

New Zealand Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement

The first Baptist church in New Zealand was established at Nelson in 1851. While this was only eleven years after the Treaty of Waitangi, and the country was very young, other denominations had been working here for some time, and were well established. From the time of Marsden the Anglican church was influential. The Methodists had been here since 1822, and were active especially in the north. The Catholic church was in New Zealand from 1838. In the south, especially in Dunedin, the Presbyterians were dominant.

The Baptists were few in numbers, and probably not well understood nor accepted by others. Most had come from the U.K. where, since the early seventeenth century, they had held views at variance with the established church, and had in some cases been disadvantaged for doing so. They tended to be determined people, deeply convinced that their stance was right. Some had come from long-established Baptist churches.¹ The first, Henry Cooper Daniell, was from Broadmeads Baptist Church, Bristol, a church with a long and distinguished denominational history. Some came from families which had been Baptist for a number of generations, and were convinced of the correctness of the emphases Baptists made. Others had only recently become Baptists (Gilbert Carson had been a Presbyterian, Decimus Dolamore and Alfred North Anglicans, and James Thornton a Congregationalist), and had all the zeal of new converts, holding to their recently found expression of the faith with an unquestioning intensity.

Despite this they did not regard themselves as other than members of the universal church of Jesus Christ, inheritors of the

rich history of the past, and upholders of the main tenets of the church. Alfred North, minister of the Hanover Street Baptist Church (1882-1900) said, 'Baptists held great principles which are held in common by all who worship Christ. Thus they did not see themselves as schismatic or a sect.' They were as orthodox as conservative believers of other denominations would have been. They were conversant with early church history, and spoke and wrote of it as their own.

In some places, because their numbers were small, they worshipped with existing churches (with Wesleyans at Thames, Plymouth Brethren in Kaipara and Nelson, and with Presbyterians in Wanganui.) But because agreement could not be reached in some matters which Baptists thought significant, these 'partnerships' broke up, and churches were established that expressed what were thought to be distinctive Baptist principles.

These principles have been enunciated in the Baptist Union Incorporation Act, 1923, where the doctrinal basis of the Union (insofar as it expressed the distinctiveness of Baptists rather than totality of their belief) is stated under six points: the inspiration of the Bible and its authority in all matters of faith and practice, the true humanity and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the atonement by Our Lord on the Cross for the sin of the world, salvation by faith in Christ alone, membership in the Christian Church for the regenerate, and the immersion of believers as the only scriptural form of baptism.

Back in 1881, these essential points were summed up as the supremacy of Holy Scripture, the personality of religious duties (a quaint expression meaning a rejection of proxy faith), a regenerate baptised church membership, and baptism by immersion. Behind these lay an acceptance of orthodox belief, as expressed through the creeds of the church (although these creeds were rarely used by Baptists).²

Because they were relatively few in number, Baptists tended to fight for their existence, for the right to be different. This was expressed through their support for denominationalism. An article in the *Canterbury Baptist*, 1878, said, 'Let Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, Episcopalians and Wesleyans and the rest fight

shoulder to shoulder yet maintain their distinctive colours, and the cause of Christ we believe will be better served.' The article went on to say, 'There must be essential and profound doctrinal differences to warrant separate existence, or to give it a moral right. Without this such a separate existence would be a criminal schism.' That sounded honest enough. But then the mood became somewhat arrogant, 'We have these qualifications as probably no other denomination has.'³

The emphases which Baptists made were not exclusively their own. For instance the practice of believers' baptism was a feature of the Plymouth Brethren and also of the Churches of Christ. The autonomy of a local congregation was a mark of the above two and also the Congregational Union. The importance of freedom of religious thought and practice, which had been pioneered by Baptists in the early seventeenth century, was now accepted in theory at least by all protestant churches. The same was true of the place of scripture as the basis of church doctrine and life. Baptists put so much stress on evangelism (often of a particular kind) that they tended to think they had a monopoly on this exercise of their faith, and failed to see the extent of it in other denominations. Perhaps because of their isolation, many Baptists thought the role of their denomination in these matters more singular than it was. Many failed to see that the distinctiveness of the Baptist church lay in a particular combination of emphases rather than in any one or two of them. But it was a good combination that provided a balance that allowed the denomination to persist for almost four hundred years.

Sometimes the leaders of the Baptist church felt they had to defend themselves because the 'distinctive colours' of Baptists were confused in the public mind with those of Plymouth Brethren. There was, however, a clear difference between Baptists and the major denominations on the matter of baptism. Baptists rejected the baptism of infants, reserving the 'ordinance', a word which many preferred to 'sacrament' because of Catholic implications, for those who had made a conscious and personal response to Christ.

But this was a derived belief, coming from a conviction that there had to be a biblical basis for belief and practice. With vehemence they took this stand on the importance of scripture as if they alone were its defenders. They linked it with their demand for

freedom from state and autocratic church in their formulation of belief. From their interpretation of scripture they also affirmed its support for congregational government, and for regenerate membership.

Baptists had to define for themselves their distinctive beliefs. In doing this they inevitably made comparisons with other denominations, and in the process were often over critical and unsympathetic.

They were not cutting themselves off entirely from other denominations, for there is plenty evidence of ministers of other churches in attendance at welcomes and farewells of Baptist ministers. But these were friendly, social occasions, where differences were not raised and discussed. There were other times when matters such as baptism were publicly debated but these were from established positions held by each side which do not seem to have been noticeably modified at all by the discussion.⁴

More formal co-operation between Baptists and other denominations developed through a number of organisations that were set up in the first half of this century.

Baptists were active in the prohibition movement. They had a great interest, along with many other Christians, in religious education, and were concerned with the Bible-in-Schools Referendum League (1903).⁵ When the Council for Religious Education was formed in 1926, Baptists were founding members along with Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational churches, the Salvation Army and the Churches of Christ. Baptist concern for religious education (which they interpreted almost exclusively as Christian education) has since been expressed through the Council for Christian Education, the Churches' Commission on Education, and the N.Z. Council for Christian Education, and since 1973 the Churches' Education Commission. Baptist support has been considerable.⁶

New Zealand Baptists had long been interested in all aspects of missionary work; the English Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1792, earlier than the L.M.S. (1795), the C.M.S. (1799),⁷ and before the Methodist and Presbyterian missionary societies. The New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society was established in 1885,

commencing missionary work in that part of India which is now called Bangladesh. It was not surprising that Baptists were present at a meeting in Dunedin in 1926 with J.R. Mott, an enthusiast for foreign missions, who had had an influential part in planning and conducting the first International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910.⁸ Consequent on his visit the National Missionary Council of New Zealand was formed. Baptists were foundation members, and attended the first meeting on April 17, 1927. When this body was reconstituted in 1954 as the Commission on Overseas Mission and Interchurch Aid (COMICA), the Baptist church remained a member.

In 1942 when the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs (ICCPA) was set up the Baptist Church was a member, and the first secretary was L.A. North, then minister of the Vivian Street Baptist Church, in Wellington. This may have been the first body on which Baptists and Roman Catholics both sat.

In the years prior to the formation of the National Council of Churches (1941), there were some Baptists who, in their own areas, formed close relationships with leaders of other denominations.

One was Lawrence A. North.⁹ He had already had contacts with the Presbyterian church. When he had applied for ministerial training the Baptist church had not yet established its own theological college, and he spent his first year at Knox College, Dunedin. The man who was to be his father-in-law, Dr E.N. Merrington, was minister of First Church, Dunedin, and later master of Knox College. When L.A. North was minister at Oxford Terrace Baptist Church, Christchurch (1930-38), he developed close relationships not only with Alan Watson, the Presbyterian minister, but also with the Anglican archbishop West-Watson, and the Methodist Rugby Pratt.

L.A. North attended the Life and Work Conference in Oxford in 1937, and made valued contacts with members of other denominations. More than most other Baptist ministers he was comfortable in an ecumenical environment, and influential in persuading Baptists to become founding members of the National

Council of Churches. Equally interested was the Rev. L.J. Boulton Smith, a Baptist representative at the initial meeting of the N.C.C..

In 1938, Baptists, along with other denominations, were approached to ascertain their interest in a body that could unify the witness and work of the various churches. Before they committed themselves, Baptists had to be assured that such a body would not be able to override denominations; behind such a question was their long standing emphasis on religious freedom for individual Christians and churches, which Baptists had pioneered in the early seventeenth century. They were not at that time interested in being part of a union of churches, nor have they yet reached that point, but they desired a greater understanding and co-operation between churches.

In 1941 a decision was made by the delegates at the Baptist Assembly to join the National Council of Churches; the Baptist Union was a founding member. Three years later, in 1944, the Baptist Union of New Zealand also became a founding member of the World Council of Churches. There seems to have been general acceptance of this action among the churches. But encouragement was needed if its significance was to be understood. Rev. L.J. Boulton Smith, on his induction as president of the Union, took as the theme and title of his presidential address, 'Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement.'¹⁰ He asked the question, 'Is the church big enough for the present situation?' He questioned the anomaly of our divisions and he asserted, 'all Christians are members of the body. The body of Christ is not a torso – it is compounded of all true believers in all lands.' He was to continue to be a strong advocate for the N.C.C..

Evidence of an acceptance of other denominations is seen in an Assembly affirmation of 'its adherence of the unity of Faith of all Believers,' and its call to Baptists to become more and more active partners in the N.C.C..¹¹

Because of the possibility of closer relationships with other churches the denomination felt a need to set out the issues on which Baptists differed from others. A report entitled, 'The Baptist Churches and the Evangelising of New Zealand',¹² showed 'at what vital points the Baptist view conflicts with that of other churches':

This conflict of belief concerns the basis matters of our faith. Matters concerning the soul's salvation, the nature of the church, of its ministry and of the sacraments cannot be lightly compromised. Unless some unanimity is reached here, men of conviction have no choice but to go their separate ways and maintain, albeit with charity towards those whose convictions are different, what they believe to be the truth. This is a sacred obligation laid upon men by God, and to compromise upon such fundamental matters is to deny the faith.

The above statement seems to show, even before discussions were entered into, some unwillingness to modify beliefs which were at variance with other denominations. There was a confidence, if not what now looks like an arrogance, that the inherited stance of the denomination did not need to be modified.

When the National Council of Churches came into being in 1941, Baptists were one of six denominations in membership. They had the right to have two representatives on the executive.

Baptists were supportive of the first large programme of the N.C.C., the Campaign for Christian Order (1942-3). This was in response to wide-spread concern over what many perceived to be a drop in moral standards and questions as to how the post-war problems would be met. The campaign lasted for two years, and included public meetings¹³ and a conference of church representatives. The initial emphasis was on Christian Order with an examination of Christian insights concerning education, industry, commerce, land resources and Maori affairs.

How united Baptists were in their response to these questions is uncertain. Some were enthusiastic, but there was a section of the Baptist church (as of other churches) that thought the expression of the gospel should not be confused with social programmes. These people decried what they called a 'social gospel'. For them 'good news' was about personal repentance and forgiveness. They probably saw little spiritual significance in the way the N.C.C. sought to address national issues. These matters needed addressing, but they did not think them high on the church's agenda.

Although the denomination was firmly behind the sentiment expressed in a campaign poster, 'Only Christian motives and methods in Personal, Family, and National Life can save Society,' not all Baptists saw the need for the churches to present a united front; some thought that, from a human point of view, individual witness, which they believed they made, would change society. More than that was in the hands of God in response to their prayers.

Those who attended the public meetings discovered much about members from other churches as they worshipped and talked together. For the most part discussion was directed at community issues that needed addressing. There was no great examination of the beliefs and practices of denominations other than one's own. This was a stage of ecumenical life still to be examined.

In preparation for a major conference to be held in Wellington in 1947, Baptists drew up and printed for their own use statements of how they understood matters such as the church, ministry, grace and the sacraments.¹⁴

When they met at Marsden, delegates became aware that differences existed not only between denominations but also within individual denominations. It was not possible for the conference to draw up one statement; minority reports had to be attached. On the doctrine of the church Baptists objected, as did the Church of Christ, the Congregational Union and the Quakers. On the sacraments objections were raised by the Baptists, the Church of Christ and the Quakers. The statement that was issued showed agreement by Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, and divergence by others.

Those who participated were mostly 'top-level' representatives of their churches, and competent in theological debates. For many it was the first time they had discussed theological issues in an atmosphere of such toleration and charity.

This interchurch discussion forced Baptists, and others, to do more thinking about themselves. Rev. Luke Jenkins, then principal of the Baptist Theological College, said,

We Baptists have to think out more clearly what we mean by a 'Minister' and what we mean by a 'Church'. If there is one Church of which Christ is the sole head, can any one Church be said to be an

'outsider' to any other church. If that is the way we talk within our denomination is it not time we sought for 'yet more light and truth to break forth from his word?'

He came away from the conference 'more pig-headedly a Baptist' and 'certainly convinced that it would be a major disaster to theology, Church life and Christian witness were [our Baptist insights] lost or surrendered.' At the same time he was convinced that the denomination had 'much still to learn from Church traditions other than our own.'

In 1948 the ecumenical experience was enjoyed by a younger generation, who took part in a National Christian Youth Conference at Blenheim. Luke Jenkins was one of the speakers. Those who attended 'learned in some ways to appreciate their brother Christians.'

Not all Baptists were able to accept what was happening. In 1949, two Baptist ministers, Rev. D.B. Forde Carlisle and Rev. L.P. Bryan tried to persuade the Assembly that membership in the W.C.C. should be rescinded. They thought that such membership meant that the Baptist Union was 'associating with those who deny the faith' and 'pervert the gospel by idolatrous practices.' The references were to 'modernists who openly repudiate the doctrines of the historic faith' and to the Orthodox church, some sections of which were members of the W.C.C.. The movers wanted the Union to join the International Council of Christian Churches, an American based, ultra-conservative organisation. After considerable debate it was agreed to set up a fact-finding committee, which was to report to the next Assembly. The resulting report allayed most fears, but the Union Executive was instructed to keep the matter under review and to report 'any developments that appear to be inimical to our Baptist convictions.'¹⁵

The matter was not settled to the satisfaction of those who had raised it earlier. Further criticism in 1963 led to another report being requested to answer the following questions: Is the W.C.C. aspiring to be a Super-church? Are Baptist principles compromised by membership in the W.C.C.? What is the relationship of the W.C.C. to the Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox Church?

The report stressed the benefits of membership, but had attached a minority report opposing association with the W.C.C.. An Assembly vote affirmed a retention of membership. A few local churches disassociated themselves from the Union decision.

A further expression of anti-ecumenical feeling arose in 1968 when theological discussions were being planned by the N.C.C. to include not only the protestant churches but also the Roman Catholic church. This time the presence of the latter roused long-seated fears and antipathies; many Baptists had for years opposed Roman Catholic beliefs. One of the most vigorous antagonists had been Dr. J.J. North, who spoke and wrote repeatedly against certain Roman Catholic doctrines. His criticisms had been theological not personal; he had had little contact with Roman Catholic leaders. Of course, this had been before the time of Vatican II, when there was little understanding between protestants and Catholics, but attitudes formed then look a long time to change. The Baptist Union raised with the executive of the N.C.C. that it was important for the body to be aware of the need to retain the support of conservative Christians. It feared a hasty decision to include Roman Catholics in these discussions could alienate many. It also stated that, because of the freedom and responsibility given to local congregations, Baptists needed more time than some other churches to test the support of its members, and to retain their confidence.

To test the attitude of Baptist congregations, the issue was addressed in 1968 by the Baptist Union sending out a leaflet, not very well designed, outlining some of the debatable points, and requiring a vote church by church. By 68 to 57, participation in the discussions was declined. Churches in the northern two-thirds of the North Island were less willing to take part than those in the rest of the country. When the matter was raised again in 1978, there had been a change in attitude; no objection was expressed to Baptist participation. During the intervening years Baptists had not been totally absent from these discussions but those who attended were there in other capacities than denominational representatives. For much of the time the general secretary of the N.C.C. was a Baptist, Rev. Angus MacLeod.

Although in earlier times Baptist leaders, such as Rev.J.K. Archer, mayor of Christchurch, were very outspoken on social and national matters, there has always been a section of the Baptist church that has been wary of association with agitators for social change. These people could not accept the position of the W.C.C. that in certain situations words were not enough; there had to be action. They were also suspicious of aid being given to needy people in countries where there was armed resistance against the government; they feared aid would be diverted to the support of 'terrorists'. Such a country was Rhodesia. Over such issues there was debate in 1970 and again in 1978, which questioned denominational involvement in the W.C.C.. But in each case continued membership with the W.C.C. was agreed to. In the latter year it was said to be 'because of the insights we may gain, the activities we may have a part in, and the contributions which we, together with other churches which share our emphases, can make.'¹⁶

Despite there being a section of the church suspicious of ecumenical affairs, Baptists took an even stronger part in the conferences arranged by the N.C.C.. This was true of the Life and Work Conference at Ardmore in 1959, the Faith and Order conference at Massey in 1964, and the consultation of the E.A.C.C. in Christchurch in 1962. They also gave loyal support to the regular work of the executive and the council.¹⁷

Baptists have also been very supportive of inter-church activities sponsored or encouraged by the N.C.C.. They have had an important part (out of proportion to denominational strength as set out in census figures) in the various chaplaincy services - prison, military, hospital, industrial, and university. When the N.C.C. set up the New Zealand Commission of the Churches on International Affairs in Auckland in 1955 the Rev. J. Ewen Simpson, a Baptist minister, was chairman for three years. For many years the senior prison chaplain was a Baptist minister, Rev. Rex Goldsmith. With the growth of Baptist Social Service, the denomination related closely with the Christian Social Service Council. Baptists were late entering into work among the Maori, and had to contend with the entrenched positions of other denominations. However, in 1968 they were accepted as members of the Maori section of the N.C.C.; for a

time Rev. Charles Joe was secretary of that section. They were more hesitant than most other denominations in their attitude to such Maori movements as Ringatu and Ratana.

By the 1960's Baptists had found a place in ecumenical life at both local and national level. They found this challenging and fulfilling. But most did not feel as deeply as some other churches the scandal of a fragmented church. Perhaps this was because the number attending Baptist services was growing year by year, new churches were being established, and the denomination was not being threatened by a shrinking membership. Thus they were not seriously concerned about church union as a means of survival. A few combined memberships (Baptist-Congregational at Thames, Baptist-Church of Christ at Orakei and Masterton) had not persisted, and had reverted to solely Baptist work. Earlier discussion (1940-41) with the Associated Churches of Christ about union had not progressed far before they foundered on divergent understandings about baptism.¹⁸

When, in the early sixties, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches addressed the question of church union, Baptists declined to take part in discussions even as observers. One reason given was that their stance on baptism would complicate the question of union for others, but, of course, when the Churches of Christ joined the other three the topic had to be raised. Baptists would have had additional trouble over accepting episcopacy.¹⁹

The search for church union came to naught, but the process had put theological discussion, which was once included in the activities of the N.C.C., into an area from which the Baptists had excluded themselves. Their earlier refusal to join in the discussions that included Roman Catholics made matters worse. They were thus deprived of this level of interdenominational life, which would have given them the opportunity of stating, and arguing, their denominational emphases, and of learning from the insights of others.

In 1983-4 the churches of the N.C.C. were desirous of working more closely with the Roman Catholic church. Already there were Catholic observers on many N.C.C. bodies, but full membership posed some problems, not the least being the difficulty

of a major church coming late into an existing organisation. Steps were therefore taken to set up a new ecumenical body, replacing the N.C.C., of which the Roman Catholic church would be a founding member. Baptists were present in all the discussions, and time came when they had to respond to the opportunity to join this body.

To the dismay of those Baptists who had had a very full part in the activities of the N.C.C., the 1986 assembly of the Baptist Union declined to join the Conference of Christian Churches of Aotearoa. In its reply the Union stated,

*we renew our commitment to sharing in a common witness to Jesus Christ as God and Savior, and affirm our desire to work with other Christian, particularly at a local level, and to nurture inter-church co-operation in every way possible [but] 'we are not agreed that the best way to express this co-operation is by membership in the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa-New Zealand as it is described in the current Constitution.'*²⁰

In the reply reasons were not elaborated. There had been no vigorous promotion of any proposal to join the conference, and no steps had been taken to counter much inaccurate and biased anti-ecumenical propaganda that was being circulated among the churches. The leadership of the denomination at the time showed little enthusiasm for such an interchurch body.

The reasons for this decision were varied. It was probably not because the Roman Catholic church was expected to become a member of the Conference of Churches (and eventually did); in most congregations the strong anti-Catholic feelings of the earlier part of the century and before had softened, and many were able to appreciate the theological conservatism of the Catholic church, not unlike their own, although on a number of what to the Catholics were very important points of doctrine Baptists could never envisage agreement. More were unsure about the strong stand the N.C.C. had taken on social and racial issues (from the Springbok tour protests to Waitangi Day celebrations), and thought the new organisation would continue this stance.

But there were deeper reasons for an uneasiness about ecumenical relations.²¹

Over the past fifty or sixty years most Baptists have become more aware of the nature and practices of the other denominations, and have ceased to be so defensive in their dealings with them. They are not awed by their size; as far as the number of worshippers at regular Sunday services in New Zealand is concerned Baptists are probably second only to Catholics. Although the total membership of Baptist churches here is comparatively small, it is estimated that on world figures Baptists are exceeded only by Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Lutheran, the strength of each of which has been increased by its being a state church in some countries at least.

But differences have remained concerning believer's baptism versus paedobaptism, and congregational versus other forms of church government. While those who have had experience of ecumenical encounter have been willing to discuss these matters and even explore ways of finding a workable agreement, many have been unwilling or unable to face the possibility that they might not have the total truth. Some have not wanted to put their views to the test by being confronted by other Christians with beliefs that are different from their own. At the same time a desire for this type of discussion has become less owing to the recent shift in interest from doctrinal and theological issues to pragmatic solutions and subjective religious experience.

Some, therefore, have retreated behind what for them were fixed positions, one of which is the autonomy of the local church. Since their emergence in the early seventeenth century Baptists have employed and defended congregational government in the church. It arose from experiences of domination by state and church, and was an expression of the freedom of religion. Some Baptists today fear any lessening of this freedom, which they think may happen if the church is influenced by episcopal or presbyterian forms of government. It may be thought that such a belief regarding the status of a local congregation must inevitably fragment a denomination, but at their best Baptists have balanced this congregational responsibility with a recognition of the wider church (as expressed in their denomination, and further still in the Christian Church at

large). This has not been easy. When there has been an undue emphasis on the local congregation, as has happened recently, ecumenism has suffered.

Baptists have looked for justification of their congregational structure in the New Testament. Many have thought the latter gives unqualified support; they have assumed only one pattern developed in New Testament times, and ignored references to passages that give some justification (perhaps insufficient) for episcopal and presbyterian forms. Those who feel the latter are alien to their experiences of the faith, are threatened by a proposal that they should associate closely with them in an ecumenical body.

The other fixed position is believer's baptism. This has always been an important emphasis, which Baptists believe is well ground in the New Testament; they think that in subsequent centuries its true meaning has been confused by the practice of paedo-baptism. They associate believers' baptism with an emphasis on the regenerate nature of church membership. Some question the reality of this in paedo-Baptist churches; perhaps it is because they do not allow for varying ways of expressing faith.

As in any denomination, among Baptists there is a wide range of competence in the knowledge and interpretation of scripture. Baptists have produced fine biblical scholars who are very discerning in their use of scripture. There are others who approach the book from a fundamentalist position, sure that they alone have the key to its secrets. The latter sometimes find it uncomfortable to study and worship alongside those with a more liberal outlook. For such the ecumenical movement creates difficulties.

Recently a new conservatism has arisen. With the advent of the 'renewal movement', many have chosen to associate with those, from many denominations including the charismatics, whose understanding of the doctrines and practices stressed by that movement are similar to their own. While these relationships may be termed interdenominational, they lack some of the qualities which have marked ecumenism. Because they are based on those expressions of the faith which are congenial to them all, they miss the challenge of working and worshipping with a more diverse company of Christians, many of whom view aspects of the church,

ministry and sacraments in different ways from one's own, yet who seek real fellowship, and search together for greater understanding of the gospel, and the purposes of God for his church.

Despite the hesitation many Baptists have had concerning ecumenism, especially structured ecumenism, Baptist churches have found ways of co-operating in common programmes at a local level and sharing in united worship.

On a national level, there are, as always, Baptists who have a large concept of the church, both historically and geographically. These advocate greater ecumenical involvement. They are well aware of Baptist convictions regarding the nature of the church, the ministry and the sacraments, but do not feel these threatened by such co-operation. Rather do they relish the opportunity to share these with others. They endeavour to keep the denomination open to the insights of others, and aware of the historical nature of the church, the traditions enshrined in it, and the impact the church has always had on the world.

Stan Edgar

NOTES:

1. Paul Tonson, *A Handful of Grain*, Wellington, 1982, Vol. 1, pp 2-4.
2. *N.Z. Baptist*, November 1881, pp 147-150.
3. *Canterbury Baptist*, June 1878, p 56.
4. For example, in 1947, the *N.Z. Baptist* (Nov. 1947, pp 326-7) contained a spirited reply to a Methodist contention that the reservation of baptism 'to the time of awakened faith' was wrong.
5. Baptists were represented at a Bible-in-schools Conference held in Wellington in 1903. A report on this was presented at the annual conference of the Baptist Union by Rev. C. Dallaston and adopted by 33 votes to 15. The reason for the fifteen objections is not stated.
6. The present writer was on the council/commission for almost twenty years and at various times was president of each. For a period, Dr Bruce Turley, a Baptist minister, was secretary.
7. 'The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel', an Anglican society, was chartered in

1701 but did not make foreign missions and important part of its operations until the early days of the nineteenth century. Scottish societies, 'Glasgow' and 'Edinburgh', were formed in 1796, and the 'Wesleyan' society in 1813.

8. *N.Z. Baptist*, June 1926, p 156.

9. See also *L.A. North: The Man and His Memoirs*, ed. G.T. Beilby, pp 36-37, 49-50.

10. *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1945, pp 300-302.

11. Minutes of Baptist Assembly, October 23, 1940.

12. The reference to 'evangelising' in the title of this report expresses an emphasis that was wide-spread among Baptists. Some examined every aspect of church life as it related to evangelism and were critical of other churches that they thought failed to do so. Their interpretation of evangelism was often a limited one. For some it did not go beyond the preaching of repentance and faith and the challenge to people to 'come to Jesus'. Many did respond, with consequent changes to their lives and a resultant impact on society through good works. But too many were slow to see the Gospel as being expressed through social service to the community.

13. The main speaker at the final meeting, held in the Wellington Town Hall was Dr. J.J. North, Principal of the Baptist Theological College.

14. The printed statements are in the archives of the Baptist Historical Society, at Carey Baptist College, 473 Great South Rd, Penrose, Auckland.

15. *Year Book* of the Baptist Union and Missionary Society of New Zealand, 1951-2, pp 18-19.

16. *Year Book*, 1979-80, pp 140-143. A further vote, taken in 1983, reaffirmed membership in the W.C.C. - *Year Book*, 1983-4, p 164.

17. Three Baptists have held the position of president of the National Council of Churches: Rev. L.A. North, Rev. A.H. MacLeod and Rev. S.L. Edgar.

18. *N.Z. Baptist*, November 1941, pp 332-5.

19. It is worth noting, however, that Baptists are included in the Church of North India and at least one Baptist minister has been a bishop of that Church.

20. *Year Book*, 1986-7, p 161.

21. An expanded treatment of the theological issues at stake for Baptists addressing the ecumenical movement is to be found in E. Roberts-Thomson, *With Hands Outstretched: Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement*, London, 1962. Although Roberts-Thomson did much of his research whilst Principal of the New Zealand Baptist Theological College, his book does not examine the specific issues pertaining to this country.