THE UNEXPLAINED RELIGION OF THE WCTU

PETER LINEHAM
Massey University, Auckland
(P.Lineham@massey.ac.nz)

Laurie Guy's fine book on the churches and their social engagement has made very clear that Baptists and evangelicals at various times played a crucial role in social reform. Responding to recent feminist scholarship he emphasised the level of evangelical involvement in first wave feminism.[1] Taking his emphasis further, this paper offers an interpretation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union paying particular attention to theological debates within the movement. A fine group of historians from Pat Grimshaw onwards have addressed the values of first wave feminism. The interpretations of Grimshaw, Raewyn Dalziel and Phillida Bunkle have done much to explore the minds of the early franchise reformers. Their interpretations have, however, given little weight to the theological issues that were inevitable in a movement which saw itself as an organisation of Christian women. We can draw on rich literature on the religious culture of late nineteenth century English and American Protestantism, which places the WCTU in a fresh context.

That context is, as Guy recognises, primarily evangelical. The identity may surprise readers in the modern era. Pentecostal women became notorious for busting up the women's forums in the 1980s and have never quite recovered their reputation.[2] So what sort of evangelicalism was it that produced the first wave feminism of the nineteenth century? Neither Dalziel nor even Bunkle have much to say about this, but Laurie Guy suggests a step towards understanding when he portrays how late nineteenth century Christianity was very optimistic. It is the aim of this paper to deepen this interpretation. Any religious tradition is always mutating and evolving, and it is my argument that the WCTU in New Zealand has a historical interest because it occurred at a particular point in that evolution.

At the Fifth Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union held at Dunedin late in February 1890, Miss W. Wieneke proposed that office holders in any WCTU must profess faith in Christ Jesus as her Saviour. Guy is the only one to notice this debate. In an attempt to divert debate over this contentious issue, the meeting passed a resolution affirming the importance of evangelism:

> We recognise the fact that the foundation of our work lies in the acceptance and practice of the Gospel of Christ, and believe that greater effort should be made by our membership during the year along all evangelistic lines. We affirm our belief that God in Christ is the king

[1] Laurie Guy, *Shaping Godzone: Public Issues and Church Voices in New Zealand 1840-2000* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011), 177-92.
[2] See Ruth E. Low, "The Debate on the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Motivated by Fear or a Clash of Ideologies," *Stimulus* 13, 4 (2005): 23-30.

> of nations, and as such should be acknowledged in our government, and his word made the basis of our laws.[3]

The issue did not go away. In the 1891 Convention at Christchurch the motion held over from the previous year was presented by Mrs Fulton, the new President of the national body. The proposal was worded "That no one may be office-bearers in any W.C.T.U. who does not profess faith in Christ Jesus as her Saviour." The initial debate on the second morning of the convention was indecisive.[4] In the lengthy and "warm" debate which resumed on the Thursday there seem to have been attempts to amend it into a motion about membership of the Union.[5] The issue was put to the vote in the final session on Monday 9th March, when it was defeated 18/23 but in what may have been an appeasing gesture to the defeated voices, the local unions were invited to discuss the issue and return comments to the next AGM.[6] The issue was one with perils whatever the outcome. It had the full backing of Mrs Fulton, as National President, and her predecessor in the years before 1889, Emma Packe. When the issue returned on the agenda for the next annual meeting Catherine Fulton was absent, citing the death of her husband James, and so she could not be at the Seventh Convention in Auckland in 1892. Consequently it was Mrs Packe who proposed an even tougher amendment to the constitution at that meeting, "that no member be eligible for election who does not accept the Bible doctrine of the atonement through Christ Jesus." The amendment seems aimed to exclude Unitarians and "modernist" Protestants from the Union.

There must have been widespread discussion in the affiliated Unions about it that year, since some felt very strongly for or against the issue. Mrs Elizabeth Brown Miller, a Dunedin delegate who was instrumental later in developing a home economics programme, proposed to avoid the problem through a pacificatory amendment:

> that the convention, whilst its individual members hold firmly and lovingly to the doctrine of the atonement, believes that it would be unwise to make any alteration to the constitution, in the direction of introducing theological doctrine.[7]

This, however, was lost, and the original motion was voted down.[8] It was an unlikely stance in the face of a stinging series of attacks on the proposal by Kate Sheppard (presenting herself as "Penelope"), the editor of the WCTU pages in the *Prohibitionist*.[9] One can feel the force of her withering scorn as well as her sustained argument:

> We are banded together to rescue our neighbours from the curse of the liquor traffic, with its train of attendant evils, and we have gladly welcomed all who have so much of the spirit of Christ as to be wishful to engage in this good work. Many true followers of Christ would,

---

[3] WCTU Minutes (1890): 14, cited from the *Temperance Herald*. There is no hint of these discussions in general press reports, the longest of which is the *Southland Times* (26 February 1890): 2.
[4] *Star*, Christchurch (4 March 1891): 3.
[5] *Star*, Christchurch (6 March 1891): 3; and motion, cited in letter to *Star* (7 March 1891): 3.
[6] *Star*, Christchurch (10 March 1891): 4.
[7] WCTU Minutes (22 March 1892): 6.
[8] See *Star*, Christchurch (26 March 1892): 3, and *Evening Post*, Wellington (26 March 1892): 2; *Hawkes's Bay Herald* (26 March 1892): 3.
[9] See Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard: A Biography* (Auckland: Penguin, 1992), 74-75. Ibid., 20, suggests that there was a running conflict between Sheppard and Fulton.

> from conscientious scruples, hesitate to sign such an article as proposed. Are we to refuse their assistance? Have we, who call ourselves Christians, not yet learned the lessons taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan? Have we forgotten Who it is Who said, "A tree is known by its fruits"? Why, then, this desire to exclude from our temperance work all who cannot pronounce our particular shibboleth?[10]

If this was not strong enough she turned her attention on those who proposed it, and recognised that both theology and practice divided them:

> The desire for change seems to emanate from those specially interested in Evangelistic work, but it is not the work for which our Unions were called into existence. Indeed, but for the fact that the Evangelistic department gives facilities for the special bent of some of our women, which the churches do not afford, it would be well to leave this kind of work to the Evangelical churches. The primary object for which we are united is to abolish the use of intoxicants. To accomplish our aim, we gladly enlist rich and poor, high and low, Priest, Levite or Samaritan…

She was not the only opponent. In reaction to the 1891 measure, M.A. Clark wrote to the Christchurch newspaper criticising the measure:

> allow me through your paper to protest most emphatically against altering the constitution in the way that was proposed, … I ask in all seriousness who are the women in the W.C.T. Union that they should interfere with the right of private judgment in religious or theological questions. … It seems strange that the Evangelical section should forget that their work is only one of the many factors in the work. Already the spirit of this clause has wrought cruel injustice. It will break up the Union just as the Young Men's Christian Association in Dunedin was broken up by the introduction of sectarian strife.[11]

This was very strong language about other members of the sisterhood, who included the National President, and it provoked a concerned letter from Catherine Fulton in the next issue of the *Prohibitionist*, and further letters from Mrs Packe and a Mrs Tattle. Mrs Fulton suggested that the "Christian" in the name WCTU might as well be dropped if it could not be given some meaning.[12] Mrs Packe pointed out that the C in WCTU stood for Christian, not civilised or cultured. Mrs Tattle warned that some people would drop out of the Union if it went the way that Penelope suggested.[13] But Penelope was unrepentant, and unabashedly criticised both Fulton's and Packe's arguments. She cited the authority of Frances Willard, and made clear her definition of "Christian" was much broader than Fulton's, insisting that "all who take Christ for their guide and teacher are His disciples, and have a right to be called by His name."[14] It seems clear, judging from that damning remark about "theological doctrine" and a later comment in the *White Ribbon*, that the proposal was criticised as a religious inquisition aiming to exclude a certain group of

---

[10] *Prohibitionist* (2 January 1892): 8. (Issue numbers from Devaliant, since the microfilm lacks these.)
[11] *Star*, Christchurch (7 March 1891): 3.
[12] *Prohibitionist* (16 January 1892): 8.
[13] *Prohibitionist* (3 February 1892): 8.
[14] *Prohibitionist* (2 January 1892): 8.

supporters. There were complaints that one total abstainer who was not a prohibitionist had been excluded, and complaints at attempts to exclude Catholics from the WCTU in parts of the American movement.[15] And since this was the year of a full-scale assault in Parliament over the franchise, the movement needed all the support it could get.

The controversy was not without consequence for the WCTU. Mrs Fulton did not offer herself for the Presidency at the next Convention, and was replaced by Mrs Annie Schnackenberg. Packe and Wieneke also disappeared from the Union at the same time. It is curious to think of this heated theological dispute at the very stage in the WCTU when its intervention into the franchise issue was reaching a height. It sharpens the issue of how the character of the WCTU was understood, for it is clear that the movement was not unanimous on this point.

The WCTU is in many respects a baffling organisation, which might easily be characterised as an extremely narrow-minded fundamentalist body. The debate which took place between 1890 and 1893 seems to have clarified the organisation's focus and location, and its place in the spectrum of Christian organisations. Before 1893 the organisation had a different flavour. The organisation before 1894 had several types of participants, and one of these sectors was a group of earnest evangelical Christians. The range of members is surprising. One somewhat surprising group was members of the new and intensely evangelical Plymouth Brethren movement. This movement had two sections, the Exclusive and the Open Brethren, and the supporters came from the more open wing. One, who was rather influential in the early WCTU was Miss W. Wieneke, who died in 1925 after founding the kindergarten movement in New Zealand, having trained in this in her native Germany, setting up her first kindergarten in Christchurch in 1885, and then serving as the first staff member of the Otago Free Kindergarten from 1889-1899. In her retirement she travelled the country as a kind of itinerant children's evangelist.[16] Another person with Brethren links was Jane Costall. Her husband was the Government Printer, and the couple had founded an interdenominational mission in Boulcott Street, Wellington, in 1873, and this later became the Herbert Street mission, also described as the Bethel Baptist Church. This church was the precursor to both the Brethren and Baptist denominations in Wellington.[17] Mrs Costall was the Wellington President of the WCTU in its earliest years, and her congregation hosted the 1889 WCTU Convention.[18] Another example is in the Manawatu, where the Brethren were particularly strong. The WCTU in Palmerston North included Mrs Anderson of Rongotea, a Brethren name from a Brethren stronghold.[19]

Alongside these Brethren stood alongside other advocates of evangelical Christianity. Mrs Packe, who like Kate Sheppard lived in Upper Riccarton, was the wife of Colonel George Packe (1836-1882),

---

[15] *White Ribbon*, 1, 9 (March 1896): 7.

[16] Peter J. Lineham, *There we found Brethren: A History of Assemblies of Brethren in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: GPH Society, 1977), 80, 125; *Treasury*, 8 (1906): 132a; ibid, 9 (1907): 76; ibid, 13 (1911): 142; ibid, 16 (1914): 95; ibid, 18 (1916):14; ibid, 19 (1917): 15; ibid, 21 (1919): 151; ibid, 24 (1922):127; ibid, 29 (1927):111 for obituary. See also ibid, 36 (1934): 15.

[17] See Lineham, *There we found Brethren*, 31, 54, 114. It is described in *New Zealand Baptist*, 1 (1880): 76, as "Wellington Bethel Baptist."

[18] See "Women's Meeting," *Star*, Christchurch (7 March 1891): 4.

[19] WCTU Convention Minutes for 13 March 1902. See Catherine Birch and Audrey Cox, *Rowe Family History* (Rongotea Rowe Reunion Committee, 1999), 60, 80, 82.

who came from a Lancashire military family and served in the Welsh Fusiliers during the Indian Mutiny, and then retired to Canterbury.[20] Although the Colonel had been a loyal Anglican, evidently Mrs Packe became a Salvationist after her husband's death. Her presidential addresses suggest a severe woman with a strong emphasis on biblical values.[21] Her links with the Union faded after 1893, but in 1897 she attended the Kaiapoi Union, and quoted scriptures suitable to inspire it.[22] Catherine Fulton is an even more striking example. The National President from 1889-1892 was born a Valpy, one of the daughters of a former East India judge and prominent Anglican. One of her sisters sponsored the establishment of the Salvation Army in the colony in 1883. Catherine married James Fulton, the future Member of the House of Representatives, moved to West Tairei and joined the Presbyterian church, although she was rebaptised at Hanover Street Baptist in 1868 and the Fultons seem to have been Baptist in Dunedin but Presbyterian in Tairei.[23] She supported many evangelical causes, beginning with Dr Somerville's Mission, operated a local mission hall and Sunday school, and supported many home and foreign missions. Her husband's death in November 1891 was offered as the reason why Catherine ceased her link with the WCTU, but her biographer in the DNZB considers it more likely that she was disenchanted with the national Union as an evangelical body. [24]

Those inclined to support evangelistic endeavour had from the outset aimed to make the Union a sponsor of evangelism. The structure of the WCTU included "departments" and branches were able to select which departments operated in their region. Consequently the WCTU was never just a prohibitionist body. The evangelistic department was the key department in the eyes of some, and some of the other departments (including, for example, the cottage meetings department) were clearly associated with it.[25] The second superintendent of the evangelistic department was none other than Miss Wieneke. After Wieneke left the WCTU, Mrs Kirkland was the superintendent of the evangelistic department. She was the wife of the Rev. James Kirkland, Presbyterian minister of West Tairei (Catherine Fulton's parish) from 1875. Presbyterians from this district were renowned for their intense evangelistic fervour. Meanwhile, Mrs Costall took responsibility in the WCTU for the Sabbath Observance Department, and

---

[20] Guy C. Bliss, *Gunners' Story: a short history of the Artillery Volunteers of Christchurch, 1867-1967* (Christchurch: Canterbury Artillery Officers Mess, 1970), 21; Macdonald Index (Canterbury Museum).

[21] Jeanne Wood, *A Challenge Not a Truce: A History of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1885-1985* (Nelson: N.Z.W.C.T.U., 1985), 92; Jolene A. McKay, "The Tie that Binds: Christianity in the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1885-1900" (B.A. Hons. diss., University of Otago, 1995), 15.

[22] *White Ribbon*, vol. 2, no. 23 (May 1897): 4.

[23] See *New Zealand Baptist* (November 1885): 165, where James Fulton says at a public meeting he chaired at the Baptist Union that "His entire sympathy and best wishes were with the Baptist section of the Christian Church" and *New Zealand Baptist* (December 1885): 185, where James and Catherine's daughter volunteered to serve as a Baptist missionary (although the offer was withdrawn later). James Fulton served on Union committees and gave generously to the Union.

[24] Rosemary Entwistle, "Fulton, Catherine Henrietta Elliott," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. 1* (ed. W.H. Oliver; Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 141. See also McKay, "The Tie that Binds," 46. It is curious that Fulton does not mention the WCTU in her autobiography, written in 1915 (available from the LDS Family History Library).

[25] *White Ribbon*, 1, 1 (January 1895).

Mrs Packe was in charge of getting churches to adopt unfermented wine, while Catherine Fulton supported Sunday school, juvenile, and peace work.[26]

We will form a better idea of the tone of the Union if we bear in mind the opportunities for united evangelism which the organisation afforded. So in Wellington Mrs Costall pushed members to help at the Quin Street Mission of St Peter's Church in Mitchelltown—the rough part of town. Their work was also assisted by a Mrs Hinse.[27] By 1898 a whole range of cottage meetings, drawing room meetings, house to house visits and literature distribution were sponsored by the Union.[28] Missionary involvement, distribution of religious literature, and carefully planned events designed to bless and redeem men from rough backgrounds, were characteristic activities.[29]

Evangelism in the larger cities often involved support for Sailors Rests. Most of these Sailors Rests were inspired by the advocacy of the remarkable Alexander Falconer, who had begun the Port Chalmers Sailors Rest in 1872 having previously run a diggers rest in Hokitika from the early years of the goldrush.[30] The WCTU supported Falconer and supplied him with a building to serve as his Dunedin Sailors Rest. The Dunedin union worked closely with Falconer for his Sailors Rest was the strongest non-denominational mission in the city. Non-denominational organisations were more willing to encourage independent women's work, while the denominational bodies were much more coy about such activity.

This evangelism was quite important to some members of the WCTU because as an organisation its American roots lay in a fervent campaign to reach and rescue men.[31] The Women's Crusade, as it was called, had been responsible for a transformation of old-style evangelism into a new and socially relevant pattern of gospel temperance missions which became very popular in New Zealand.[32] Gospel Temperance missions were popular in the late nineteenth century because they combined religious fervour with an intense awareness of social issues. Such missions combined political campaigning and moral exhortation. The preaching became a category with its own values and traditions; it emphasised that the converts should become Christians and renounce the demonic power of drink, which had kept them from salvation.

Support for overseas missions blended well with this emphasis. The WCTU eagerly supported some of the first single women working overseas as Christian missionaries. This category of missionary was justified because single females had a unique opportunity to rescue women from evil conditions,

---

[26] *Star* (10 March 1891): 4 (although this concerns Miss Juliet Fulton); WCTU, Report of First Annual Meeting (1886); Report of Fourth Annual Meeting, (1889): 6.
[27] Of Hinse nothing more is known. A Miss Hinse travelled from Wellington to Lyttleton in 1905. *Star* Christchurch, (5 October 1905): 3. A Mr Hinze travelled to Hokitika in 1891. *West Coast Times* (7 January 1891): 2, and a German, Hinze, was touring the colony in 1904. *Evening Post* (30 September 1904): 5.
[28] See Kirkland's report in *White Ribbon*, 3, 33 (March 1898): 7-8.
[29] *White Ribbon*, 2, 20 (February 1897): 3.
[30] Jane Thomson, ed., *Southern People: A Dictionary of Otago-Southland Biography* (Dunedin: Longacre Press, 1998), 154-55; Alexander R. Falconer, *The Harbour Reached: a Report of the Port Chalmers Sailors Rest* (Dunedin: Fergusson & Mitchell, 1903); P. J. Lineham, *There we found Brethren*, 26, 109-111.
[31] Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: the Quest for Power and Liberty 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple Press, 1981).
[32] I have commented briefly (and critically) on this in Peter J. Lineham, *New Zealanders and the Methodist Evangel* (Wesley Historical Society Proceedings 42, 1983), 12-13.

inviting them to become Christians, and working to transform their treatment by heathen societies. Thus the WCTU supported the work of Miss A. J. P. Newcombe, Australian Baptist missionary in India.[33]

Recent American religious historians have gone a long way to analyse the tone of post-Bellum American society. They have noted that in the mood of ebullient optimism after the Civil War, a new wave of revivalism transformed the mid-west of American society. This revivalism emphasised the ways in which the work of salvation empowered women and men so that they could be agents of transformation both of themselves and their world. The new measure revivalism of C. G. Finney, which bent the old Calvinist rules because of its strong emphasis on voluntarism, gained new momentum with the urban evangelism and activities of Dwight L. Moody. Beginning in the YMCA in Chicago, he shaped a distinctive non-denominational evangelism, which was positive, involved in community concerns and very internationally minded. This fits into the pattern described by Nathan Hatch as the democratization of American Christianity.[34] Out of it sprang the Student Volunteer Movement, the Bible Institute movement, and a great surge of home and foreign missions. The Women's Crusade flourished in this environment, for the whole movement was not shaped by Calvinist emphasis on the universality of sin, and so was eager to harness the energies of ordinary laymen and laywomen. "Work for the night is coming" they sang. Thus it is possible to speak of the evangelical roots of feminism.[35]

The Women's Christian Temperance Union thus emerged as a result of the new inter-denominational evangelicalism which flourished in late nineteenth century society. Many aspects of the WCTU, including its focus on prayer, and its belief that it was called to create a purified nation under God, were a reflection of this background. Later authors have described this outlook as fundamentalist, but this adjective is inappropriate as well as anachronistic. For while fundamentalism grew out of this kind of movement, so too did "modernist" religion. It is necessary to understand the character of this religiosity to understand the character of the WCTU. It was not fundamentalist because while many members upheld a Protestant gospel of salvation by conversion through the cross of Christ, they were anything but separatist from society but were constantly engaged in the work of transforming church and society.[36]

A further aspect of this movement was the place it gave to evangelical piety. In 1891 Christian Endeavour was introduced to New Zealand starting at Ponsonby Baptist Church, which aimed to help young people move from Sunday school to church and was characterised by an emphasis on fervent lay testimonies and unscripted prayers.[37] This tone reflects that of the evangelical members of the WCTU. At first the Union (with some notable dissenters) made much of the symbolism of sharing together the "noontide prayer." Prayerful dedication was seen as essential to evangelism (perhaps because their

---

[33] "Our Missionaries," *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1890): 154.
[34] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).
[35] Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 85-98.
[36] Ian Tyrrell, *Women's World, Women's Empire* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 62-70, recognises the role of evangelical support, but these tensions do not seem to have had wider international equivalents.
[37] See *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1892): 157-58. H. Bush & W. J. E. Kerrison, *First Fifty Years: the Story of Christian Endeavour under the Southern Cross* (Melbourne: National C.E.U. of Australia & New Zealand, 1938).

audiences of men did not relish women seeking to evangelise them). Later members believed that the Union's success was dependent on its spiritual power, and this was proportionate to the levels of fervent personal piety of members.[38] In Palmerston North the Union held a prayer meeting on election day in 1896.[39] This tone seems to have been particularly strong in the Wellington and Dunedin Unions. The Auckland and Christchurch branches were much more politically attuned. In Wellington the Southern Cross Society competed with the WCTU from 1893 until it was closed in 1898. Possibly this was a local version of the controversy about whether the movement had room for women like Lady Stout who, as a Unitarian, did not hold evangelical views of the atonement, and was not part of the Union in the early days but was very active in it by 1897.

One can detect the deep influence of Moody on the New Zealand union, not least in the enthusiastic singing of Moody's lieutenant, Sankey, at meetings. The movement was characterised by a warm fervency of faith, such as was common in the Christian Endeavour Movement, but it also had an activist fervour for creating a better world using politics, and this certainly troubled some.[40] The hymns were straight out of this stable. For example the favourite "Till we meet" was a hymn of the Sankey revival.[41] The Crusade Psalm[42] and the White Ribbon Hymn Book were used at meetings.[43] It is interesting that the union cited Moody's opinion in its support for divorce legislation.[44] When American speakers toured the New Zealand branches they often appealed to this tradition. Mrs Leavitt on her tour of the churches in 1885 combined intense scientific analysis of the evils of alcohol with a spirituality drawn from Sankey's "Sacred Songs and Solos." Consequently she was aware that it was more difficult to receive a positive reception from Anglican churches.[45] Mrs Barney, who visited in 1897, was appreciated for her combination of action and spiritual life, her motherly appearance, and gospel temperance addresses.[46] So the WCTU reflects the growing influence of American Christian patterns on the colonial faith and that its debates also became evident in what developed in New Zealand.[47]

Bunkle, and others influenced by her, have argued that a notion of purification was central to the values of the WCTU.[48] Sarah Dalton has developed this into a comprehensive interpretation of the

---

[38] This is already clear in Kirkland's report on the evangelistic department in *White Ribbon*, 2, 24 (June 1897): 5, but becomes very pronounced in the 1917 Annual Convention minutes.
[39] "Palmerston North," *New Zealand Baptist* (January 1897): 10.
[40] See for example the account of Frances Willard's death in *New Zealand Baptist* (June 1898): 96. Also the cautious account of the WCTU in "American Notes," *New Zealand Baptist* (April 1886): 51.
[41] See John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth, 1978), 215-235.
[42] For example *White Ribbon*, 2, 23 (May 1897): 4.
[43] *White Ribbon*, 2, 22 (April 1897): 10.
[44] *White Ribbon*, 2, 23 (May 1897): 10.
[45] "Christchurch," *New Zealand Baptist* (June 1885): 90; *Auckland Star* (26 June 1885): 2.
[46] *White Ribbon*, 2, 23 (May 1897): 4, 8.
[47] Colin Brown, "The American Connection: The United States of America and Churches in New Zealand 1840-1940" in *Religious Studies in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Albert C. Moore* (ed. M. Andrew, P. Matheson, and S. Rae; Dunedin: Department of Theology, University of Otago, 1991), 153-62.
[48] Phillida Bunkle, "The Origins of the Women's Movement in New Zealand: The Women's Christian Temperance Union 1885-1895," *Women in New Zealand Society* (ed. P. Bunkle & Beryl Hughes; Auckland: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 52-76.

WCTU as an organisation devoted to the social purification of both womenhood and manhood.[49] While these themes were undoubtedly present in the movement, there is little evidence in the first years of the movement that these values were shared by all members. Religious motivations rather than eugenic theories seem to be the key to the motivation of early members of the Union. Jolene Mckay, in her fine Otago dissertation on the Dunedin WCTU, probes these issues well. Mckay repeatedly emphasises the small scale of the churches which supported the WCTU.[50] This emphasis is somewhat surprising for a thesis written in Dunedin, for the supportive churches surely included the Free Church Presbyterians who were so dominant in Otago.

Yet a significant group in the WCTU were increasingly suspicious of this evangelical tone in the Union. This reflected a growing debate over the issue of the inspiration and authority of the Bible within the erstwhile evangelical churches.[51] Within the WCTU one group was enthusiastic for the radical *Women's Bible*. A series of events in that same period show evidence of debates within New Zealand Nonconformist evangelicalism. The debate over evolution in the Dunedin YMCA in the 1870s was referred to by one of the newspaper correspondents commenting on controversy over membership of the Union. Even more relevant are the debates over doctrinal orthodoxy in the southern Presbyterian and the Methodist churches in the early 1890s. The debate over the views about immortality expressed by William Salmond, former Presbyterian Professor of Theology, in his pamphlet probably provoked reactions in the union.[52] Only a year later James Gibb, the recently arrived minister of First Church, Dunedin, was arraigned for heresy for his rejection of the doctrine of the predestination of sinners to hell.[53] In 1893 C. H. Garland of the Methodist Church's Theological Institution was accused by Shepherd Allen of Morrinsville (whose wife was probably active in the WCTU) of introducing higher criticism into the Connexion.[54] These events, highly relevant to the debate in the Union, were provoked in part by the charges against Charles Strong of Scots Church, Melbourne, for his rejection of the penal substitution theory of the atonement, one of the key issues raised in the WCTU debate. In essence the WCTU flourished within the world of Moody's rich blend of undenominational evangelism and education. It is this world which shaped what we call both the "fundamentalist" and the "liberal" world especially within Nonconformist (non-Anglican) Protestantism. But growing tensions sundered this work. Moody was faced with increasing division among the "bible conference" supporters on the one side, and the YMCA supporters on the other. The Student Volunteer Movement planted in New Zealand by John R. Mott in 1896 was convulsed with controversy over the same issues in the early 1920s. By the 1920s in America

[49] Sarah Dalton, "The 'pure in heart': the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union and social purity, 1885-1930," (M.A. Diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 1993), 45-72.
[50] Mckay, "The Tie that Binds," 8, 14.
[51] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Biblical Arguments and Women's Place in the Church," in *The Bible and Social Reform* (ed. Ernest R. Sandeen; Philadelphia & Chicago: Fortress/Scholars Press, 1982), 85-104.
[52] William Salmond, *The Reign of Grace: a Discussion of the Question of the Possibility of Salvation for All Men* (Dunedin: John Horsburgh, 1888). See Lawrence H. Barber, "An Otago University Academic on Trial for Heresy," *Forum* (November 1975): 9-11; Alison Clarke, "Heavenly Visions: Otago Colonists' Concepts of the Afterlife," *Journal of Religious History*, 30 (2006): 2-17.
[53] Lawrence H. Barber, "James Gibb's Heresy Trial," *New Zealand Journal of History*, 12 (1978): 146-57.
[54] E.W. Hames, *Out of the Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era 1840-1913* (Wesley Historical Society Proceedings. 27, 1972), 81.

and in New Zealand, the debate over prohibition led to sharp division within evangelicalism into fundamentalism and modernism.

So it is not surprising that this one debate was echoed in later debates in the WCTU about the place of Scripture. The *White Ribbon* noted in April 1897 that the misconstruing of Scripture was a way in which women were kept subject to men, and it urged the interpretation of passages in the context of their times and circumstances.[55] Mary Powell battled with a Lutheran pastor near Palmerston North over the interpretation of Paul's letters.[56] In the Christchurch Diocese of the Anglican Church these same passages were cited in the debate in which women continued to be excluded from participation in synod proceedings.[57] There was a sharp exchange in 1898 between the *White Ribbon*'s regular reviewer, Vesta, and a challenger probably from the Manawatu, Veritas, after Vesta recommended a book by Professor Walter Adeney, *The Construction of the Bible*, which promoted Wellhausen's notorious documentary theory on the compilation of the Pentateuch, and other approaches based on the so-called literary theory—the very issues which had been at stake in the attack on C. H. Garland. To Veritas this was outrageous: "Let us never allow of lowering the sacredness of the Scriptures by the teaching that speaks of man's "compiling" the records therein given to us."[58] Others in the movement took the approach that Scripture did ban the public ministry of women, but that exceptional talents and opportunities could occasion a circumstantial waiver of these rules.[59] Curiously the controversy was entered by Mary S. Powell, the travelling secretary of the movement, who disavowed this tentative fundamentalist position: "I believe a large number of infidels have been manufactured by Christian people claiming for the Bible a verbal infallibility which it does not claim for itself."[60]

The strands of the emerging diversity within the WCTU are relatively easily identified. A religious awareness certainly enables us to identify the "forward movement" within the WCTU as progressive in its theological outlook. It is little wonder that other members complained that the *White Ribbon* was "too advanced." Mrs Sheppard and others involved in the publication took pride in their awareness of the issues of the day.[61] The favourite notion of "scientific temperance" was in many respects loaded in favour of a Social Darwinist perspective. Miss Freeman of Dunedin referred confidently to Herbert Spencer's ideas of "conscious evolution."[62] Although Professor Bickerton of Canterbury College treated Christians with derision, Sheppard and friends cited him as an authority.[63]

---

[55] *White Ribbon*, 2, 22 (April 1897): 8.
[56] *White Ribbon*, 3, 26 (August 1897): 5.
[57] *White Ribbon*, 3, 29 (November 1897): 8.
[58] *White Ribbon*, 4, 37 (July 1898): 1-2; ibid., 4, 39 (September 1898): 4-5, ibid., 4, 43 (December 1899): 5; ibid., 4, 44 (January 1899): 9.
[59] Miss Ackermann's Farewell, *Otago Daily Times* (30 April 1889), 3. The argument was made by Rev. Porter visiting from America.
[60] *White Ribbon*, 4, 40 (October 1898): 9.
[61] *White Ribbon*, 3, 33 (March 1898): 9; ibid., 3, 36 (June 1898): 7-8.
[62] *White Ribbon*, 1, 7 (January 1896): 3-4.
[63] For example *White Ribbon*, 3, 31 (January 1898): 9; ibid., 4, 42 (December 1898): 3.

There was a regular invective in the *White Ribbon* against the church because it did not express love but was rather judgemental and harsh.[64] In an editorial on the longing for peace, Kate Sheppard noted the longing for the fulfilment of the promise of the Christmas angel, and presented the classic liberal Christian dream:

> On every side we see unmistakeable evidence that the teaching of the prince of peace is sinking into the hearts of men. The idea of brotherhood and goodwill is growing. Tribes and factions that were formerly hostile have been knit into nations. Nations are forming alliances with each other with the avowed object of preserving peace. In every land there has been good social progress. Our prisons have been improved; hospitals have been built, slavery is being suppressed; the poor are being educated. Hundreds of thousands of good men and women are giving freely and voluntarily of their time, thought and money to relieve the wants and right the wrongs of those unable to help themselves. Is not this goodwill? Has the prophecy failed? Is it not being very slowly but markedly fulfilled? It is our privilege to help, to keep step with God. Shall we take advantage of it? Let us each cherish the message and strive to do our mite towards filling the world with light and love.[65]

Similarly the movement drew much from Josephine Butler's view of Christ as the leader of a great rebellion.[66] Kate Sheppard shared the same view of Christ, who was hardly the Christ worshipped in the churches, in their narrow approach to divinity:

> yet such was His appearance to those who had no eyes save for externals. But in him dwelt the living God, the God of love, of mercy, and of peace. And the light of his message and life has never ceased to shine. Obscured often by clouds of superstition, of unbelief, of error, it has sent beams of sunshine into many a dark region and cheered many a heart.[67]

She believed that Christianity was the brotherhood of humankind, and reverence for the temple of God in the heart. Professor Herron's description of Christ as the true socialist was cited in another issue of the *White Ribbon* with approval.[68] Even more striking were the views of Eveline Cunnington of Christchurch who, although she was Anglican, had highly unorthodox religious approaches.[69] The new creed by the American novelist and poet, Mrs Elizabeth Phelps, was cited:

> I believe in the life everlasting, which is sure to be; and that it is the first duty of the Christian faith to present that life in a form more attractive to the majority of men than the life that now is. I believe in women, and in their right to their own best possibilities in every department of life. I believe that the methods of dress practised among women are a marked hindrance to the realisation of these possibilities, and that they should be scorned or persuaded out of society. I believe that the miseries attendant on the manufacture and sale of

[64] For example *White Ribbon*, 2, 17 (November 1896): 1-3.
[65] *White Ribbon*, 2, 18 (December 1896): 7.
[66] *White Ribbon*, 2, 19 (January 1897): 1.
[67] *White Ribbon*, 3, 30 (December 1897): 7.
[68] *White Ribbon*, 3, 32 (February 1898): 3.
[69] E.W. Cunnington, *The Lectures and Letters of E. W. Cunnington*, edited by her children (Christchurch: Lyttleton Times, 1918), 100-104.

> intoxicating liquors are so great as to command imperiously the attention of all dedicated lives. I believe that the urgent protest against vivisection which marks our immediate day, and the whole plea for lessening the miseries of animals as endured at the hands of men, constitute the "next" great moral question which is to be put to the intelligent conscience. I believe that the condition of our common and statute laws is behind our age to an extent unperceived by all but a few of our social reformers; that wrongs, medieval in character, and practically resulting in great abuses and much unrecorded suffering, are still to be found at the doors of our legal system.[70]

She goes on to cite Henry Drummond. Drummond was a follower of Moody who, in his much-read book *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883) argued that evolution was a spiritual principle. Drummond was Moody broadened, Moody without doctrinal restraints.[71]

These forces were probably intensified in the late 1890s. Some WCTU members were intensely frustrated with the churches, when the parliament of the Colony allowed women to vote, but the churches that supported this measure failed to admit them to their vestries, diaconates, presbyteries and conferences.[72] Yet it is fair to note that the colony did not permit the election of women as members of the legislature, and some conservative voices in the WCTU certainly thought this was a proper biblical approach.

The terms of this debate are significant. For the concerns of the more radical members of the WCTU reflected the modernist thrust of the social gospel movement.[73] The conservatives of the debate were well informed about debates on these issues.[74] The references to verbal inspiration suggest informed awareness of current theological debates.[75] Thus the WCTU is living proof that the "trans-Atlantic world" of religion also enveloped New Zealand. Both the liberals and the conservatives in the WCTU were part of a rich and wide world of late nineteenth century intellectual transition, which cannot be read in an exclusively New Zealand context.

I do not wish to argue that the WCTU was focused on theological debate, for in that case its extraordinary energy and activism to change the world would have been circumscribed. Conservative and liberal differences were framed within common ground which was a heartfelt desire to change the world for Christ, converting all opponents, transforming all obstacles, and cleansing it from all impurities. Thus activism was the feature of the unions. The WCTU emphasis was on women's responsibility to God (not to their husbands) for their high calling as mothers, although at the same time the softening of the old-style Calvinism is evident in the emphasis that the motive should be love, not fear of punishment, and an

---

[70] *White Ribbon*, 2, 20 (February 1897): 10.
[71] *White Ribbon*, 2, 24 (June 1897): 1.
[72] For example the comments on the Anglican General Synod, *White Ribbon*, 3, 32 (February 1898): 7-8.
[73] William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
[74] See for example George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
[75] Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelical, Scholarship and the Bible in America* (2 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 11-31.

optimism that God willed to see the world follow Christ.[76] They were deeply convinced that Christianity ought to make a better contribution to civilization. When Jessie Mackay commented on the atrocities in Armenia, her appeal was to her readers "As Britons, as citizens, as Christians."[77]

We might argue that the WCTU members on the conservative evangelical side in the debates were traditionalists in their view of society. But this is not the case. Wieneke for example, shared the forward thinking of other members of the WCTU. Coming to New Zealand from Germany about the time of the commencement of the WCTU, she had evidently been trained in Froebel's ideas of infant nurture. Then in 1889 she expressed a profoundly child-centred view in her vision of the Dunedin Free Kindergarten.[78] Yet Wieneke was also strongly evangelistic in orientation, having joined the Brethren shortly after arriving in New Zealand and made it a condition of taking the Dunedin job that she could teach the children Christian truths—an approach which did not endear her to all parents, according to later memories.[79] Others who shared her conservative theology were just as committed to the women's franchise. So one and all in the Union worked with intense devotion for redemption of society in both the narrower and broader sense.

Curiously, although the WCTU effectively chose the broad path in the 1890s, by the 1920s it had returned to a narrower path. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was by the 1970s on the conservative side regarding reformist measures like abortion, taking very seriously its focus on home, family and humanity. These emphases had always been part of its appeal; by the 1970s they led it to take their stand against second wave feminism. Back in the 1890s it was theological, not ideological issues, that divided feminists.

---

[76] *White Ribbon*, 3, 35 (May 1898): 9-10, 11.
[77] *White Ribbon*, 2, 15 (September 1896): 5.
[78] Beryl Hughes, *Flags and Building Blocks, Formality and Fun: One Hundred Years of Free Kindergarten in New Zealand* (Wellington: New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union, 1989), 9.
[79] For WCTU references see WCTU minutes, 1889, 1890. Helen May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: mid-Eighteenth-century Europe to Mid-20th century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press & Bridget Williams Books, 1997), 70; Lineham, *There we found Brethren*, 80, 125; Gertrude Robinson to Peter Lineham, (private communication, 16 December 1975).