EDITORIAL:
'AS BROAD AS THE GOSPEL IS, AND AS NARROW':
NEW ZEALAND BAPTISTS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

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In his address to the inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Baptist College, J.J. North, the principal, outlined his vision for the infant college. Its purpose, he declared, was to train ministers who "both know Christ and know the thought currents that flow through [their] age."[1] "We want", he insisted a few months later, "to make [our students] conversant with the great things of the Faith and we want that faith in its whole extent applied to the whole life of the whole [person], and to the whole community."[2] As principal of the College for twenty years, this was North's recurring theme. Ministers of the gospel must occupy two worlds—the world of scripture and the world of culture—and be able to relate the two. "We do not", North wrote, "allow that the Christian faith is open to serious revision. It is the firm foundation, and it stands sure." But, he said, "We do feel in every fibre of our being the urgent need of relating Christ and the implications of His Gospel to the thoughts and problems of our age."[3] For North and many of the students that he would train, these convictions translated into a passionate commitment both to personal evangelism and broader social concern. "A good minister of Jesus Christ", in North's view, "must be as broad as the Gospel is, and as narrow."[4]

In Laurie Guy's estimate, most New Zealand Baptists have tended to be narrow, but not broad. They have "commonly not engaged to any great extent with major issues of social and public life." They have been "inclined to stand outside society".[5] This assessment is surely right. Mainstream New Zealand Baptists have often struggled to relate the insights of the gospel to the issues of their day. However, one stream of New Zealand Baptists, exemplified by J.J. North, has understood the gospel more broadly. In the late nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth century that stream flowed strongly. While it was never dominant, it was influential beyond its size. Its leaders, like North, tended to occupy the major pulpits in the main city churches and held significant leadership positions within the Baptist Union. Energetic and articulate, they had a profound impact on their relatively small denomination. Their

[1] 'A Baptist Manifesto,' *New Zealand Baptist* (*NZB*) (April 1926): 96-97 at 96.
[2] 'The College: A Dream Fulfilled', *NZB* (January 1927): 1-2, 4 at 2.
[3] *NZB* (December 1928): 355.
[4] *NZB* (September 1930): 282.
[5] Laurie Guy, 'Three Countries, Two Conversions, One Man: J.J. Doke: Baptists, Humanity and Justice,' in *Interfaces: Baptists and Others* (ed. David Bebbington and Martin Sutherland; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 265-76 at 266-67.

views seeped widely through the Baptist network. During this period, annual assemblies and regional association meetings devoted considerable time and energy to wrestling with social issues. In conjunction with other churches, Baptists contributed meaningfully to public debate and the shaping of public life in New Zealand. They played, for example, an important role, in the shaping of public attitudes and practices regarding alcohol and gambling. But they also had a hand in other significant developments, such as the birth of the welfare state and the suspension of compulsory military training in the 1930s.

From the late 1960s, however, there was an evident decline in the level and breadth of Baptist engagement in public debate. There was a growing sense among some Baptist leaders that their denomination was failing to relate the gospel to the wider world. In a 1969 sermon on the church's responsibility in the political sphere, the Rev. Roy Bullen bemoaned the fact that many Baptists were now "so obsessed with their 'heavenly citizenship' that earthly responsibilities are neglected".[6] The following year the Rev. Bert Whitten reflected on the fact that while scores of people were willing to serve on the Evangelistic Committee of the Auckland Association of Baptist Churches, only one person was willing to serve on the Public Questions Committee. "As a people," he declared, "we are too prone to regard our mission over much in terms of soul saving, and too little in terms of social responsibility."[7] In the centennial issue of the *New Zealand Baptist*, the editor lamented the decline in the number and quality of letters that he received on broader issues confronting the church and society. Observing that this was not paralleled in other religious papers, he asked of his movement: "Have we become 'pietistic', preferring to shelter under an umbrella of spirituality that ignores the world about it, seeing God as interested only in Church newsletters and sickly songs of praise?"[8]

Increasingly, it seems, the answer was: Yes. By the end of the century the denomination's Public Questions Committee had disappeared.[9] Public questions very rarely, if ever, figured at annual assemblies. And broader social issues hardly rated a mention in the *Baptist* magazine. Religious historians in New Zealand's have observed that, from the 1960s, the mainstream Protestant churches were increasingly outspoken on issues of social justice. No longer "chaplain to the nation", they took on the role of "prophet at the gate".[10] During that period Baptists, by contrast, moved in the opposite direction. Today, the radical stream of the Baptist movement—the stream typified by the likes of J.J. North—is now rarely, if ever, heard.

The declining interest of New Zealand Baptists in broader social issues can be traced to a number of factors. In his recent study on the church in post-sixties New Zealand, Kevin Ward points to the rise in

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[6] Roy Bullen, 'The Christian and Politics,' sermon preached at Gisborne Baptist Church, 1969: Roy Bullen Papers, AN 1561, Box 5, File 'Social Questions', New Zealand Baptist Archives.
[7] *NZB*, (August 1970): 1.
[8] *NZB* (November 1980): 2.
[9] A small Public Questions Committee was resuscitated briefly between 2000 and 2004 on the initiative of a member of the Tawa Baptist Church. Since 2004, however, the Baptist Union has not had a Public Questions Committee.
[10] Allan K. Davidson, 'Chaplain to the Nation or Prophet at the Gate? The Role of the Church in New Zealand Society,' in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives on New Zealand History* (ed. J. Stenhouse and G. A. Wood; Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 311-31 at 330. See also John Evans, 'Church State Relations in New Zealand 1940-1990 with Particular Reference to the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches' (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1992), 128.

western societies of values like individualism and privatism.[11] But beyond the shifting topography of western culture, there have been several key developments within the New Zealand Baptist movement. One of these was a shift in the denomination's cultural allegiance. In 1965 Judge K.G. Archer, son of the notable Baptist minister, J.K. Archer, lamented: "I am under the impression that our Baptist Union is no longer imbued with the liberal principles of the English Baptists from whom its founders sprang, but that it now looks for leadership to the … Southern Baptists of America."[12] This impression was accurate. After World War Two New Zealand Baptists were increasingly "mesmerised by things American", forgetting "the pit from which they were hewn."[13] This was a significant development. The modern American evangelical movement, did not have 'the kind of sustained, theologically grounded reflection on social and political issues that shapes some other Christian traditions,' such as the English Baptist tradition.[14] Their energies tended to be channelled more towards evangelism.

Post-war New Zealand Baptist churches followed their example.[15] This preoccupation with evangelism tended to push other concerns, such as theological reflection and social action, off the agenda. In an address to the 1968 Assembly, the Baptist Cabinet Minister, Lance Adams-Schneider, warned Baptists against speaking out on controversial political issues. The church's major task, he argued, was evangelism, proclaiming a gospel "which relates primarily to the issues of eternity". When the church embarks upon public controversy it is moving away from its primary message to peripheral matters, from "Christian centralities" to "Christian supplements".[16] Letters to the editor suggests that he had plenty of support. "Our main task", declared one correspondent, "is to preach the Gospel, and involvement in controversial social issues only serves to obscure our mission."[17]

This focus on personal evangelism to the exclusion of wider social issues was intensified by the widespread adoption of American church growth principles. The Church Growth movement, associated with Donald McGavran and Fuller Theological Seminary, promoted the use of quantitative research to develop sociological awareness of "target populations" and factors affecting their receptivity to the gospel. The emphasis was on technique and method, deploying the right presentation or programme to achieve maximum evangelistic returns. The New Zealand Baptist Union embraced it enthusiastically. Ministries and programmes were created to meet the "felt needs" of the "target market". Worship services were renovated so as to become "seeker-sensitive". The emphasis was on whatever would produce "results" in numerical terms.[18] Unfortunately, one of the effects of this church growth focus was to shrink mission

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[11] Kevin Ward, *The Church in Post-Sixties New Zealand: Decline, Growth and Change* (Auckland: Archer Press, 2013), 15-41.
[12] *NZB* (September 1964): 230.
[13] *NZB* (September 1964): 221.
[14] Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers, eds., *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 9. See also Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3, 12-13, 61, 160. This perhaps reflects what a number of commentators have observed is an anti-intellectual or pragmatic bent to the American mind generally: David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 37-38.
[15] John Tucker, *A Braided River: New Zealand Baptists and Public Issues 1882-2000* (Peter Lang: Bern, 2013), 181-82.
[16] *NZB* (March 1969): 4-5.
[17] *NZB* (January 1971): 20.
[18] John Tucker, 'Prophets at the Gate? New Zealand Baptists and Social Justice in the 1990s,' in *Interfaces: Baptists and Others* (ed. David Bebbington and Martin Sutherland; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2012), 277-91.

down to personal evangelism—"getting bums on seats and people into heaven", as one leader put it.[19] Not surprisingly, the wider prophetic role of the church in society was neglected. Most Baptist leaders saw little value in relating Christ and the implications of his Gospel to the thoughts and problems of their age because it did not translate into "church growth".[20]

New Zealand Baptists were evolving in other ways. From the 1960s the charismatic renewal movement developed a momentum in New Zealand which was unprecedented in other western countries.[21] Baptist churches were affected more than most.[22] The charismatic renewal led many Baptist congregations to express their faith in a form that reflected the changing social and cultural context of post-sixties New Zealand. Informality, spontaneity, immediacy, an emphasis on emotions and individual experience—these were all values that came out of the counter culture.[23] However, these very values tended to spawn among those same congregations a "pietistic individualised spirituality" that neglected the public implications of the gospel.[24] This was evident in the pages of the *New Zealand Baptist* during this period. In 1973 the 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 instead of living in the real world as it is, painful as that may be."[25] In a 1978 editorial, the 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."[26] Again, in 1983, the president of the Baptist Union 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".[27]

So charismatic influences, along with American church growth principles, certainly account for the narrowing vision of New Zealand Baptists and their failure to apply the insights of the gospel to all of life. During these years, however, Baptist churches were also reacting to the rise of neo-liberalism within the mainline Protestant churches. Robert Wuthnow has observed in relation to North America that from the 1960s evangelism and social justice "became the polar positions around which religious conservatives and religious liberals increasingly identified themselves."[28] A similar dynamic was at work in New Zealand. Many Baptists came to associate the socio-political action of mainstream Protestant churches with the

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[19] Ian Brown, interview by author, digital recording, Cambridge, 28 May 2008.
[20] *NZB* (March 1989): 16. See also Neville Emslie, 'Silver and Gold Have I None,' *NZB (*August 1993): 5.
[21] Allan K. Davidson and P.J. Lineham, eds., *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating Aspects of New Zealand Church History* (Auckland: College Communications, 1987), 324.
[22] Elaine Bolitho, *Meet the Baptists: Post-war Personalities and Perspectives* (Wellington: Christian Research Association, 1993), 37.
[23] Ward, *The Church in Post-Sixties New Zealand*, 190-91.
[24] Allan Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), 173. See also Colin 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), 99-118 at 107.
[25] *NZB* (September 1973): 16-17.
[26] *NZB* (June 1978): 2.
[27] Walter Lang, *NZB* (November 1983): 5.
[28] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 148-49.

liberal theology—and the numerical decline—of those same churches. In the words of the Rev. Walter Lang, evangelical Baptists by the early 1980s tended "to polarise evangelism and social action instead of wedding them together".[29] When the annual Baptist Assembly voted to oppose the 1981 visit by the South African rugby team, it provoked considerable protest. One correspondent to the *Baptist* wrote that he was deeply concerned "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." He pleaded: "May we not conform to that which the world would have us be: a political [World Council of Churches]-type organisation, forgetting our Lord's commission to preach, and teach a spiritual Gospel to all the world."[30]

From the 1960s, then, the New Zealand church became increasingly divided along theological lines, leading to a "collapse of the theological middle".[31] At the one end liberals affirmed the centrality of love, the importance of contextualising the gospel, and the mandate to seek peace and justice in society. At the other end conservatives affirmed the authority of Scripture, the fundamental truths of the gospel as embedded in the creeds, and the importance of personal evangelism. As a result of this polarisation, New Zealand Baptists withdrew from ecumenical contact with theological liberals.[32] They pulled back from participation in wider public debate. They became "more retreatist, more pietistic and more narrow in their understanding of the gospel".[33] They struggled, in terms of J.J. North's vision, to apply the whole of the gospel to the whole of life.

Kevin Ward has observed that the "churches which are most likely to have experienced growth in New Zealand since 1960 are those which have combined a strong adherence to the basic tenets of orthodox Christian belief with an ability to adapt their life and message to forms that relate effectively to the rapidly changing social and cultural context in which they exist."[34] These churches, rather than embracing an extreme conservative position or an extreme liberal position, have united the strengths of both positions. This should come as no surprise. Ian Pitt-Watson wrote that every Christian sermon must be "stretched like a bowstring between the text of the Bible on the one hand and the problems of contemporary life on the other. If the string is insecurely tethered to either end, the bow is useless."[35] This connection between word and world is an indispensable characteristic not just of all Christian preaching, but of all Christian ministry and mission. If churches are to follow in the way of Christ, who entered into humanity without surrendering his deity, then they must refuse to compromise either the divine content

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[29] *NZB* (November 1983): 5.
[30] *NZB* (February 1981):6. The WCC or World Council of Churches was viewed with deep suspicion by conservative Christians for its emphasis on social action at the apparent expense of evangelism and discipleship.
[31] This term was used by Robert A. Evans, 'Recovering the Church's Transforming Middle: Theological Reflections on the Balance between Faithfulness and Effectiveness,' in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-1978* (ed. Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen; New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 288-314 at 290.
[32] See S.L. Edgar, 'New Zealand Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement,' *New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 1 (1996): 9-25.
[33] Laurie Guy, ed., *Baptists in Twentieth Century New Zealand: Documents Illustrating Baptist Life and Development* (Auckland: NZ Baptist Research and Historical Society, 2005), xiv.
[34] Ward, *The Church in Post-Sixties New Zealand*, 53.
[35] Ian Pitt-Watson, *Preaching: A Kind of Folly* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 57.

of the gospel they proclaim or to ignore the human context into which it must be spoken. They must incarnate, or contextualise, the gospel. They must be securely tethered to both the Bible and life.

This issue of the *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* has been compiled as a Festschrift to honour Dr Laurie Guy. For forty years Laurie has given outstanding service within the Baptist movement of New Zealand, first as a minister in Auckland, then as a missionary to Papua New Guinea, and, for the last twenty-five years, as a lecturer at Carey Baptist College. During his academic career, Laurie has persistently urged Baptists to reclaim the vision of J.J. North and recover the theological middle ground—to be a people who are both faithful to Scripture and sensitive to culture. In his teaching Laurie has always urged his students to apply their subject matter, to think through its significance for ministry and mission in today's world. His frequent in-class reference to missionary experiences in Papua New Guinea, while a source of amusement for students, expressed a deadly serious commitment on Laurie's part to integrate text and context. In his commitment to a Socratic or dialogical method of teaching and in his sensitivity to students whose cultural backgrounds made western-style education a challenge, Laurie has embodied a concern to incarnate and contextualise the message.

This impulse to integrate word and world has also been evident in Laurie's research and writing. A select bibliography of Laurie's published work is included in this volume. His primary focus has clearly been the church's participation in public debate. On difficult and complex social issues, like homosexuality or race relations, Laurie has provided the church with a well-informed and articulate voice. But Laurie has also made an important contribution to our understanding of the early church and the New Testament. In these fields Laurie has deliberately sought to "bridge the gap" between the academy and the church. His success can be measured by the extent to which the church has called on his services. He has been a frequent speaker in local churches, at youth camps, and at Baptist assemblies. He is currently chairing a Baptist Union taskforce on same-sex marriage.

Besides his teaching and writing, Laurie has, though his leadership at Carey, frequently sounded the call to mission. It was at his instigation, and with his generous support, that Carey established a Maori and Pacifica student support fund. While serving as interim Principal, Laurie also proposed an alteration to the field education of pastoral leadership students. Instead of spending three years in a church, Laurie recommended they spend one year working in a "non-church" organisation like Women's Refuge or Drug Arm. The proposal was not taken up, but Laurie's report captures his heart to engage with the world: "If we are serious about training for mission as well as for ministry, then this sort of training exposure could be hugely beneficial. There may be a few students who don't see this as particularly relevant to their training—but that may stem from a church-only vision, a vision which is too small for the realities of the 21st century." These were not idle words. Through his church ministry and community involvement—as much as through his teaching, research, and leadership—Laurie has sought to know both Christ and culture and bring the two together. He has endeavoured to apply the whole gospel to the whole of life.

The contributors to this volume are all colleagues or peers of Laurie who have made a significant contribution in the field of religious history. They have all written papers that connect with Laurie's primary interest in the relationship between church and society. Professor David Bebbington explores the

changing attitudes towards the relation of church and state among nineteenth century British Baptists. In doing so, he shows how these attitudes—and the different understandings of the gospel and mission which underlay them—had an impact on the colonies. Professor Peter Lineham traces the theological debates within the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union during the 1890s. His paper shows just how profoundly first wave feminism in New Zealand was shaped by evangelical influences, and by international theological currents. Dr Allan Davidson explores the memorialisation of war and peace in New Zealand—a very timely essay as we approach the centenary of World War One—and how this remembering presents ongoing challenges for church and society today. Finally, Dr Martin Sutherland provides a critical but appreciative analysis of Laurie published work. His essay highlights Laurie's versatility as a scholar, his capacity to communicate effectively the fruit of his scholarship to a wide array of audiences, and, above all, his passion for mission.

This passion is particularly evident in one of Laurie's recent essays, where he examines the colonial ministry of the Rev. J.J. Doke. Doke was trained in England, but had a significant ministry in New Zealand—where he mentored J.J. North—and in South Africa. His ministry was securely tethered both to the word and the world, and it was marked by a deep commitment to both personal evangelism and social justice. It was "as broad as the gospel is, and as narrow". Summarising his ministry, Laurie wrote: "Doke's evangelicalism was a big evangelicalism. He was a man of two conversions: to humanity as well as to Christ."[36] The same could be said of Dr Laurie Guy. He has consistently called the churches of New Zealand to relate Christ and the implications of his gospel to the thoughts and problems of our day. The Baptist movement, in particular, is deeply indebted to him. So it is with a deep sense of gratitude that we, his colleagues and peers, present this Festschrift in his honour.

[36] Laurie Guy, 'Three Countries, Two Conversions, One Man: J.J. Doke: Baptists, Humanity and Justice,' in *Interfaces: Baptists and Others* (ed. David Bebbington and Martin Sutherland; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 265-76 at 276.