 2 July 1962, 49.
114 The lobbying churches and Christian-related groups were the Presbyterian, Methodist and Open Brethren Churches of Auckland, the Christian Businessmen's Association and the YMCA: Auckland City Council minutes 22 November 1945, 920.
115 *Truth Seeker*, 3 September 1927, 7.

citizens who objected to seeing them play on Sundays. However, he was prepared to sanction Sunday play in the latter context because those who objected to Sunday play need not go near the courts. Because the original proposal was an all-or-nothing one, lacking the mayor's sort of distinction, he would support a Sunday ban on tennis clubs on all council-owned land.[116] A blanket-ban on Sunday tennis on council property was short-lived: sixteen months later the council lifted the ban in relation to tennis on the Victoria Park courts.[117]

Caution persisted for some time yet on the issue of Sunday sport. A ban on sport for boarders at Mount Albert Grammar School was lifted in 1935 but only after there was board discussion that noted that the decision would not affect church services. In the discussion one board member at least stressed that games might be permissible, but not 'organised games' such as football. The issue was clearly a sensitive one, with the final decision that 'games may be enjoyed *discreetly* on Sundays'.[118] As late as 1955, in giving permission to the Auckland Football Association to hold a representative trial match on Blandford Park, the City Council imposed the condition that spectators be barred. The secretary of the Association, in expressing his unhappiness about the spectator ban and the resultant inability to take up a collection to support the injured players' fund, nevertheless stated that apart from games in support of charity, 'the association is opposed to organized Sunday sport itself'.[119] While that decade saw increasing though limited normalising of Sunday sport, nevertheless the issue was a sensitive one and pro-Sunday-sport advocates needed to tread cautiously. Vestiges of older attitudes persisted, however, even into the 1970s. In 1973 the Pukekohe Borough Council declined an application for the annual Benson and Hedges 500 long distance motor race to be held on Sunday, not, it said, because it was opposed to Sunday sport, but because the race would run at a time which competed with church services.[120] It was the fading grin of the Cheshire cat.

Presbyterians and the sabbath

Despite occasional sabbatarian victories, the Presbyterian Church was coming to realise even back in the 1930s that it could no longer

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116 NZH, 11 May 1934, 8.
117 Auckland City Council minutes 19 September 1935, 1249.
118 *Dominion* 26 September 1935, 8. Emphasis added.
119 *Auckland Star*, 27 May 1955, 29.
120 'No Sunday Date for Car Race', NZH, 12 July 1973, sect. 1, p.1.

significantly control the behaviour of society as a whole and that its focus must be more on influencing its own members to keep Sunday holy. Its 1933 Public Questions Committee report made the following observations:

- The Committee is deeply concerned about the futility of much of the Church's appeal to the secular arm for consideration of the vital realities enshrined in a religious observance of Sunday
- The Church's position is being gravely weakened by the laxity in this matter of many of her own members
- The Committee would therefore recommend that less emphasis should be placed on the appeal to the secular arm and more on the fact that "the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God".[121]

However, the church continued to bark at Sunday-activity innovations. There was concern, for example, in 1938 when elections were held for the first time on a Saturday. The convenor of the Presbyterian Public Questions Committee met with Walter Nash and received government assurances that no work would be done by the returning officers on the Sunday immediately after the election.[122] That committee also gave support to funeral directors in discouraging Sunday funerals in 1939.[123] And as late as 1964 the convenor of that committee met with a senior officer of the Tourist Department to ascertain the extent to which members of tour parties were given opportunity to attend Sunday services.[124] Such measures all had the look of rearguard actions of a retreating army.

Erosion of a stricter Sunday observance was gathering momentum in mid-twentieth- century New Zealand. By 1951 the Presbyterian minister, D.G. Gordon, could see that the traditional church stance was a lost cause:

> Personally I cannot see New Zealand as a whole returning to a puritan Sabbath. Therefore any Church decisions on this subject

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121 *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1933, 89.

122 Public Questions Committee minutes 16 September 1938 and 21 October 1938 (Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Archives, GA21).

123 Public Questions Committee minutes 18 August 1939.

124 Public Questions Committee minutes 5 June 1964.

> should be made in view of our people living in a land with something akin to a continental Sunday.[125]

The same year his church seemed to take the same stance. Its Public Questions Committee, while stressing the obligation on Christians to be at a service of worship, took the view that how else the day should be spent was over to the conscience of each individual. The 1952 Public Questions Committee report, which General Assembly adopted, took a similar line, noting that recreation was a legitimate Sunday activity, and specifically including as recommended activities on Sunday:

> The enjoyment of literature, art, music, indoor and outdoor recreation of such a nature that it does not interfere with our Christian duties [of public worship etc] . . . or involve organised sport and such activities as would deprive others of the rest and benefits of the Lord's Day.[126]

Already, however, the issue of organised sport (which the Public Questions Committee still opposed) was challenging sabbath-minded churches. An early trigger for debate was cricket, with its five-day matches, which were often played against international teams from countries whose formative religion was not Christianity (for example the Indian sub-continent). Walter Hadlee, captain of the New Zealand cricket team (and father of three subsequent national representative cricketers, including Sir Richard Hadlee), warned, in preaching at Knox Church, Christchurch after an overseas tour in 1949, that there would be increasing pressure for competitive Sunday sport – 'a cancerous growth that will ultimately stifle any community that goes for it'.[127] In 1956 the Hawkes Bay Presbytery issued a statement opposing 'all forms of organised Sunday sport': 'The Presbyterian Church is convinced of the value of our present Sunday, and does not wish to see a Continental Sunday introduced into New Zealand. Organised sport is the thin edge of the wedge in this connection.'[128]

The Presbyterian Assembly accepted in 1960 that individuals 'may use their time on Sunday in healthy indoor and outdoor recreation as their consciences permit' but reaffirmed its opposition to organised Sunday sport on the following grounds:

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[125] *Outlook* 10 July 1951, 8-9.
[126] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1952, 224-26.
[127] *Outlook*, 14 December 1949, 13.
[128] *Outlook*, 1 May 1956, 7.

1. It involves more and more people in Sunday work – especially transport workers, caterers and so on and will involve more as it increases.

2. It makes demands on young people which interfere with their Christian training.

3. It creates a community attitude of mind which may unthinkingly accept more and more inroads into the value of Sunday.[129]

Baptists and Sunday sport

Baptists were part of the fight against organised Sunday sport. In 1952 the Timaru Baptists led by their pastor, the Rev. R.L. Fursdon, sought to get other bodies to join them in protest against a Sunday rugby special benefit match held in the city. No other body (and this presumably means no other church) would join them in the protest; so they went ahead on their own. The city council reply advised the church that 'the general policy of this Council is unfavourable to organised sporting events on Sunday'.[130] Such a reply indicates that the matter was still a sensitive subject and local body politicians would listen to this sort of protest.

However, Sunday sport rolled on. A *New Zealand Baptist* editorial in 1955 noted the ongoing attack on 'the strict observance of Sunday' from three quarters, namely the 'R.C. element', the Seventh Day Adventists and some sporting bodies. The latter represented 'the forces of paganism'. The editorial noted that the way Sunday was observed was a hallmark of a 'Protestant Christian' and that 'Christians must give Sunday sport a wide berth even if it means losing matches or titles'.[131]

One Christian to follow this sort of advice in 1960 was Brian Wood, who was on the verge of gaining selection for the Auckland rugby team. However, he declined to join the team training that would likely have led to his selection: 'As a Christian (Baptist) I feel I cannot take part in Sunday sport.' The *New Zealand Baptist* congratulated Wood on his stand.[132]

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[129] *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand*, 1960, 110a.
[130] *New Zealand Baptist*, February 1953, 34.
[131] *New Zealand Baptist*, October 1955, 235.
[132] *New Zealand Baptist*, July 1960, 167.

Several years later, three national cricket players (Victor Pollard, Brian Yuile and Bruce Murray – all Baptists) became heroes in the conservative Christian world of the mid-1960s for their stance in refusing to play in Sunday games.[133] The annual Baptist Assembly even passed a resolution in 1967 supporting their non-Sunday-sport stance.[134] Bruce Murray much later recalled that competition Sunday cricket did not occur in his youth. The dilemma cropped up in overseas tours, as these commonly involved Sunday play. The three Baptists would not play on Sunday, though they were prepared to make an exception in India and Pakistan, in cultural situations that did not have a Sunday tradition. However, they then reverted to not being available for Sunday cricket when the tour moved on to England. Vic Pollard later had qualms about having made the exception on the Indian sub-continent – the sabbath was an absolute biblical mandate which should be followed in all situations. Bruce Murray remained comfortable with the exception. In his mind, one reason for not playing sport in a more 'Christian' country like England or the West Indies was that to do so would look odd to the Christian sector of society. Murray's non-Sunday play stance was clearly partly shaped by his Christian community. That community was largely against Sunday play and as a part of that community its members adhered to its values. By the early 1970s the possibility of representing New Zealand at cricket as a non-Sunday player was becoming increasingly problematic and Pollard and Murray both prematurely retired from the New Zealand team. In their later memories, the issue for Pollard was fidelity to Scripture; for Murray it was the need to have time available for a young family.[135] Either way it was the end of an era.

Final efforts to preserve the sabbath

Subsequently, Michael Jones (significantly a Pacific Islander where a traditional Sunday has much more been preserved) took the same bold stance in the 1980s and 1990s as a rugby player. He was probably the last Christian to take a non-Sunday-sport stance and still play in the national side. Changing societal values and increasing professionalism and Sunday

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[133] For a suggestion that Pollard failed to get final promotion from vice-captain to captain of the New Zealand cricket team in part at least because of his refusal to play on Sundays see *NZ Truth*, 10 March 1970, 36.

[134] *New Zealand Baptist*, January 1968, 14.

[135] Transcript of interview of Vic Pollard by Laurie Guy on 15 April 2006; transcript of interview of Bruce Murray by Laurie Guy on 6 November 2006.

play in the world of sport make it much more likely that more recently such a person would never get the chance to make it to the top.

By the time of Michael Jones in the 1980s there was almost no antipathy to a 'continental Sunday'. Over the previous generation most people, including most Protestant church-goers, had now come to embrace it. The outcome was that the church had little strength or will even to oppose full Sunday retail shopping, which was permitted (except for alcohol sales) under the Shop Trading Hours Repeal Act in 1990. Hotels and off-licence premises have been able to sell alcohol on Sundays since 1999. The current issue is whether to have full trade permitted on Easter Sunday.

New Zealand Baptists were slow to give up on the sabbath issue. While president of the Baptist Union in 1965, Stewart Carey bemoaned the decline in sabbath observance, with Sunday sport, pleasure and business all on the increase. Was it necessay, he asked, 'to travel on Sunday when you go to, or return from, a holiday? Must we squeeze the last ounce out of a holiday and neglect God?' To Carey, not only were gardening and lawn mowing off-limits on Sundays, but so also were knitting and sewing. Sunday expenditure was a particular bugbear: 'I wonder if you are shocked, as I am, as you see Christians going into shops on Sunday to purchase frozen peas or some other article of food, which with a little forethought could have been purchased during the week.'[136]

I personally recall attending a Baptist youth Easter camp around 1966 where that issue came up. In that era the Easter Sunday night camp meeting was always a major focus for evangelism. However, at this camp the speaker, a Baptist pastor, opened his address by giving the campers a verbal blast because a few of them had bought ice-creams etc at a local confectionery store in breach of the sabbath – hardly a brilliant way for the speaker to win converts and influence young people of that time.

The 1970 annual Baptist assembly came out strongly for one final time against Sunday sport. However, not all Baptists held to that perspective. A letter in response to the resolution saw nothing wrong with Sunday sport at non-church times.[137] And an article published by the *New Zealand Baptist* in 1970 noted the hypocrisy of Baptists who condemned Sunday trading and denied children the pleasure of buying an ice-cream on their way home from Sunday School, while putting out milk bottles on Saturday night for Sunday morning delivery and

[136] *New Zealand Baptist*, March 1965, 56.
[137] *New Zealand Baptist*, June 1971, 6-7.

expecting to buy bread and newspapers on Mondays, even though their production had required Sunday work. The article writer concluded: 'The old platitudes ground out Sunday after Sunday to our forebears must give way in a modern world to a more real approach and more valid reasoning, however much it hurts.'[138]

New Zealand Baptists continued to voice sabbath concerns for another decade or two. The public questions committee sent a letter to the Wellington organisers of a 'run for fun' race in 1979, commending them for changing the run from Sunday to a Saturday morning.[139] The following year the same committee wrote to the New Zealand broadcasting tribunal urging it to keep public television and radio free of advertising on Sundays.[140] And in 1989 the congregation of Whakatane Baptist Church wrote to their member of parliament urging her to oppose any further liberalisation of Sunday trading.[141] However, Christian ability to influence society on the use of Sunday was almost gone. And so too was the will to do so. A century earlier the sabbatarian voice was a roar, often over matters that subsequent generations would consider minor. A century later that roar had become a whimper, fading almost to nothing.

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[138] L.E. Treliving, *New Zealand Baptist*, December 1970, 7.
[139] Public questions committee minutes, 16 October 1979: Baptist Archives: File MA701 MS B1/86, and file MA 704 MS B1/98.
[140] Letter, Bruce Turley and S.L. Edgar to B. Slane dated 7 March 1980: Baptist Archives: File MA701 MS B1/91.
[141] Letter Whakatane Baptist Church to Anne Fraser, MP, dated 22 February 1989: Baptist Archives: File 876 MS B1/170.,