THROUGH 'JESUS ONLY': J. K. ARCHER, PUBLIC THEOLOGY, AND BAPTIST IDENTITY IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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John Kendrick Archer (1865-1949) was a New Zealand Baptist minister and politician who served an active ministerial and political career within the Baptist Union of New Zealand and New Zealand Labour Party. Despite his enigmatic and unique blend of political and pastoral offices—serving in various English and New Zealand Baptist pastorates, as president of both the Baptist Union of New Zealand and the New Zealand Labour Party, three-term Mayor of Christchurch, and appointed member of the Legislative Council—Archer remains an underexamined figure within both the religious and political history of New Zealand and in wider Baptist studies.[1] This article examines the first decade of Archer's time in New Zealand where he emigrated from England, draws together an analysis of the social and political currents which shaped his context, examines his own turbulent career within the years of World War I, and offers a reading of a selection of Archer's preaching and other addresses. I argue that the period between two sermons delivered to the Assembly of Baptist Union of New Zealand—"Jesus Only" in 1910 and "Covetousness" in 1918—represents a maturing and crystallising of Archer's public theological vision which he pursued with force into his later years. Finally, I conclude by setting this analysis of Archer within a paradigm of public theology in order to offer insights into the field of Baptist studies and theology.

BAPTIST AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

J. K. Archer arrived at the pastorate of Napier Baptist Church in 1908 from England in his forty-third year. He entered a growing and increasingly buoyant Union situated amidst a developing post-British colony which, despite its youth, was approaching its own unique social existence and consolidation simultaneous to the development of the Baptist church. From its formal inception in 1882, the Baptist Union of New Zealand saw significant growth in both congregations and members at the turn of the twentieth century. Within the twelve years from 1903-1914 there was an increase of 59% in local church membership.[2] This

[1] Though he appears in various political and church histories, only two scholarly publications exist on Archer in and of himself, both written in the 1990s. See: Martin Sutherland, "Pulpit or Podium? J. K. Archer and the Dilemma of Christian Politics in New Zealand," *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 1 (1996): 26–46; and Barry Gustafson, "Archer, John Kendrick," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 3, ed. Claudia Orange (Wellington: Allen & Unwin. 1996), 16–17. This does not include a biography commissioned by the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society in the 1970s which remains the most extensive secondary account of Archer's life to date. See: N. R. Wood, "John Kendrick Archer: Baptist Minister—Christian Socialist 1865-1949," *Bulletin of the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society* 7 (1970): 1–22.

[2] J. Ayson Clifford, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.*, vol. 2 (Wellington: New Zealand Baptist Historical Society, 1984), 71.

was a deliberate and fruitful result of an effort for growth and development in the Union; the 1901 Assembly resolved to form at least one new local church each year.[3] This goal was quickly surpassed, yet alongside this increase Baptists in New Zealand were searching to find their own sense of coherency and identity within the new settler society. Whereas dissenting traditions in England had long-established practices of nonconformity, the general ecclesial situation was markedly different in Aotearoa, a dynamic which Archer himself wrestled with during the war years. Entering with growth into the new century, Baptists in New Zealand were nonetheless struggling to mark out their own identity in the "new" world.[4]

The Union's new life reflected wider cultural and social forces at play. Within just six decades of European settlement, New Zealand settler society had quickly developed and organised highly functioning social and political institutions. In the eyes of the emerging settler nation and wider colonial imagination, factors such as the development of political and legal structures based off the Westminster system, near-universal primary school education, giving women the vote, developing transport links across a geographically diverse country, building an agricultural economy supplying Britain, and even supporting a basic pension scheme gave the young colony an attitude and reputation of progressivity and equality.[5] James Belich refers to this phase as the "second type" of European colonisation in Aotearoa—what he terms "recolonisation"—the making of a new society in search of a "better Britain."[6] The remarkable and disruptive rate of European population growth and development in the late nineteenth century, in Belich's approximation, created an unstable collective settler identity that marked the transition into the twentieth century. The result, however, was a re-narration of New Zealand as a nation for its own end; "from embryonic superpower to the world's social laboratory."[7] New Zealand society saw itself as "co-owners of the British empire" rather than "subjects of it."[8] Thus, New Zealand was to be like Britain, but a better Britain "without the mistakes."[9]

Archer was attracted to New Zealand for its radical reputation and egalitarian social policies. In England, the undeniable figure in his life had been that of John Clifford. Clifford was a personal friend and mentor for Archer who wrote him a glowing commendation to the Union in New Zealand.[10] Despite success in England, Archer left his position at Zion Chapel in Grimsby eager to study the economic and social conditions of New Zealand.[11] Napier provided him a chance to do so as he took to various ministerial and political platforms to discuss the socialism he inherited under Clifford. During his time at Napier Baptist, Archer preached widely on social topics, delivering a six-week lecture series on Christian socialism

[3] Clifford, *A Handful of Grain*, 71.
[4] Martin Sutherland, *Conflict and Connection: Baptist Identity in New Zealand* (Auckland: Archer, 2011), 81–94.
[5] Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), 283.
[6] James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1800s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001), 29–30.
[7] Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, 77. This process of European settlement and recolonisation is occurring at the simultaneous dispossession and struggle for identity and resistance of Māori who continued to resist the domination of British settler society throughout this epoch in which the myth of their decline was most persistent. See also Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990), 186–210.
[8] James Belich, "How Much Did Institutions Matter? Cloning Britain in New Zealand," in *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600-1900*, ed. Jack P. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 249.
[9] Belich, "How Much Did Institutions Matter?" 250.
[10] For Archer's various commendations see *New Zealand Baptist*, June 1908, 114.
[11] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 5.

in 1910.[12] In 1913, he became editor of the *United Labour Leader* and increasingly involved with the Social Democratic Party which was later absorbed into the founding of the New Zealand Labour Party in 1916.[13] Though enthusiastic for the potential of radical social reform in New Zealand, Archer did experience frustration with the political scene later in life.

Influencing many socialist political movements during this period was a strong postmillennial eschatology—a commonly held assumption that the gradual progression of Western civilisation towards equality and freedom would inaugurate the return of Jesus Christ. Though it was not unanimous, a stream of interest regarding socialism, as a means for a social understanding of the gospel being realised amidst the political and economic structures of society, ran through the Baptist Union of New Zealand, and certainly in wider Baptist circles abroad.[14] As early as 1890 the denominational periodical, the *New Zealand Baptist,* raised the "labour question" as one of its most pressing concerns, albeit presenting the issue with a rather cautious stance.[15] By the turn of the century, a progressive eschatological atmosphere was palpable: "The days are hastening now towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God amongst men.… His authority extends to every province of human energy. To make that authority effective and supreme is the duty of the true Christian, who must live in the world and not apart from it; in the world, but not of it; a force to leaven and purify."[16] This type of language and theological thinking was hardly unusual during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, though more commonly associated with liberal Protestantism in America. As the American Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch wrote in his influential *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, at the core of this understanding of the gospel "is not a matter of getting individuals into heaven but of transforming the life of earth into the harmony of heaven."[17] Though Archer read figures like Rauschenbusch, he was primarily influenced by British Baptist and socialist thinkers, specifically organisations who advocated for non-revolutionary socialism, such as the Fabian Society of which he was a member.[18] Prominent Baptists such as Clifford, while somewhat paralleling the social gospel movement in North America, held to their own distinct and generative form of Christian socialism.[19] The level of public engagement within British nonconformity during this time achieved a remarkable amount of social and political influence, one pertinent example being the tax strikes against the Educational Act of 1902 led by Clifford which Archer himself participated in.[20]

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[12] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 8.
[13] Gustafson, "Archer, John Kendrick," 16–17.
[14] John Tucker, *A Braided River: New Zealand Baptists and Public Issues 1882-2000* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 23.
[15] "The Question of the Hour," *New Zealand Baptist*, May 1890, 65. See also: Laurie Guy, *Shaping Godzone: Public Issues and Church Voices in New Zealand 1840-2000* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011), 198.
[16] A. S. Adams, "The Relation of the Church to the Social Problems of the Age," *New Zealand Baptist Handbook*: *1906-1907*, 10-11.
[17] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 65.
[18] For a treatment of Archer's ideological influences see: Sutherland, "Pulpit or Podium?" 26–46.
[19] Matthew Tennant, "Modern Implications of John Clifford's Theological Understanding of Socialism," in *Baptists and the World: Renewing the Vision: Papers from the Baptist Historical Society Conference, Prague, Czech Republic, July 2008*, eds. John H. Y. Briggs and Anthony R. Cross (Oxford: Regents Park, 2011), 96–101.
[20] David Bebbington, *Baptists Throughout the Centuries: A History of a Global People*, 2nd ed. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 134; Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 4–5. See also: David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 127–152. Wood records that Archer had a number of books seized which he then bought back at auction. Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 4–5.

This period in early twentieth century Aotearoa also saw the emergence of party politics and the rise of unionism. By 1912, the Liberal government, the first organised political party in New Zealand, after a period of decline was replaced by the newly formed Reform Party. Amidst this shift in power was the rise of the New Zealand Labour Party. New Zealand's population was experiencing an increasing disparity between social and economic strata, the cost of living was increasing, and there was a shortage of housing and affordable rental properties.[21] The Liberal government was increasingly pushed to the centre and Labour's approach spoke more fruitfully to those interested in socialism.[22] The rise of unionism culminated in the 1913 Great Strike, which lasted until early 1914, bringing New Zealand's economy to a near halt.[23] Policies of redistribution and egalitarianism became an attractive option amidst wealth inequality and high costs of living.

The Labour Party contained a vocal minority, which included Archer, who were inspired by religious and Christian ideals.[24] Archer was particularly involved in the formation of the New Zealand Labour Party, though his failure to be elected to the House of Representatives diminished his influence in the party later on. Such was his standing in these early years of Labour's development, his commitment to the party was noted numerous times in Parliamentary tributes given in the Legislative Council after his death. Then-leader of the Council, David Wilson, commented: "There have been quite a large number of ministers of the Gospel who have been associated with the Labour party, but I think it would be true to say that there was never one in the Labour movement or out of it who was so highly respected and widely known as the late Reverend J. K. Archer."[25] This forging of political and party identity can be seen within the wider ecosystem of societal identity seeking the emergence of a supposedly utopian colonial nation.

J. K. ARCHER AMIDST THE WAR YEARS

As alluded to, the years at home in New Zealand society during the First World War were marked by a variety of different social and economic issues. Despite relatively sedated economic movement during the period of 1900-1914, New Zealand society was undergoing dramatic change regarding the influx of European settlers and processes of industrialisation. Along with this change came a gradual rise in the cost of living, unemployment—which peaked in 1908-1909—and a shortage of affordable rental accommodation, especially in the big cities.[26] The Great War exasperated these conditions. Within the first year of the War, the cost of food for an average family rose by 16.5%, roughly the same inflation that occurred over 20 years prior.[27] In the end, between July 1914 and July 1919, the cost of rent, food, fuel, and

[21] Barry Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence: Origins and Establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party 1900-19* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1980), 96–101.
[22] King, *Penguin History*, 307, 322.
[23] James Watson, "The Continuation of Politics: Parliamentarians and the Great War," in *New Zealand Society at War 1914-1918*, ed. Steven Loveridge (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 52.
[24] Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, 120–131.
[25] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 281, 1948, 978.
[26] Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, 96.
[27] Steven Loveridge and James Watson, "Economic Mobilisation: New Zealand Business and the Great War," in *New Zealand Society at War 1914-1918*, ed. Steven Loveridge (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 166.

electricity combined rose by one third in the four main urban centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.[28] Meeting the required industrial outputs put a strain on women, children, and older men, given that younger men were being sent to Europe.[29] War profiteering was another area of concern and societal angst.[30] These concerns and social inequalities would come into sharp focus in Archer's 1918 presidential address, "Covetousness," which we shall examine later.

Archer himself was undergoing a turbulent time in his life and career. Within the space of just a few years, Archer and his family moved across the country into various pastoral and chaplaincy settings, a period of life N. R. Wood calls "the broken years."[31] In late 1913, to his congregation's disappointment, he completed his time at Napier Baptist to receive a call at Esk Street Baptist in Invercargill. By early 1916, Archer finished at Esk Street to take up the prominent pastorate of Vivian Street Baptist Church in Wellington where he would remain for only seventeen months before, once again, moving on to become an army chaplain at Tauherenikau military camp. This period of unsettlement finally ended after the War in 1919 when he became the pastor of Sydenham Baptist in Christchurch, a position in which he would remain until his formal retirement from pastoral ministry in 1932.

Throughout this time, Archer was actively preaching and teaching, often with special attention to both prophetic and apocalyptic literature in the Bible, as well as being politically active. At Esk Street, Archer preached on "Armageddon" and at Vivian Street ran a series of addresses on the book of Revelation during the mid-week prayer meeting.[32] In Invercargill, Archer served as president of the local Workers Educational Association and was elected to the Borough Council. Amidst his chaplaincy at Tauherenikau he delivered his forceful sermon "Covetousness." The decision to eventually settle in Christchurch was partly influenced by the terms of call, including space for Archer to pursue a political career while being a minister. The congregation at Sydenham—which eventually became Colombo Street Baptist—happily agreed.

The Maturing of a Public Theological Vision

Martin Sutherland argues that the period during the years of World War I represents a sort of "midlife crisis" in which Archer is wrestling between his commitments to pastoral ministry and political office. Sutherland contends that after 1918, Archer's political career becomes his primary focus born from frustration in finding New Zealand Baptists less politically active than the free church in England.[33] "Had he stayed in Britain," Sutherland writes, "it is possible Archer would have continued to direct his energies into the Church's radical activities."[34] But instead, Sutherland argues that Archer turns primarily towards politics to practise his vision of Christian socialism, "resolving his personal struggle by choosing the podium above the pulpit."[35] This is too simplistic a reading; while Archer became more involved in national politics, he

[28] Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, 96.
[29] Loveridge and Watson, "Economic Mobilisation," 166.
[30] Loveridge and Watson, "Economic Mobilisation," 167.
[31] See Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 10–15.
[32] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 10–11.
[33] Sutherland, *Conflict and Connection*, 108–112.
[34] Sutherland, "Pulpit or Podium?" 43.
[35] Sutherland, *Conflict and Connection*, 112.

did so as a committed minister of a local church and of the Baptist Union. Furthermore, his blending of political and pastoral offices was not without precedent within Archer's own career in England.

Certainly, Archer's political activity increased after World War I. In 1919, he stood unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate for the House of Representatives in Invercargill, a position he would attempt twice more in 1922 and 1928 in Christchurch, and another occasion still in 1931 in Kaiapoi. Though this parliamentary avenue failed Archer, from 1925 he was elected for three consecutive terms as Mayor of Christchurch, marking him as the first Labour mayor of a major New Zealand city.[36] In 1929, after serving various stints as vice-president, Archer became the president of the New Zealand Labour Party. Yet throughout nearly all this time, Archer actively served his denomination, whether in his pastoring of Colombo Street Baptist, his extensive involvement with the Canterbury Westland Baptist Association, or his activity with the executive council of the Baptist Union. Wood maintains that Archer's ministry in Christchurch "had two sides to the observer, one church, the other political. Archer saw these two sides as equal applications of the gospel of Christ, with the Church taking priority."[37] Members of Colombo Street Baptist understood his political and ministerial careers as complementary, not competitive. When Archer decided not to run for another term as Mayor, one member noted: "our church has really benefitted from our Pastor holding the dual office. The addresses on Sundays have been practical and inspiring."[38] When Archer completed his pastorate at Colombo Street after 13 years, then-Mayor of Christchurch, Dan Sullivan, a Roman Catholic, paid similar tributes, commenting on Archer's fervent commitment to the churches he served and his genuine desire to work for church purposes. Sullivan remarked, "Mr. Archer has been a good member of the Labour party and a courageous fighter throughout his career, and I am convinced that his politics and fearless outlook are due to his religious convictions."[39] Archer remained a pastor who was as committed to the pulpit as he was to the political podium. For Archer it was not a choice of pulpit or podium, but pulpit *and* podium.

Furthermore, this increase in political activity after 1918 should not be seen as some sort of departure from Archer's earlier life but rather as a relatively predictable progression right from his earliest years in pastoral ministry. In England, Archer was actively involved in public, political, and civic life while serving as a pastor. For example, almost immediately after his appointment at Zion, Grimsby, Archer became involved in a number of disputes over the temperance cause. This conflict culminated in somewhat of a feud between Archer and the local councillor running for mayoralty, Francis Evison, who owned a local public house. Archer very publicly denounced Evison's (later successful) candidacy in a letter to the local newspaper as "a disgrace and a scandal to the town."[40] The rivalry ended in a successful lawsuit from Evison for libel. Archer held political office in Grimsby, too, being elected as the Labour candidate to the Grimsby Board of Poor Law Guardians in 1907, a locally elected board that managed social welfare, which he

[36] Peter Franks and Jim McAloon, *The New Zealand Labour Party: 1916-2016* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 85.
[37] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 15. While Wood writes primarily for the purposes of denominational history, it is nonetheless not clear that Archer's political positions were fundamentally born out of a frustration at the churches.
[38] Quoted in Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 19.
[39] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 21.
[40] E. Harrison, "Manuscript Detailing Archer's Ministry at Grimsby," received by the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society in 1977: J. K. Archer files, MA188, New Zealand Baptist Archive, 13-15.

remained on until he left for Napier.[41] Sutherland himself admits that the "picture we have of Archer at Grimsby is of an activist pursuing several causes at any one time in addition to his pastoral duties."[42] Of the recommendations which Archer received upon arriving to Aotearoa, the reference from the Mayor of Grimsby is indicative of his standing and reputation in the local community.[43]

It is not clear that after World War I, Archer makes a dramatic career shift into politics, leaving behind his commitment to church work such that, by 1918, "secular politics had become the preferred channel for his socialist Gospel."[44] Sutherland's claim that Archer gave up his pastoral duties for the sake of political platform does not account for Archer's ongoing commitment to the Baptist church. Instead, the two remain intertwined in a more complex way, as they had before and after Archer's arrival to New Zealand. It is not clear whether Archer's political positions were fundamentally born out of a frustration at the state of the Baptist Union and free church tradition in New Zealand however much he might have experienced irritations. The increase in political activity that occurred after the First World War is more likely a consequence of a developing and maturing career. Regarding motives, Archer's "intervention in the public square" was born out of an insistence about the public foundation of the Christian life.[45] More specifically, it arose out of a dynamic reading of the Bible, a feature which is amply demonstrated in his preaching. Archer's public theological creed is evidenced in an analysis of the development of his preaching during this time which reached maturation on the far side of the Great War.

UNION SERMON AND OTHER ADDRESSES: "JESUS ONLY" AND "COVETOUSNESS"

Archer's preaching serves as an insight into the way his political understandings were intertwined with his reading of the Bible and understanding of Christianity. Indeed, the extent to which Archer merged the political and theological so closely in both vocation and ideology throughout his life remains noteworthy. Archer's parliamentary addresses were replete with biblical allusions and references to the Christian gospel.[46] To make most of his points, whether in the pulpit or in parliament, Archer remained insistent that it was only a reading of the Bible which would enable real social change and progress. To one Baptist assembly, upon rhetorically inquiring whether the congregation knew the solutions to all society's ills, Archer thrust his Bible onto the pulpit of Vivian Street Church and proclaimed, "Here it is!"[47] Archer, in both political and ministerial office, constantly referenced the Bible to make his political claims.

[41] Harrison, "Manuscript," 93–96.
[42] Sutherland, "Pulpit or Podium?" 37.
[43] *New Zealand Baptist*, June 1908, 114.
[44] Sutherland, *Conflict and Connection*, 110.
[45] Barry Gustafson, "Intervention in the Public Square: Baptists and Politics in New Zealand, 1916-19," *Bulletin of the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society* 8 (1980): 2–7.
[46] E.g., *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 260, 1941, 639-641, where Archer draws on the Genesis creation story, Jesus' response to his disciples' invocation of Elijah in Luke 9:51-56, and Jesus' words on the cross in Luke 23:34 all in response to a debate on the morality of capital punishment.
[47] G. T. Beilby, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.*, vol. 3 (Wellington: New Zealand Baptist Historical Society, 1984), 101.

Few sermons reflect this dynamic as well as two addresses delivered at the annual Assembly of the Baptist Union of New Zealand: "Jesus Only" in 1910 and "Covetousness" in 1918. Rather than representing a disillusionment with the church, these two addresses represent a thickening of Archer's understanding of Christian socialism and public theology. Where "Jesus Only" is vague and idealistic, "Covetousness" is confident and direct. The turbulent time between the two sermons thus represents a maturing of Archer's thought. This development is anticipated by his New Year's message as president of the Baptist Union in between 1917 and 1918.

"Jesus Only"

"Jesus Only" was delivered as the Union Sermon at the Assembly in 1910. The sermon follows an exposition of Matthew 17:8. Just as the Apostles "looked up" to see the transfigured Jesus, Archer implores the national Assembly to see "Jesus only" in all their dealings across society. He preached that "Jesus only must be our motto, our ideal, our standard of measurement, our goal," arguing that "Jesus only is sufficient for reconciliation, cleansing, guidance, … to science … to economics … or to theology."[48] Archer had a particular idea of political reform based on a redistribution of wealth and socialistic economics. He made no pretences regarding his agenda, explicitly denoting this form of political action as a divine imperative by boldly claiming that "socialism is merely an attempt to place Jesus on the throne of society."[49] While it could be easy to dismiss this as simple cultural captivity, Archer ties his socialism to a sustained reading of the Bible. It is not that he is merely making theological claims and then making social claims. Rather, Archer makes theological claims about the nature of the public space, the unfolding history of the world, and the observable "progress" of humankind. Christ's lordship is understood as lordship in contemporary, legislative terms and in modern politics. "Jesus, Jesus only, was [to the lame man at Bethesda] his legislative authority. He only is ours."[50] Thus, "we must claim all life for Jesus, home life, business life, political life, and recreative life, as well as religious. We must destroy the distinction between sacred and secular by making all life sacred."[51]

Yet, there can be no doubt that cultural and theological currents were shaping Archer's beliefs, particularly a pre-War progressivist eschatology. As has already been examined, theological currents such as postmillennialism were prominent in the time and, although he never lost a certain kind of eschatological flair, Archer himself reflected with retroactively misguided optimism in "Jesus Only." Archer is relatively dismissive regarding a number of contemporary social issues: "Legalised slavery is virtually dead. Legalised disability for womanhood is dying. Arbitration is replacing war. The drink traffic is doomed. … Jesus, rightly understood, interpreted, applied, is the solution of all social, national and international problems."[52] Archer is less specific regarding how this Christocentric social ethic should be "rightly understood" and applied. Social issues, and their remedy, are only vaguely treated. By 1918 in "Covetousness," Archer develops a far

[48] J. K. Archer, "Jesus Only," *New Zealand Baptist*, January 1911, 11.
[49] Archer, "Jesus Only," 11.
[50] Archer, "Jesus Only," 12.
[51] Archer, "Jesus Only," 13.
[52] Archer, "Jesus Only," 11, 13.

clearer and more specific picture. The period between "Jesus Only" and "Covetousness" represents a period of growth for Archer in which he turns his ideals towards concrete social issues around him, more carefully applying his theological understanding of the public and the political.

"Covetousness"

"Covetousness" was a homiletical bombshell in its time. As a pamphlet, it was distributed well beyond the Baptist Assembly to which it was delivered.[53] Wood writes of the sermon as "one of the most outspoken presidential addresses" ever delivered, arguing that "[i]n some respects, the address ranks as one of the greatest ever given by any president of the Union."[54] It remains a powerful example not only of Archer's breadth of public theological thinking—representing for him somewhat of a manifesto—but also of the political and theological streams of the early twentieth century activistic Baptist tradition and identity.

"Covetousness" is an extensive reflection on a variety of social issues which Archer confronts.[55] From a reading of Colossians, Archer defines covetousness at its core as a "desire for more … more than others possess."[56] Archer applies this definition of greed throughout the sermon to an astonishing range of issues including war profiteering, imperialism, land ownership, international mission, wealth inequality, the labour question, local ministers' wages, and parliamentary power. Archer first reflects on geopolitical conflicts regarding the First World War. Despite tracing the origins of the conflict on the German Kaiser's desire for expansion and growth, Archer refuses to let this become a scapegoat for Britain and her colony's economic self-interests:

> Let not us Britishers, however, wrap ourselves in a cloak of hypocrisy, and talk as if we are free from this Satanic spirit.… [The war profits] are outrageous. Not a farthing of them is justifiable. In England they are estimated to total anything up to £750,000,000 a year. In New Zealand they seem to be proportionately as great.… No wonder the Hon. W. D. Mackenzie, Minister of Agriculture, himself a farmer, speaks of our 'sordid commercialism.' In its presence we have little right to throw stones of criticism at Germany's self-seeking. Fundamentally, competitive commercialism is the same all the world over.… It is the most un-Christian thing on the face of the earth. Before the war it was discredited. Now it is irrevocably disgraced.[57]

Refusing to justify Britain's actions—actions which he clearly sees both his own and the Assembly's complicity in—Archer turns to examine the conditions of British and European rule in Ireland and Africa respectively. The minority colonial rule in both these places, Archer contends, "are the fruits of covetousness, and exceedingly bitter to the taste."[58] Of the ongoing scramble for Africa, he reports:

> Landgrabbers, mostly white folk, are dividing up that giant continent without proper consideration of the rights of the natives. They are crowding the natives on to clearly defined reserves, small compared to the number of natives, and in constant danger of being reduced. The continental

[53] For example, it appears often throughout Barry Gustafson's account of Labour's origins. See: Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*.
[54] Wood, "John Kendrick Archer," 13–14.
[55] J. K. Archer, "Covetousness," *New Zealand Baptist*, December 1918, 184–9.
[56] Archer, "Covetousness," 184.
[57] Archer, "Covetousness," 185.
[58] Archer, "Covetousness," 186.

> railways, the one already running from the Cape to Cairo, and another contemplated from East to West, open up vast territories for white men to exploit, at the expense of black.[59]

Quoting the editor of the International Review of Missions, Archer implored the Assembly with the message that mission work must proclaim Jesus Christ "as Lord of the whole life."[60] Social, economic, and imperial reform is nothing short of an issue of the gospel: "Regeneration implies, includes, and impels the reconstruction of society."[61]

Archer then turns to the social conditions of New Zealand in a fiery denouncement of land acquisition, property holding, wealth inequality, and working conditions. First, he compares the European settlement and acquisition of land in New Zealand to the actions of previous British tyrants:

> After William of Normandy had conquered England, he boldly claimed that all the land belonged to him … Vicious old Henry VIII suppressed the English monasteries, and thereby got a possession of a fifth, if not a third, of all the land in England.… The origins of land monopoly in New Zealand are scarcely less discreditable.… By force or guile we have taken 63,000,000 acres … from the Maoris [*sic*]. A lot of it was got for nothing, and a lot more for next-to-nothing.[62]

Here, Archer's socialistic vision of government is his main agenda. He calls for the redistribution of wealth in an attempt to end poverty and the centralisation of property in order to break the hold of elite landowners. Whatever the validity of such a view, Archer is explicit in calling the Assembly to political action. "Prayer will not produce the change," he preached, "Votes alone will deal with them. Politicians laugh at prayers; but they tremble at votes."[63]

However, Archer fundamentally sees the addressing of these social problems as an issue of discipleship. Despite demonstrating clear political agendas in "Covetousness," the impetus and energy for such action is theological. Archer, through an exposition of Colossians 3:5, reflects on the purging of sin from the life of the church as an act of participation in the life and death of Christ. He ties the sacrifice of Jesus to the reality of a new life free from death and greed, such that Jesus' death and resurrection are to be understood as "moral and spiritual experiences as well as historic facts."[64] Through the resurrection, we are given new life, "a life so new that covetousness has no place in it … covetousness may be slain, and should be. It may be slain instantly, and forever."[65]

This represents an evolution in Archer's public theological thought. In 1910, "Jesus Only" hinted at the way the gospel must be "rightly applied" to the issues of the day. After the turbulent period of the Great War, "Covetousness" emerges more confident. It is pertinent to note that "Covetousness" was delivered a month before Armistice. Despite the war fatigue that must have surely been present in the 1918 Assembly, Archer is uncompromising. By presenting a wide sweep of the various local and international consequences of covetousness, Archer once again calls for political action as a theological imperative. This time, however,

[59] Archer, "Covetousness," 186.
[60] Archer, "Covetousness," 186.
[61] Archer, "Covetousness," 186.
[62] Archer, "Covetousness," 186–187.
[63] Archer, "Covetousness," 189.
[64] Archer, "Covetousness," 188.
[65] Archer, "Covetousness," 188.

he is clearer regarding what that precisely entails; a prophetic witness to the death and life of Jesus Christ concretely applied in political and social action.

Between the Pulpit and the Podium

The force of "Covetousness" was anticipated by Archer's New Year message to the churches in the *New Zealand Baptist* as president of the Baptist Union in 1918. In this address, Archer expressly calls for the reinvigoration of social action within the life of local congregations with a prophetic and eschatological urgency. Reflecting on the Apostle Paul's words to be "ready," Archer implores the churches to prepare with determination and steadfastness for the year ahead. The very reputation and potency of the church depended on it; reflecting on the perception of religious life from the soldiers he was ministering with, Archer argues that popular opinion "is not merely out of touch with the Churches but is positively full of wrath and resentment against the Churches."[66] He reasons that there is a "deeply held belief that the Churches are not Christian and are not representing Christ in the life of the community."[67] Instead "they are splitting theological hairs, emphasising ecclesiastical differences, winking at and even indulging in economic sins, instead of setting up the kingdom of God."[68] Archer then calls for a prophetic response on the part of Baptists:

> As Baptists we ought to be more ready than the members of any other Church. Our ancestors were in the true line of prophetic and apostolic succession. Would to God that all of us were prophets, not foretellers so much as forthtellers, men and women who live in touch with God and interpret Him to the age!… We require to dream Spirit-prompted apocalypses of our own, and then strive to get them actualised.… Not gazing into the sky, but working away at the earth, helping Him to re-create it is our chief business.[69]

Archer makes a connection to the biblical prophets, insisting that rather than studying them as static figures of history their critiques of economic injustice must be brought into the contemporary public square. In another later address reflecting on Baptist identity, Archer understands his own tradition as one with a rich prophetic heritage based on the total lordship of Christ. For Baptists, "the Christian Gospel has its social implications and applications, and to evade these is to deny our Lord."[70]

The example of these various messages and sermons demonstrates Archer's lasting concern to situate public and political witness amidst a social reading of the Bible. Furthermore, these manuscripts demonstrate that the period during the Great War, rather than fundamentally upending Archer's public theological vision, developed and furthered it. By the end of 1918, Archer was more confident to enter the political world partly because he had specified and narrowed down on his calling and purpose. Archer's life could accurately be read as an active attempt to live between the sacred and the secular; his pastoral and political callings irrevocably intertwined. Indeed, later, during a speech in the Legislative Council, Archer commented on his "peculiar position": "When I speak here [in parliament] my friends tell me I am preaching

[66] J. K. Archer, "President's New Year Message," *New Zealand Baptist*, January 1918, 4.
[67] Archer, "President's New Year Message," 4.
[68] Archer, "President's New Year Message," 4.
[69] Archer, "President's New Year Message," 4.
[70] J. K. Archer, "The Distinctive Message and Mission of the Baptists," address given to the Christchurch Minister's Association, 1931: J. K. Archer files, MA188, New Zealand Baptist Archive, 5.

sermons. When I preach in the pulpit, they tell me I am talking politics. I really do not know which is right."[71] As Barry Gustafson writes in his account of Archer, "there was no conflict between his political and religious activities; both were the same sacred vocation."[72] The pull, and union, between the pulpit and the podium remained at the generative centre of Archer's calling, rather than as a source of contradiction.

POLITICAL ACTION, BAPTIST IDENTITY, AND PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Archer offers a unique ministerial vision which takes seriously an understanding of Christian faith that is innately public. In this way, a public theology cannot be conceived of by simply translating Christian insights to a wider, secular public square. Instead, Archer imagines the wider secular public as a place in which Christ's kingdom *is already present*, arguing for a theological understanding of political and social action through his own particular means of socialism. Archer therefore represents an understudied Baptist dynamic that imagines political action and social engagement for the church as key places of eschatological anticipation. Furthermore, in his practice, Archer understood this engagement with the public as innately tied to the pastoral office. Archer pursued his ministerial vocation in the confines of such an eschatological public through the medium of political and social action.

As Paul Fiddes has argued, at the heart of a Baptist theology lies the immediate rule of Jesus Christ over the life of the local congregation, a rule which seeks God's eschatological purposes in and for this local community.[73] Simon Woodman writes in his analysis of Baptist eschatology and nonviolence: "From their theologically driven and politically enacted rejection of Christendom, to their commitment to scripture as the revelation of Christ to each gathered community, Baptists were deeply motivated to play their part in inaugurating the kingdom of Christ that they believed was coming into being in their midst."[74] Thus, as Martin Sutherland argues, the Baptist community "is rightly concerned with how it is to live in its real time context. Gathered in Christ's name it seeks to harmonises its own with his story and, thus, with the Kingdom of God."[75] Archer constantly appealed to this prophetic calling. "Supremely," he pronounced, "we need to study not what Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and John the Evangelist said and did when they were alive; but what they would say and do if they were alive now."[76] Archer's vision of Christian socialism and political engagement can rightly be understood as an attempt to live in active anticipation of God's eschatological purposes in "its real time context." His ongoing commitment to the local church, at least implicitly, reflects a peculiarly Baptistic disposition.

Baptist identity within the study of public theology remains an underexamined opportunity. Archer, and other public Baptist leaders, such as J. J. North or John Clifford, provide historical examples of Baptists

[71] *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 264, 1944, 415–16.
[72] Gustafson, "Archer," 17.
[73] See Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock/Milton Keyes: Paternoster, 2003), 85–86.
[74] Simon P. Woodman, "There's a New World Coming Baptists, Violence, and the End of the World," *Baptist Quarterly* 50 (2019): 140.
[75] Martin Sutherland, "Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method," *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 3 (2007): 41–57, 55.
[76] Archer, "President's New Year Message," 4.

who engaged in the public square in provocative and interesting ways.[77] His work is a form of public and political theology before they were formally established as disciplines. It offers a fruitful resource for the development of contemporary Baptist public theology. Political action and witness, far from being a distraction from the "real" task of the church, is a participation in the eschatological preparation of society for the return of Jesus Christ. In line with this call for political holiness, public theology and Christian political action are not simply a useful contribution to the common good—though they are not less than this—but rather an eschatologically orientated participation in the mission of God. How precisely Baptists have embodied this remains an ongoing question of inquiry. In the example of J. K. Archer, public theology is found within the union of the pulpit and the podium. He understood his political calling as inherent to his pastoral vocation.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to give due attention to a underexamined figure within New Zealand and Baptist history. Limitations of space mandate that only brief vignettes be offered. First, I have situated Archer within the societal and denominational contexts into which he arrived at Napier Baptist in 1908. This arrival was to inaugurate a remarkable political and ministerial career in New Zealand, spanning a number of decades and contexts. I have argued that the period in Archer's life between 1910 and 1918, rather than being some sort of crisis that resulted in a disillusionment with the church, is best understood as a maturation of his public theological creed. The fruits of this development are particularly observable in his preaching, "Jesus Only" and "Covetousness" revealing an increasingly thick and generative understanding of public and political action as inherent to the church's mission and embodiment. This pastoral understanding of public theology offers exciting opportunities for understanding Baptist identity and its relationship to political witness and action.

[77] For an account of J. J. North's preaching, see: John Tucker, "The Ancient Word in the Modern World: The Preaching of J.J. North," in *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, eds. Geoff Troughton and Stuart Lange (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 139–53.