Pulpit or Podium? J.K. Archer and the Dilemma of Christian Politics in New Zealand*

New Zealand Baptists are natural activists. The energy created and released by the Baptist way of being 'Church' has been channeled into evangelism, social service and protest. Political activism has been less common, its appearance patchy and little understood. Thomas Dick (1823-1900) of Dunedin was an outstanding nineteenth century individual, prominent for thirty years in province and parliament. He is yet to be fully studied. Baptists feature in the Christian Coalition but it is clearly too early to assess the importance of this group.

The first four decades of the twentieth century appear to stand out as a period when Baptist political involvement ran broad and deep. Important lay people were involved in party organisations; J.J. North fulminated against social injustice and moral decline; Howard Elliot of Mt Eden caused a stir with his Protestant Political Association. Indeed, so common was political interest that Dr Barry Gustafson devoted an article in the predecessor to this journal to this flowering of 'intervention in the public square'.[1] Yet, the flowering lasted only one generation. Among Baptists, general political activism dwindled. The reasons for this are complex but they may be glimpsed through a study of the most prominent Baptist activist of the time.

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Rev. John Kendrick Archer (1865-1949) features prominently in Gustafson's analysis. He seems to have personified the denomination's consciousness 'of its social and political responsibilities as well as its task of evangelism.'[2] A formidable figure, Archer served his denomination variously as President, as minister in several churches and on numerous committees and boards. Contemporaneously he was as active in politics: President and Vice-president of the New Zealand Labour Party, Parliamentary candidate, three-term Mayor of Christchurch, member of the Legislative Council. No other figure in New Zealand history has combined political and clerical roles to such a degree.

Gustafson was not the first to note Archer's importance. Some years before his piece, N.R. Wood contributed a long biographical essay.[3] Given this previous attention it might be imagined that enough has been said. Yet, no written history can claim to be more than a progress report. Evidence may be reinterpreted, different questions may be asked. In this essay I will endeavour to do both. I will suggest that neither Wood's nor Gustafson's interpretation of Archer is satisfactory. A more rounded picture will emerge - one which has implications for our understanding of Baptist life and N.Z. society.

Much of the basis for this reinterpretation comes from an examination of material not previously studied. In a major antiquarian exercise E. Harrison of Grimsby has transcribed local records of Archer's pastorate there 1903-08.[4] From the other end of his career, Archer's speeches to the Legislative Council provide numerous insights into his view of himself. Neither of these sources was employed by Wood or Gustafson. They will be drawn on here for the first time.

In his influential history of the formation of the New Zealand Labour party, Dr Gustafson includes Christian principles among 'sentimental' motivations for involvement in the labour cause. Archer, he suggests, fits this category.[5] There is, admittedly, some evidence for this view. Archer's early encounters with deprivation had a deep emotional impact. Late in life, he spoke movingly to the Legislative Council of miners he saw in his youth.

> *There was not a man of forty years of age among them who was not warped and twisted in his body by the conditions under which he worked. Many of those men living round about my home were living in hovels that I have never heard of, except among the Negroes engaged in the cotton industry in the Southern States of America.*[6]

Gustafson's taxonomy, however, is misleadingly simplistic. It does little justice to the intellectual core of Archer's Christian commitment. To the Legislative Council in 1941 he declared

> *As I see it, the Labour movement - and this is why I am in it; if I did not believe this I would not be in it - is an attempt, a very imperfect and incomplete attempt, but a real attempt, to put into practice the teachings and the spirit of Christ.*[7]

Later he affirmed that 'the teaching of the Bible, rightly understood, is the most radical teaching in the world.' The phrase 'rightly understood' is important. Just what sort of Christianity drove Archer? The answer provides an important element in a reinterpretation of his life.

In 1906 the popular preacher, Rev. R.J. Campbell of the City Temple, London, caused a storm with his adoption of the findings of 'higher criticism'. In his 'New Theology' he repudiated the Fall and appeared to question the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement. Archer's mentor John Clifford (1836-1923), although differing on some details, was one of the most prominent churchmen to come to his defence. On 27 January 1907 Archer himself responded to the controversy, preaching to his Grimsby congregation on the 'New Theology'. A report of the sermon reveals an approach far from the fundamentalism assumed by Gustafson.

> *What was theology? Simply a statement of man's religious beliefs. God had no theology. All the theology in the world was man's making....There were some things their forefathers believed in, that never could be believed in again by intelligent man. For instance the belief that God made this wonderful world in six days of twenty four hours*

each, the belief in a hell of literal burning, the belief in verbal inspiration of the scriptures... were beliefs of the past. He did not believe in the Bible because it was called the Bible but.. because he believed it to be true and if modern scholarship could show him it was not true,... he would give it up and go into the world and work for his living.[8]

Archer maintained a lively appreciation for theological development. In a debate on the question of capital punishment he censured another member of the Legislative Council who suggested a dualistic explanation for 'the murder-complex'.

It is not.. a sort of conflict between God and the Devil. That is a very obsolete way of stating the position. No up-to-date theologian would state it that way and I would suggest to the honourable gentleman that he should brush up his theology and read a few up-to-date books.[9]

In the same debate he set the question in the context, not of divine judgment or retribution but of theistic evolution.

The unfolding of God's great plan for the creation of the world... was not finished in six or seven days, but is still going on. In that light we see that this bill is a step along the evolutionary path.[10]

Archer's faith was intimately linked with his political views, but his was no conservative reaction. Gustafson was wrong to place him among those with 'impeccably fundamentalist and evangelical credentials'. Although he was a committed, warmly evangelistic theist, Archer is better associated with more liberal theology.

There were, however, many Christians - even 'modernists' - who took little part in political affairs. Archer's militancy drew on more than Christianity - whether 'sentimental', 'fundamentalist' or 'up-to-date'. Other influences shaped and directed him.

John Clifford was undoubtedly a significant figure in Archer's life. Also one who combined Baptist ministry and political activism, Clifford briefly taught Archer and gave a testimonial as to his qualities when Archer was called to Napier from England in

1908. From this patron Archer drew inspiration and encouragement. Clifford also imparted economic and political views. Nevertheless Clifford's role was primarily that of a mediator, exposing Archer to a wide range of radical thought.

Chief among these was one of Clifford's philosophical guides, John Ruskin (1819-1900). Archer acknowledged his debt to Ruskin in one of his first speeches to the Legislative Council. Another member, Waite, had quoted from Ruskin's *Unto This Last.* Archer regarded his use of the text as invalid.

> *I imagine the Hon. Mr Waite has never read it, or, if he has read it, has never understood it in its completeness....I have the book here, one of the greatest books in the world next to the Bible. I have carried this book with me for thousands of miles during the last thirty or forty years. I have read it wholly or in part hundreds of times...If Ruskin's teaching as an whole were accepted, we shall very soon get to an ideal state....*[11]

Archer's claim to have 'carried this book...during the past thirty years' seems to have some foundation. Certainly Ruskin features in his speeches from early on. At Grimsby on 13 April 1905 Archer based a speech to a local literary society on *Unto This Last.* He outlined Ruskin's thoughts on education, welfare, wealth and labour. Ruskin, he admitted, 'was not a socialist but he pioneered social reform and paved the way for socialism.'[12] Wood records that in N.Z. in 1912, Archer included Ruskin in a series on 'Big Brothers of Humanity'.[13]

In part a reaction against industrialization, Ruskin's political economy gave much attention to education and advocated a planned economy and full employment. Many of these themes came out in Archer's own thought and life. He too was convinced of the value of schooling. He was a local School Board member whilst pastor at Hepstonhall Slack in 1901 and education was one of the main themes in his 1919 campaign for the Invercargill seat.[14] In the Legislative Council Archer displayed an almost utopian faith in learning. Taking China as an example he said it 'could not be a

cultured nation when...90% of the people [are] illiterate. When we have cultured nations, there will be no war.'[15]

Ruskin developed a novel theory of work and labour. Work should to be treated as a 'luxury'. One could have either too much or too little.[16] Thus it should be policy to evenly distribute the amount of work. Archer's views on working hours were similar.

> *Looking at it from the point of view of the benefit to the people themselves, it is desirable that everyone should be at work, and it is quite obvious that if everybody is to be at work all of us must only work a few hours a day...we have to set our minds to the problem of what is the smallest number of hours that all people must work in order that they all may be at work and in order that all may have a sufficiency of the necessaries of life.* [17]

As will be seen, in 1918 Archer identified 'covetousness' as the root of society's ills. In the Legislative Council this became 'selfishness' but the message was the same. Private enterprise benefits 'the worshippers of mammon' and 'the private enterpriser who wins great success is a public plunderer.'[18] Here too are echoes of Ruskin, who insisted that the reason merchants are held in poor regard lies 'in the fact that the merchant is presumed to act selfishly... [The public] must not cease to condemn selfishness; but they will have to discover a kind of commerce which is not exclusively selfish.'[19]

Ruskin was not Archer's only favourite. The Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) appealed even more as a man who added militant action to his theories. Archer admired him as

> *a preeminently religious man who was three times sentenced to death by his own Government. He lived for years as an exile in England and his wonderful writings were sent back to Italy,... in packages of merchandise. But his memory today is reverenced and almost worshipped from one end of Italy to the other.*[20]

In Mazzini's political economy, the will of the people was guaranteed, their need to organise recognised, the evils of property rights deplored, and an internationalist conception of humanity

advanced.[21] Each of these themes finds an echo in Archer's speeches. He too professed a confidence in the people:

> *I am sufficiently democratic to believe that the mistakes of democracy are preferable to the sins of autocracy...*[22]

and strongly supported organisation:

> *the right to combination is one of the fundamental rights to life..So far as the workers are concerned, my view is that wherever they do not combine and are therefore unprotected they are maltreated.*[23]

He was clear on the relative importance of property:

> *when the rights of property and the rights of the people clash, the rights of property must be subordinated to the rights and needs of the people.*[24]

and was inspired by an internationalist vision:

> W*e want to keep before us the great idea of the brotherhood of nations...to which we hope all nations of the earth will ultimately belong.*[25]

Two other approaches, elemental in Archer's political philosophy, were shared with Mazzini. Among the latter's 'foundations of belief' were 'the unity of the human race' and 'the constant, unlimited progress of mankind'.[26] These very themes were espoused by Archer in 1938

> *There is no such thing as an individualist life, and the more civilisation progresses the more interdependent we become.*[27]

In the closing words of his last major speech in the Legislative Council his optimism again shines through.

> *I believe that the poet Browning was right when he said,,"the best is yet to be".... In spite of all the things we are in the midst of, a great evolutionary process is going on which will have good results for the good of man and the glory of God.*[28]

In the Address in Reply debate of 1944, in one of Archer's most representative speeches, unity and progress are again prominent. If 'covetousness/selfishness' were the root problems of society, 'Unification' was his solution.

> *I submit that the real alternative to what is called private enterprise..can be summed up in one word - 'unification.' I mean unification of possessions, interests and activities. That is the great family idea, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man...The Bible stands for unification of individuals, unification of groups and unification of races...'That they may all be one'...that is the Lord's prayer...It means Unification.*[29]

'Unification', though articulated in this form only in the final years of his life, was the sum of Archer's ideology. An amalgam of the teachings of Christ, the Bible, Ruskin, Mazzini, and Clifford, it's final form was the creation and property of Archer himself. This unique and sophisticated view of life and society provided the intellectual underpinnings for his career.

An intellectual framework does not explain Archer, any more than did his Christian faith alone. Not all who hold radical views become activists. Ruskin generally stayed above the fray; Clifford vigorously pursued political causes but declined a political career. Archer, by contrast, actively sought office. This drive involved factors beyond mere ideology. Two are crucial: Archer's idiosyncratic personality and the New Zealand religious and social context he encountered. Of these, the first has been courteously skirted in earlier studies; the second hardly recognised at all.

The course of Archer's life might suggest that he was driven by simple ambition. He stood unsuccessfully for Parliament no fewer than four times and sought nomination for a safe seat (Lyttelton) at least once. He sought and gained high positions in the New Zealand Labour Party. He gained numerous Local Body posts, standing three times successfully and once unsuccessfully for the Mayoralty of Christchurch.[30] At the age of 72 he accepted appointment and subsequent reappointment to the Legislative Council. The scale of the public offices he sought gradually expanded: from school board to Poor Law Guardian whilst still in England, to local bodies, Mayoralty and Parliament in New Zealand. Archer's career seems to have followed the pattern typical of any ambitious politician.

Archer's motivation transcended crude power seeking. His ideology was genuine and clearly played a major part. Nevertheless, certain personality traits helped set the pattern of his life.

When he died in 1949 a series of memorial speeches were delivered in both houses of Parliament. Each testifies to his pugnacity. Archer was a natural controversialist. As his own speeches reveal and as his colleagues readily avowed, he did not avoid conflict. Indeed, he appears to have relished it. Walter Nash, speaking on behalf of the Government, noted that 'he was as fearless as any man I ever contacted'. Nearly twenty years later, less than a year before his own death, Nash wrote of Archer that

> *he spoke with a directness that far exceeded the normal, caring not so much it seemed to me for what the rate payers he represented, or the people on the City Council said or thought.*[31]

Sydney Holland (hardly a political ally) noted much the same in his memorial tribute in 1949.

> *Mr Archer was...not very careful whose toes he trod on. If he felt a thing ought to be said, nothing on earth would stop him from saying it...he would sooner lose an election when there was a fight than win one without a fight.*[32]

In the post-war, overwhelmingly male world of the New Zealand Parliament these assessments of Archer may have been the mere stuff of eulogy. In Archer's case, however, the descriptions carried more than an element of truth. He spoke in similar terms of himself.

> *So far as I am concerned the most miserable moments I have had in my public career have not been when I was criticized but when I have been complimented.*[33]

Later he makes the point more directly.

> *I love a fight and a fighting man, and, if ever we reach a state when there is nothing to fight about, the best thing will be to go home and do some useful work elsewhere. It is in the clash of ideals that we get progress.*[34]

He admired the same quality in others. In a tribute to H.T. Armstrong he declares

> *I have never had sympathy with men who are what Tennyson calls. 'faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection, no more.' I used to like my friend...when he got warmed up and when others were warmed up too. I have a lot of faith in men who, with their eloquence, get warmed up and warm other people up when they deserve it.*[35]

Passion, the cut and thrust of argument, these were of the utmost importance in Archer's approach to public life. As a result he was a vigorous debater. He could be sarcastic, acerbic and humorous.[36] He clearly enjoyed the fray. There were drawbacks. Archer was sometimes guilty of placing polemic before accuracy. On occasion he had to withdraw statements about preceding speeches, seemingly because he gave more energy to reacting emotionally than to listening analytically. Speaking to the Customs Act Amendment Bill in 1942 he delivered a scathing condemnation (based on doubtful evidence) of the Liquor Trade. Despite the strength of his rhetoric (perhaps because of it!) Archer's speeches were often ignored by others in the Council. On this occasion, however, his errors were so egregious as to provoke a series of responses.[37]

If the 'fighting spirit' attributed to Archer was not imagined, neither was it a feature only of his Legislative Council years. An examination of his career both in England and New Zealand reveals numerous incidents which suggest he was most at home when embroiled in battle.

Almost immediately after his arrival in Grimsby Archer became involved in local affairs. In March 1903, responding to criticism of a temperance mission, he wrote to the local paper questioning the motives of the critic. This man, one H.J.F. Crosby, claimed to have been, initially, a supporter of the mission. However, on some point he felt he had been deceived by the mission organisers. Archer, in a reply replete with strong phrases, alleged a hidden agenda behind Crosby's strictures. 'Surely we need no brewer's lackey to speak for us.' Crosby was 'working out his pigmy vengeance'. If any had been deceived it was 'the drink buyers...who

impoverish themselves for the enrichment of the brewery shareholders...and allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the newspaper claptrap of brewers' paid agents.'[38]

Archer's five years at Grimsby witnessed a series of battles over the drink question. The most dramatic began in October 1903, after another letter from Archer to the paper. The leading candidate for the local mayoralty was a respected councilor by the name of Evison. Evison, however, was 'of the trade'. In October 1903 Archer wrote to the editor, protesting at Evison's candidature. He had been requested to do so by the Temperance Union but, he later acknowledged, 'the terms of the letter are mine'. The 'terms' were strong. Despite disclaiming any personal attack, Archer declared that 'a publican as a mayor is a discredit, a disgrace and a scandal to the town'.[39]

The letter caused a local storm. Although his own church affirmed their confidence in him, at least one other temperance leader dissociated himself from the letter. Crosby, the target of Archer's letter in March, suggested a 'good ducking in the horse pond' for Archer. Evison was duly elected but, refusing to let the matter drop, sued for libel. Archer refused to apologise. The case was heard in February 1905, the jury finding against Archer and awarding 25 pounds damages. In addition Archer was left with a legal bill of some 250 pounds (his annual stipend at this time was 160 pounds).[40]

The libel writ does not appear to have slowed Archer down. In the interval before the case was heard he conducted a campaign against gambling and was fully active in the local activities of the "Crusade against the Education Act" of 1902.

Education had been a bone of contention for Nonconformists for many years. After the 1902 Act the issue hinged on the payment of rates. The Act allowed local authorities to levy a general rate which included a sum which would subsidise Church of England schools. Many Nonconformists refused to pay that portion of the rate. The national figure leading the opposition to the Act was Archer's mentor Dr. John Clifford. It is therefore not surprising to find Archer himself heavily involved at the local level.

At Grimsby Archer and many others refused to pay the disputed part of the rate. Several times during his five years at Grimsby Archer had a distress warrant issued against his property to recover the unpaid amount.[41] At a hearing on 21 March 1906 Archer was appointed spokesman for the resisters. By this time it appears he had gained a reputation. The Stipendiary Magistrate allowed him to speak on the condition he was 'not going to hear a long political speech'. Archer's address barely complied with this ruling and was, in any case, of no avail. He later wrote yet another letter to the paper, protesting at the Magistrate's remarks about the resistance.[42]

In 1907 Archer was elected (as a Labour Party candidate) to the Grimsby Board of Poor Law Guardians. Here too he was soon the centre of conflict. At one of his first meetings he challenged the Finance Committee on a decision over tendering. Harrison records that 'personalities were brought into the discussion and the Chairman had to call order'. A year later on 2 March 1908 Archer was calling into question the distribution of work to tradesmen, alleging favouritism. None was established.[43]

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. In the Evison case he was not merely active but provocative. Not just causes but controversy itself seemed to attract him. In 1908, bidding farewell after accepting a call to Napier, New Zealand he was explicit in his relish for battle. A report of his address includes a revealing statement, which would be echoed in the New Zealand Legislative Council forty years later.

> *One of his greatest delights was the thought that he had made a few enemies at Grimsby. He should be sorry to go away feeling he had the good word of everybody.*[44]

Archer quickly became part of the Labour movement in his new home. He also very rapidly stamped his character on the Napier Church. Early in 1909 he preached against Britain's increased Naval expenditure and took the unusual step of inviting comment from his congregation. Two of his deacons responded, taking issue with his handling of the question. This 'breeze at Napier' reached the pages

of the *The Baptist*. He later acknowledged to the Church that 'he had always been a fighter.'[45]

The 'fight' could come from anywhere. In 1917 Archer was appointed Chaplain to the Army camp at Featherston. Immediately he volunteered for front line duty. His application was declined on the grounds of age but the incident is indicative of his attraction to action.[46] In other settings he would deliberately incite a reaction. During one of his Christchurch mayoralty campaigns he was reputed to have responded to a question about ratepayers concerns at proposed expenditure with a direct 'Damn the Ratepayers!'. His opponents made much of this strong statement by an ordained Minister. In his tribute on Archer's death, Holland suggested, probably correctly, that this was a provocative ploy to put some life into the campaign and get some free publicity.[47] Wood suggests that Archer's predilection for the provocative statement cost him valuable votes in his attempts to get into Parliament. To the Baptist Assembly held in Christchurch during his mayoralty Archer confessed that 'the town clerk who accompanied him on most occasions spent his time whispering, "Don't do anything rash".'[48]

As this track record might suggest, Archer was in his element during his years in the Legislative Council. Wood records that 'he said it was the best job and the best paid job he had ever had'. In her memorial speech, Mrs Dreaver (another member of the Council) recalled a visit to Archer during his final illness. Archer was anxious for news of the Council.

> *He never tired of hearing what was happening in Wellington. He still lived in the Council, as it were, although he could not leave his home.*[49]

Without question Archer enjoyed the political hurly burly for its own sake. His activist and irascible personality played a large part in shaping his career. Throughout his life he pursued the greatest action, constantly seeking the eye of the storm.

> *I want to be in a place where there is something to be done - where we are expected to do it, and to attempt to achieve some results.*[50]

Bielby notes that 'the dust of battle was never far from J.K.Archer.'[51] This was no accident. He liked it that way.

Even this dimension does not complete the picture. To the emerging image of a modern, informed Christian socialist, naturally drawn to political controversy, must be added the peculiarities of the New Zealand context in which he spent the second half of his life.

New Zealand had appealed to Archer for its radical reputation. What he found disappointed him. He was particularly frustrated at the indolence of the Churches. In 1941 he would declare

> *I have been a churchman all my life, and for the last fifty years I have been waiting and watching and hungering for the Church to take its proper place alongside the forces of progress in the interests of social reform. I want that a thousand times more than I want anything for myself.*[52]

In New Zealand, the Christian activism for which Archer yearned was missing. When he set out for his new home he had not fully grasped how different the context was from that pertaining in England. There, under such leaders as his friend Clifford, Nonconformists were a powerful force in political life. Indeed, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Nonconformist influence was at its peak. In New Zealand, although occasional individuals were active, 'Nonconformists' as a group had little political profile.

Reasons for this are not hard to identify. One was a function of size. There were less than 5000 Baptists in New Zealand in 1910 . Other 'Nonconformist' groups were bigger, but the wide spread of the population meant there were few centres of activity and intellectual development.

'Nonconformist' has been deliberately placed in quotation marks. The term is anachronistic, barely applicable to the colonial situation. In New Zealand there was no legally privileged, established Church as in England. 'Conformity' and its opposite were thus stripped of their sense.

For Archer this would have far-reaching consequences. He had come from an environment where historically-defined Nonconformists had obvious political grievances. The Education Act which he had opposed in Grimsby was just one rallying point.[53] In New Zealand the "free" Churches were much less conscious of disputes with the Church of England. They were more inclined to

define themselves in opposition to the Roman Catholics than to the Anglicans. Political issues where they emerged were often barely disguised 'anti-popery'. The churches Archer came among in 1908 were 'protestant' much more than they were 'nonconformist'.

Two individuals, already mentioned, exemplify this factor. The towering personality among N.Z. Baptists between the wars was J.J. North. An otherwise open thinker, thought 'liberal' by some, North wrote often and vociferously against Catholic influence. In one of his most popular publications, a short book entitled *Protestant and Why* he concluded that 'Rome is at variance with the Gospel and history refuses to countersign her claims.'[54]

Then there was the Rev. Howard Elliott, leader of the Protestant Political Association (P.P.A). By 1918 this organisation boasted four times as many members as the Baptist Union. Most were drawn from among Presbyterians and Methodists. Nevertheless, it is a measure of the sectarianism of New Zealand Baptists that, in 1916, Elliot was a close contender with Archer for the Presidency of the Union. Archer was ultimately successful but not before two rounds of voting were required.

Elliot eventually went beyond 'acceptable' sectarianism, planting sensational false allegations against Catholics to test whether the P.P.A.'s mail was being intercepted. The Baptist Union officially dissociated itself from his extreme actions but, significantly, questioned why there should be censorship of the P.P.A. when none was applied to the Catholic *Tablet*.[55]

Both North and Elliot represent a sectarian framework quite different from that of Archer. This is no coincidence. Both were among the first generation of Baptist ministers who grew up and were trained in the colonies (North in New Zealand, Elliot in Australia) where the weight of Anglican establishment did not apply but where strong Catholic working class communities were present. In Elliott's case, anti-Catholicism came to merge with opposition to socialism.

When he came to New Zealand, Archer thus entered a context quite different from that he had shared with Clifford. 'Nonconformist' churches displayed little interest in political campaigns beyond issues such as temperance. As a body they

certainly did not identify with the emerging Labour party with which Archer was naturally aligned. This unanticipated feature of Church life contributed to both his disillusionment with merely religious activism and his increasing attraction to party politics.

Despite the fact that he spent a working life as a minister Archer appears to have found the pastoral role increasingly restrictive. Indeed, between 1914 and 1918 he appears to have gone through a personal crisis. This is the period Wood calls 'the broken years'. Archer was successively minister at Invercargill for two years, minister at Vivian Street in Wellington for sixteen months and then Army Chaplain for eighteen months. Wood puts this transient interlude down to Archer's willingness to serve wherever called. This is too simple an analysis. These years were more like a 'mid-life crisis', during which Archer, unsettled and dissatisfied, was forced to reconsider his call.

Throughout this period, his involvement with party politics gradually increased. He made contact with the New Zealand Labour movement soon after his arrival in Napier, serving as editor of the *United Labour Leader* in 1913.[56] This continued the association he had begun in Britain. From 1914 onwards he would be increasingly involved in the political side of the movement. By 1918, secular politics had become the channel for his socialist Gospel.

Some hint of this process can be traced in the two major statements he made as Union President. The first (a new-year message published at the start of 1918, when he was still a Chaplain) reflects both his own struggle and his criticism of the Churches.

> *Life in Camp demonstrates beyond all dispute, that our manhood, in overwhelming proportions, is not merely out of touch with the Churches, but is positively full of wrath and resentment at the Churches...*
>
> *[The Churches] are splitting theological hairs, emphasising ecclesiastical differences, winking at and even indulging in economic sins, instead of setting up the Kingdom of God.*
>
> *We need to dream Spirit-filled apocalypses of our own and then strive to get them actualised.*[57]

By the October 1918 Assembly Archer had 'dreamed his own apocalypse'. His Presidential address, entitled 'Covetousness', was a sweeping critique of society and a call to radical discipleship.

> *We must take the machinery of government out of the hands of the robbers... We must transfer from private to public hands the business of producing and distributing the necessities of life...Politicians laugh at prayers; but they tremble at votes...It is up to Christians in general and Baptists in particular to lead a movement for the consecration of the ballot box to Christ and humanity.*[58]

Covetousness marks the maturing of Archer's creed and the end of his crisis. By the date of its delivery his candidacy for the parliamentary seat of Invercargill seat had been announced. Before the end of the year he accepted a call to his final and most lengthy pastorate, Sydenham, in Christchurch.

Archer was serious about his Invercargill candidacy. It is clear that he was ready to give up his pastoral responsibilities if elected to Parliament. After initially declining the call to Sydenham, he eventually accepted only on the condition that he be able to continue his political activities. From this time forward he was constantly running for, or holding, some political office. The Sydenham charge was not neglected but Wood's assertion that that the Church took priority is hard to sustain. The six years of his Mayoralty of Christchurch took up much of his time, particularly during the early years of the Depression.

From 1919, though he was faithful, even enthusiastic, in the discharge of his pastoral duties, J.K.Archer's focus was primarily on public life. This was not a repudiation of his calling. On the contrary it was its full flowering in a new environment. His speeches in the Legislative Council were replete with biblical imagery and quotation. As Archer put it

> *I am in a very peculiar position. When I speak here my friends tell me I am preaching sermons. When I preach in the pulpit, they tell me I am talking politics. I really do not know which is right.*[59]

Both were right. The imperatives of the Gospel, shaped by

experience and frustration, married to his predilection for action and conflict, made Archer's religion and political stance indivisible.

Had he stayed in Britain - where the nonconformists provided a larger, more politically organized platform - it is possible Archer would have continued to direct his energies to the Church's radical activities. He may never have had to grapple with the crisis he faced in New Zealand between 1914 and 1918. This was a turning point. In it he displayed a willingness to honestly appraise his commitments and an ability to redirect his considerable energy. Perhaps more importantly, in this crisis Archer's career merged with a now familiar story.

In New Zealand, the Churches have struggled to adapt largely British forms to a new environment.[60] The corporate identity of English Nonconformity evolved in the face of centuries of legal and structural constraint. In the new country, few such limitations survived. Those that did were rapidly fading echoes of the past. Categories such as 'establishment', 'nonconformity', 'dissent' and 'free' are thus of only limited use in understanding Christian history in New Zealand. Protestant denominations, removed from the framework in which they arose, have struggled to establish a new sense of identity. Imported forms and structures have proved to be provisional only.

For Baptists, with roots deep in 'Old Dissent', the fresh air of the new territory presented remarkable opportunities. Some achieved rapid prominence in fields only barely opening up to them in Britain.[61] There were problems too. One was the blurring of accepted links between religion and politics. By 1918, J.K. Archer had adapted, resolving his personal struggle by choosing the podium above the pulpit. Few followed his lead. Though Baptists have sounded their trumpets on a narrow range of moral issues, less obviously 'religious' causes have created more confusion than action. For a period, the denomination sublimated its concerns through impotent 'Public Questions' committees. Now, even these have died. 'Spirit-filled apocalypses' remain unactualised dreams.

NOTES:

1. B. Gustafson, 'Intervention in the Public Square', *Bulletin of the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society*, No. 8, July 1980, pp 2-7.
2. Gustafson, 'Intervention', p 3.
3. N.R. Wood, 'John Kendrick Archer: Baptist Minister - Christian Socialist 1865-1949', *Bulletin of the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society*, No. 7, October 1970. See also the undergraduate research essay of M. Frost, 'J.K. Archer', University of Canterbury, 1989.
4. In 1977 the Baptist Historical Society received a 102 page manuscript from Mr E. Harrison, J.P. of Wolsham, England. The product of Harrison's antiquarian efforts relating to Archer's pastorate in Grimsby (1903-1908), it consists of transcripts of newspaper accounts of Archer's activities, including several important letters.
5. B. Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence: The Origins and Establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party 1900-19*, Auckland, 1980, p 158 (in the biographical note on H.E. Holland). See also Chapter 11 'Wowsers and papists: religion and the rise of Labour', pp 120-131.
6. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (*N.Z.P.D.*), Vol. 260, p 1086, 9/10/41. See also Vol. 250, p 146, 8/3/38 and Vol. 263, p 178, 2/7/43.
7. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 260, p 641, 12/9/41.
8. Harrison pp 72-3.Clifford had a very open attitude to doctrine. 'My attitude towards Creeds...is of persistent investigation with a high resolve not to be misled by terms or confused by the clouds that emerge from the hoary past....The "doxies", "ortho" and "hetero", have interested me and do still, but the main purpose of my spirit...is to *live at* the vital centre and work from it.' See S.J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences*, London, 1924 pp xiv-xv.
9. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 260, p 639, 12/9/41.
10. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 260, p 640, 12/9/41.
11. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 249, pp 123-4, 4/11/37.
12. Harrison pp 43-4.
13. Wood p 8.
14. Wood p 4. *Southland Times* 11/10/19. p 6, col. 3; 12/12/19. p 10, col. 11.
15. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 249, p 75, 3/11/37.
16. J. Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, London, 1860, pp 100-1 note *.
17. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol., 250, p 145, 8/3/38. See also Vol. 249, p 852, 1/12/37; Vol., 264, p 833, 31/3/44.
18. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 264, p 416, 11/3/44.
19. Ruskin pp 28-29.
20. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 251, p 223, 6/7/38.
21. On Mazzini see G. Salvemini, *Mazzini*, London, ET 1956 .
22. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 256, p 853, 7/10/39. See also Vol 261, p 81, 19/3/42. cf. Salvemini p 61.
23. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 250, p 147, 8/3/38; cf Salvemini pp 162-3.
24. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 249, p 850, 1/12/37 cf. Salvemini p 165.
25. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 249, p 75, 3/11/37. See also Vol. 260, p 306, 27/8/41.
26. Salvemini pp 18-19. These themes are also found in Clifford (cf his

description of the preacher's task in Marchant p 97)
27. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 251, p 223, 6/7/38.
28. *N.Z.P.D.*,Vol. 273, p 441, 18/7/46.
29. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 264, pp 416-8, 11/3/44.
30. In addition to the mayoralty he held posts as vice-President of the Labour Party 1922-25, 1927-28, 1929-31; President 1928-29; Invercargill Borough Councilor 1915-16 and Christchurch City Councilor 1921-25, 1931-35. He was a member at various time of the Canterbury Hospital Board and the Christchurch Tramway and Fire Boards - See Gustafson, *Labour's Path*, p 153; Wood pp 18-20.
31. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 983, 3/8/49; letter to N.R. Wood 7/9/67.
32. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 985, 3/8/49. Rev. Carr, in his tribute said of Archer 'He liked a fight, but he liked a fair fight and a clean fight.' - *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 987, 3/8/49.
33. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 260, p 480, 4/9/41.
34. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 263, p 1144, 26/8/43.
35. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 261, p 901, 2/12/42. The quotation from Tennyson (which Archer repeats in 1943 - Vol. 263, p 1144, 26/9/43) appears to have been a favourite of his mentor Clifford - see Marchant p 56.
36. See e.g. *N.Z.P.D.*.Vol. 256, p 721, 6/10/39; Vol. 260, pp 305-6, 27/8/41.; Vol. 263, p 178, 2/7/43; Vol. 271, pp 294-295, 8/11/45.
37. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 261, pp 345-350, 9/5/42. See also Vol., 249, p 154, 4/11/37; Vol., 249, p 851, 1/12/37; Vol., 256, p 316, 26/9/39.
38. Harrison pp 4-5.
39. Harrison pp 13-15.
40. Harrison pp 17-28.
41. See Harrison pp 6, 12, 29, 36, 40, 48, 55, 64, 75.
42. Harrison pp 55-58.
43. Harrison pp 75, 82, 93-96.
44. Harrison p 101. cf *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 260, p 480, 4/9/41.
45. Wood pp 7-8; *N.Z. Baptist*, May 1909, p 323.
46. Precisely in what capacity Archer sought to serve in unclear. Wood p 12 implies he wished to go as a Chaplain. Wilson, Leader of the Legislative Council suggests that 'Mr Archer volunteered on three occasions for active service..' - *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 977, 2/8/49. Holland talks of Archer's desire for a 'combatant' role - *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol 286, p 986, 3/8/49.
47. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 985, 3/8/49.
48. Wood pp 19-20.
49. Wood p 21. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 286, p 980, 3/8/49.
50. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 263, p 1144, 26/8/43.
51. G.T. Bielby, *A Handful of Grain: The Centenary History of the Baptist Union of N.Z.*, Vol. 3 - 1914-1945, Auckland, 1984, p 98.
52. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 259, p 221, 26/3/41. He did not regard the whole of Church history as a write-off. He acknowledged failures but proudly pointed to such achievements as the abolition of slavery - see N.Z.P.D., Vol. 260, p 1048-9, 8/10/41.

53. Baptist political activism peaked in England in the last third of the nineteenth century. On reasons for this and its subsequent decline see D.W. Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century', *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol XXXIV, January 1991, pp 13-24 and 'Baptists and Politics Since 1914' in K.W. Clements (ed), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, London, 1983, pp 76-95. See also Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: chapel and politics, 1870-1914,* London 1982.

54. J.J. North, *Protestant...and Why*, Wellington, 1938, p 92.

55. See Gustafson, 'Intervention', pp 5-6.

56. Gustafson, *Labour's Path*, p 153; Wood p 9.

57. *N.Z. Baptist,* Jan. 1918, p 4.

58. *N.Z. Baptist*, Dec. 1918, pp 184-9, p 189.

59. *N.Z.P.D.*, Vol. 264, pp 415-6, 11/3/44.

60. Much remains to be explored in the evolution of 'transplanted' forms of Christianity. The best general treatments remain H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, Wellington, 1987 and A Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1991.

61. Examples are Dick in politics, Thomas Kirk in botany and education and T.W. Adams in silviculture and education.