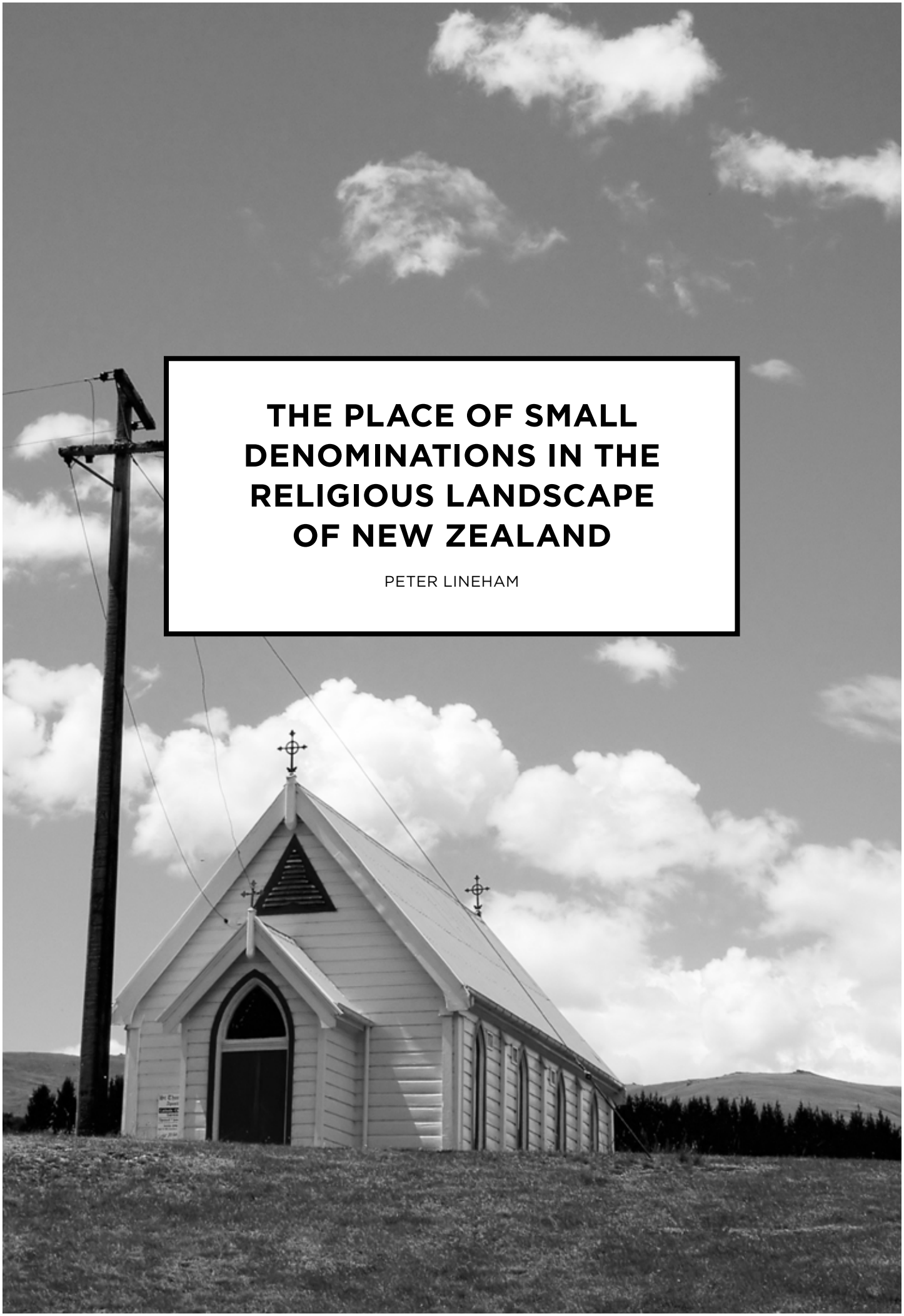

THE PLACE OF SMALL DENOMINATIONS IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF NEW ZEALAND

PETER LINEHAM

My earliest experience of church is very different from that of the average New Zealander. In our small rural district the Anglican and Presbyterian ministers alternated in holding services in the local Anglican Church. My brothers and I attended Sunday school there (which was led by Open Brethren with financial help from the other Brethren group to which our family was affiliated), but then we were off to "the meeting" in an old hall beside the road beside the river, where a small group of maybe a dozen of my relations attended a Brethren breaking of bread. Two different types of Brethren met in other halls. Every Sunday afternoon my father preached the gospel to more of my relations. Later on Sunday we might attend the Presbyterian service in the Anglican Church and attend an Open Brethren meeting which happened if there was a visiting preacher. The little Catholic Church was a mystery to me, but I assume a priest visited regularly to lead services.

Other members of the local community were focused on the picture theatre or the pub, but for our family this was the primary focus. Overall the three types of Brethren made a very significant contribution to the religious life of the district and into school and community organisations.

This is a peculiar story, but variants of it can be traced in other rural areas of New Zealand. In mid-Canterbury the Baptists played a prominent role in a circuit including Darfield and Methven. In the Hawkes Bay Lutherans and rural Methodists were important. In the Manawatu the Open and Exclusive Brethren were very significant in many rural districts. In different parts of Otago and Southland Baptists, Brethren, the Salvation Army and the Churches of Christ dominated the religious life of local districts. In Taranaki the remnants of rural Methodism as well as the Salvation Army were very evident. In Nelson Churches of Christ and different types of Brethren were found in the little districts. In the Dargaville area the Albertland settlement left a legacy in the active Congregational chapels. As for the towns and cities of New Zealand, as I discovered when we moved to one in my teenage years, there were many mysterious church buildings down side streets, probably unnoticed by people other than their members, but collectively they represented a significant proportion of active Christianity in the community.

Members of the small churches were expected to be more committed and more active than were members in other churches. This was attractive to some people but it also acted as a deterrent. Keen Christians felt alienated by the low expectations in the main churches and were drawn to the smaller religious groups. Low attendance expectations in the main churches and active sectarianism went hand in hand. Yet there was no great antagonism towards the main religious traditions in New Zealand. No particular issue caused people to want to dissent. The absence of an established church in New Zealand excluded differences over the role of the state in controlling religion, which led to the formation of the dissenting churches in England and Scotland. Just because of the established Church of England and Church of Scotland, nonconformity needed to emerge. Christchurch, which came as near as any place to having an established church, was home to more sectarian groups than any other place in New Zealand – closely followed by Presbyterian Dunedin.

Many years ago when I wrote a history of the Brethren movement in New Zealand, many people discouraged me. No-one had previously thought the story either possible or significant, and many Brethren told me how unprofitable such a book was bound to be. Much the same was experienced by historians of other small churches of New Zealand. The story was little more than a narrative of family connections. The churches certainly did not see themselves as sharing common ground with others. Even if small sects and denominations believed that they were placed by God in their communities, they did not have grand aspirations. Yet taken together, they have a collective significance which their individual scale belies.

Collectively this type of church is easy to overlook because the individual denominations are small. As we celebrate two hundred years of Christianity in New Zealand, attention inevitably falls on the larger Christian traditions, but the New Zealand Christian history cannot be adequately told without exploring the minor movements in the Christian story.

MAINSTREAM AND MINOR STREAMS

In recent years the larger denominations of New Zealand have suffered severely from loss of public respect and interest. There was a time when their news was widely reported in the general press, and contributing to the church was regarded as an act of public service. Today while the proportion of Catholics has remained relatively unchanged, the three prominent Protestant churches, the so-called "mainstream", Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist, which in 1956 accounted for two-thirds of the population of the country, now account for just over twenty percent of the population. The public are well aware of this catastrophic decline in support and public profile. They know very little of the smaller churches within the Protestant world. Following convention I will include the main

Methodist church in the mainstream (although in some respects Methodism is more like smaller churches in its basis and there is a long history of small Methodist churches). Catholics, the Orthodox and the new religious movements are excluded from my consideration, whereas Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses might be regarded as admissible. According to the 2013 census count, the sects and denominations include (from largest to smallest), Baptists (53,496), Pentecostals (45,777), Latter-day Saints (40,728), Ratana (40,353), Jehovah's Witnesses (17,931), Seventh day Adventists (14,613), Assemblies of God (13,806), Ringatu (13,272), Salvation Army (9,162), Open Brethren (7,884), Apostolic Church (6,120), Plymouth Brethren (5,388), Brethren not further defined (4,965), Congregationalists (4,740), Reformed (4,611), Tongan Methodists (4,509), Samoan Congregationalists (3,909), Lutherans (3,903), New Life Centres (2,157), Church of Christ not further defined (1,755), Christadelphians (1,686), Elim (1,494), Cook Islands Congregational (1,314), Independent Evangelical Churches (1,194), Vineyard Fellowship (1,017), and it also includes several groups with less than one thousand adherents including other Adventists, the Worldwide Church of God, Chinese Christians, Korean Christians, Bible Baptists, Independent Baptists, the Associated Churches of Christ, other Churches of Christ, Independent Pentecostals, Christian Outreach Centres, Christian Revival Crusades, Full Gospel, Revival Centres, United Pentecostals, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of God, the Commonwealth Covenant Church, the Metropolitan Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Religious Society of Friends, and the Unitarians. All in all there are 316,932 numbers in this list, although we should probably exclude the 58,659 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-day Saints. One could possibly include people choosing generic categories, including Protestant (4,998), Evangelical (6,099), Born Again (7,920), and Christian (216,177). Many churches are not listed in the census report including Destiny, Life, Arise and City Impact. Readers are likely to know of groups unknown to me. Of the denominations on this list, only the Seventh-day Adventists showed any significant increase between the last two censuses, but the census is slow at registering new categories or changes of name.

Above all, the restricted list is astounding because of its sheer range. How do we explain this proliferation of Christian variants? Remember that they cluster together in the Protestant Christian sector. What leads people to agree on so much and yet choose not to go with the great majority, or even undermine the great majority of Christians. Religion was traditionally seen as a basic social cement, and the loss of this role seems to explain religious decline. Many people from the smaller denominations want to see Christianity as the religion of the society and state. Nevertheless, they assert the right to maintain their own independent form of Christianity. The proliferation of smaller Christian groups indicates that Christianity is far more diverse and pluralist than it likes to present itself, even though these groups would reject pluralism. It is a significant feature of the Christian landscape. One hundred years ago a shrewd French sociologist André Siegfried, after a visit to New Zealand, argued that this was a striking characteristic of New Zealand religion:

> No tradition has remained so strong in New Zealand as the religious one. Churches swarm there;... In shop windows, on the stalls at railway stations, religious books meet the eye, and it is evident that these matters are universally and constantly in people's thoughts...

ABOVE ALL, THE RESTRICTED LIST IS ASTOUNDING BECAUSE OF ITS SHEER RANGE. HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THIS PROLIFERATION OF CHRISTIAN VARIANTS?

He went on:

> Religious activity in New Zealand has retained a purely English form. It has split up into a number of sects, in which the slightest shades of thought are represented. Under the influence of this environment, the least orthodox – we might say the least Christian – doctrines have in the end themselves assumed an ecclesiastical group seems to be quite unbearable to the New Zealander. The man without a religion is regarded with little sympathy by public opinion, and "society" openly dislikes him. So when anyone abandons one chapel he generally enters another immediately, unless he decides (there have been cases) to start on his own account a religion of which he is the apostle. Hence results a veritable forest of denominations...
>
> This religious imagination sometimes assumes ridiculous forms, and the officials charged with making the census must often wonder whether they are not being hoaxed... Any idea, in the colonial surroundings of Australasia, takes on a religious form

> so easily, and so naturally that no-one is surprised to see men who in everyday life are most commonplace merchants or politicians become, as soon as there is any question of religion, enthusiastic and sometimes slightly ridiculous apostles.[1]

Siegfried attached great significance to the colonial environment. This may have been wrong. Very few of the religions listed in the census originated in New Zealand. Furthermore Siegfried as a Frenchman may have not registered that New Zealanders were less preoccupied by religion than English, Irish and Scottish people. And in the absence of a comparable British census, it is hard to know if small churches proliferated more in New Zealand.

One simple explanation for the notice taken of the small churches is that the census authorities in New Zealand were very diligent in counting affiliation to them. In the 1926 census the main tables focus on forty Christian groups along with eleven other religions and fourteen other species of unbelief, but there is an additional table recording 266 people (170 men, 96 women) in seventy-six Christian groups plus another 140 or so other beliefs making a total of 5.8% of the population!

SO THE SMALLER CHURCHES HAVE GROWN AS A GROUP, EVEN IF THEY DID NOT ALWAYS FLOURISH. THEY WERE GENERALLY REALISTIC, NEVER IMAGINING A WORLD CONVERTED TO THEIR INTERPRETATION OF FAITH, BUT THEY HELD THEIR INDIVIDUAL CONVICTIONS AS SACROSANCT

So the smaller churches have grown as a group, even if they did not always flourish. They were generally realistic, never imagining a world converted to their interpretation of faith, but they held their individual convictions as sacrosanct. The modern world has undermined the authority of state churches and removed the meaningfulness of "mainstream" forms of Christianity. In this context, religions based upon individual beliefs and convictions may have significant opportunities for growth. This is often seen as the reason why religious forms have proliferated in America, effectively driven by consumer demand. Yet the flourishing has not really happened in New Zealand, and the smaller churches seem to have their own, perhaps more rapid, cycle of rise and decline, like mainstream Protestantism.

There has always been a price to pay for belonging to a smaller church. The smaller religious groups have all had to contend with a degree of opposition. In the early years larrikins subjected groups like the Salvation Army to peltings of stones and the public press was very sarcastic. Colonial society has needed high levels of community engagement, and the smaller churches were often viewed as inhibiting this cooperation. New Zealand has not appreciated dissenters, as became evident in the public reaction towards conscientious objectors during the two world wars. Where groups have worked in the community, people have been more willing to live and let live. There is general freedom to do one's own thing in religion, but if this involved disruption of families, there is intense suspicion, as the Exclusive Brethren and Jehovah's Witnesses found to their cost.

In New Zealand smaller churches have never flourished to the extent that they have in the United States. Small churches have grown, but those who make no profession of religion have increased far more. Alan Gilbert suggests that early industrial societies favoured denominational diversity, but after two centuries the western world is essentially post-Christian.[2] This argument might be related to consumer trends. Yet each small denomination has its own historical experience, and the categories of church need to be classified on a coherent basis. The best categories probably link to various historical contexts.

THE DISSENTING CHURCHES

The early religious history of New Zealand was dominated by the Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic churches. Anglicans and Catholics were provided with a bishop. The Free Church of Scotland sponsored a significant settlement in Otago, ensuring that the Presbyterian Church was dominant in the south. These three types of Christianity were therefore dominant.

Yet since the seventeenth century the British establishment had been forced to permit the organisation of other types of Protestant church. Protestant Dissent or Nonconformity was used as a collective description of dissenters from the state church. The main groups were Presbyterians, Congregational Independents, and Baptists. By the nineteenth century most Presbyterians in England had become Socinian or Unitarian in theology, while

1 André Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, trans. D. Hamer (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1982), 310, 311, 313–14.

2 Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: a History of the Secularisation of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980); idem., *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longman, 1976).

Baptists and Congregationalists had been reshaped by the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century.

Methodism, the primary product of the Evangelical Revival became the largest non-Anglican church, although it also split into several groups. Because it had an active missionary movement which had commenced work in New Zealand in 1822, it was much better placed than the Dissenters to provide ministry to the settlers. But it was inevitable that some settlers were from a dissenting background. What were these settlers to do? Doubtless from the first they wanted to form congregations. The Nonconformist principle of the gathered church, self-governing with the power to ordain its own ministers, meant that they faced no theoretical obstacle. The practical obstacle was the lack of sufficient numbers to get congregations going. In Auckland Baptists and Congregationalists formed a single church, in Wellington, Baptists worked with Brethren. Often wealthy laymen threw in their lot with the local Presbyterian or Methodist congregation. However the very first Congregational Church was established by Barzillai Quaife in the Bay of Islands in 1840 although it came to an end within four years.

The mix of settlers in some places aided the formation of dissenting churches. The classic example is Nelson. The group of German migrants at Ranzau and the group of Quakers in the town of Nelson firmly established the right to dissent. The first Baptist church in the colony was established here in 1851. Other sectarian groups flourished in the tolerant setting. This owed much to the evangelical flavour of the local diocese of the Church of England.

The greatest opportunity for Dissenting churches in New Zealand came – and went – in 1862. To celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of their expulsion from the Church of England a group of Dissenters led by William Rawson Brame planned a settlement intended to rival Anglican Christchurch and Scottish Dunedin. This settlement on land provided at Albertland, on the Kaipara Harbour, was something of a disaster. The location had no easy access, the number of settlers was low, they were not united in their church loyalties and they arrived in Northland at a time when the land wars made the rural North Island very unappealing. The planned settlement of Port Albert was abandoned and the pastor and most of the settlers moved to Auckland. Nevertheless the settlers left some mark in the region which survives even to today. Albertland had for many years separate Congregationalist, Baptist and Churches of Christ congregations, unlike any other rural region.

In the towns, dissenting congregations were established more quickly. Congregationalists were the first to form their own churches, and established the Congregational Union in 1884. Yet Congregationalism did not then grow but rather slowly languished. Perhaps one reason was a question of class. The Congregational churches in England were proud of their middle class ethos but this class was under-represented in New Zealand. The Congregationalists were Calvinist in background, but the Presbyterian Church had similar theological roots, so Congregational churches often languished and ministers left to become Presbyterians. Its greatest opportunity came in the 1960s when an influx of Pacific Island Congregationalists, the product of the work of the London Missionary Society, arrived in Auckland, but the church struggled to cope with this style of Congregationalism. In 1969 the Pacific Islands Congregational Church was transferred to the Presbyterian Church, and in 1970 the great majority of other churches merged with the Presbyterian Church.

Baptists had a different experience. Slower to found churches, they created a Baptist Union in 1882. In the same year Thomas Spurgeon, son of the greatest English preacher of the denomination was appointed to the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland, and his vigorously evangelistic approach provided Baptists with new impetus. Nevertheless Baptist growth was limited while the denomination was shaped by the traditions of English dissenting life. Only in the second half of the twentieth century did Baptists become the largest of the small churches. The other groups were much smaller. Unitarians were a small but select group of settlers, but no church was established until 1898. Quakers too were present among the earliest settlers, beginning especially in tolerant Nelson, but they remained a very small group and although their work and witness was always distinctive, they made little impression in the new colony. Only a very small number of churches were established.[3]

REVIVALIST GROUPS

In the nineteenth century the forces of the great awakening were reshaped by American and English groups into what historians call Revivalism. Using a distinctive musical and praying style, lay preachers, focused evangelistic enterprises, altar calls and

3 See M. West and R. Favell, *The Story of New Zealand Quakerism, 1842–1972* (Auckland: N.Z. Yearly Meeting of Religious Society of Friends, 1973); James Brodie and Audrey Brodie, *Seeking a New Land: Quakers in New Zealand;* Quaker Historical Manuscripts 3 (Wellington: Beechtree Press for New Zealand Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 1993).

prayers of commitment, it created a new model of evangelism. In the wake of the 1859 Trans-Atlantic revival, a series of new denominations were planted and existing Protestant churches faced pressures to follow revivalist patterns. A pattern of non-denominationalism arose following the model of Dwight L. Moody.

In New Zealand revivalism became the main characteristic of some congregations. Travelling evangelists visited many churches. A variety of seamen's missions and other mission halls sought to reach out to working class people. In many towns there was a constant round of evangelistic meetings, and gospel campaigns were a common form of entertainment of the late nineteenth century. There were also to a lesser extent some denominations which benefitted. The Wesleyans in particular often used revivalist methods, but the arrival of the Primitive Methodists, pioneers in revivalist methods, meant that at least one stream of Methodism was strongly revivalist. Also a range of new denominations emerged, including the Salvation Army, while the Churches of Christ, the Brethren and the Seventh-day Adventists in their public face at least became revivalist denominations. To this day churches with this background justify their existence largely because they are reaching to the lost. Their essentially lay structure meant that homely preachers and simple music-hall style religion made them more accessible to the poor.

IN NEW ZEALAND REVIVALISM BECAME THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF SOME CONGREGATIONS. TRAVELLING EVANGELISTS VISITED MANY CHURCHES... IN MANY TOWNS THERE WAS A CONSTANT ROUND OF EVANGELISTIC MEETINGS, AND GOSPEL CAMPAIGNS WERE A COMMON FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT OF THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

Dramatic revivals of religion occurred in a few places, and they were not restricted to the small churches; many Methodists and Presbyterians were also enthusiastic supporters. Nevertheless, the small churches often flourished in such an atmosphere. In Wanganui there was great religious excitement in 1875, which subsequently helped the smaller churches. There was a revival in the Manawatu district in 1880–1882 through the preaching of Gordon Forlong, and although this began in Methodist churches, the district became a centre of Open Brethren. In many other bush districts a phase of religious excitement explains the prevalence of small churches. Revivalist religion also focused on lay faith, and this fitted very well into the self-made rural communities and modest towns that began to flourish after 1870.

The most spectacular story was surely the Salvation Army. General Booth was offered a financial incentive to develop work in New Zealand, and in 1883 he sent two young officers who began their ministry in Dunedin. Within a few years the Salvation Army had spread to many centres, and was especially effective in working class suburbs of towns.[4]

This revivalist tradition was profoundly important for Protestantism as a whole in the late nineteenth century. Evangelists were often employed to build denominations. Baptists benefited greatly when Thomas Spurgeon, who had been appointed to be minister of the Auckland Tabernacle, proved a master evangelist who ministered throughout the country. The colony was small enough for one very gifted leader to greatly help the profile of a denomination. Nevertheless, the most notable revival preachers preferred a less denominational focus. The greatest evangelists were Charles Alexander and Reuben Torrey, associates of Moody, who aimed for a broad evangelical alliance, and this deeply affected churches influenced by revivalism, as did the Keswick focus on individual sanctification. The Pounawea Convention founded in 1909 and later conventions had an indirect influence on many small churches. Moreover many congregations of the smaller churches commenced evening gospel meetings, which were rather less denominational and less formal than traditional services, and thus created a common evangelical community. Placing a huge, almost sacramental significance on the "decision" to follow Christ, revivalism thus nurtured a shared pattern of Christianity where fervency and commitment were highly valued and a common culture of faith was nurtured. The high point of this type of religion was the Billy Graham Crusade of 1959, which gained sponsorship by the National Council of Churches (comprised largely of the main Protestant churches), but depended on the voluntary labour of members of the evangelical churches. Many new congregations were founded in this post-war era, and a few small denominations, including the Church of the Nazarene, a holiness church, which

4 See Cyril R. Bradwell, *Fight the Good Fight: The Story of the Salvation Army in New Zealand 1883–1983* (Wellington: Reed, 1982).

emphasised Wesleyan doctrines neglected by modern Methodism.

Eventually revivalism and its crusade language came to seem very old fashioned and simplistic although in some ways the Charismatic Movement was a kind of revivified revivalism with a new kind of informal style. Perhaps for this very reason the evangelical churches largely abandoned their gospel meetings, but this left those denominations with a quite uncertain character. They had either to become Charismatic themselves or to find a new kind of identity.

RADICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Another aspect of the emergence of the small churches was a widespread appeal within the conservative Christian community of restorationist ecclesiology. Darby and his friends in the Brethren on the one hand, and on the other, Thomas and Alexander Campbell and their Restoration Movement, set out to return to primitive Christianity. It was perhaps not surprising that the Campbellites who had done so well on the western frontier of America should also make an impact in New Zealand. There were certain sharp differences between them and the Brethren; the Campbellites were more optimistic and influenced by the Enlightenment in the hope for a unified Christianity, whereas the Brethren were shaped by Darby's distinctive doctrine that Christianity was in ruins. The sectarian strains which became so dominant in the Exclusive Brethren stem from this outlook, whereas the Churches of Christ had a very liberal wing. Both the Brethren and the Restoration Movement made their first New Zealand appearance in tolerant Nelson in the 1850s, and there were sharp debates between the two. Both did well in New Zealand, partly because their primitivism appealed to settlers who were often unimpressed by traditional church regulations. In the end they flourished as they adopted revivalist evangelistic methods, and struggled as they sought to keep an identity and yet appeal to a wider group of Christians. In the twentieth century Open Brethren were reshaped by revivalism, whereas Exclusive Brethren became increasingly isolated.

This sectarian outlook has also been evident among some Pentecostals. In some respects the schisms in the early movement reflect sharp debates on beliefs and practices, which divided Pentecostals between the Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Church and what became Elim. Then further groups with only vague links to Pentecostalism emerged; A. H. Dallimore's healing mission and F. A. Wilson's Church of Christ Mount Roskill. The advent of the Charismatic movement took Pentecostal themes back to the main churches, but a series of supporters abominated this including the Cooperites (originally from Rangiora but now associated with Gloriavale on the West Coast), the Camp David Community in Waipara, and the Witness Lee collection of local churches. Curiously it was the worldly success of the Charismatic Movement that provoked this latter day attempt to purify faith.

CHURCHES WITH REFORMIST THEOLOGIES

Colonial readers were kept informed about the theological debates in Europe by local newspapers. The main Protestant churches in New Zealand tended to be quite conservative compared to their home denominations, and reluctant to tolerate revision of theology and liturgy, for these churches were focused on establishing replicas of the church as it was in Britain. The standard of education of most clergy was low, and theological emphases were conservative. Inevitably some clergy strained at the leash. In Melbourne the same circumstances led Charles Strong to secede from the Presbyterian Church and found the Australian Church. There were a few equivalents in New Zealand, but not on the same scale. In Auckland Samuel Edger, who had been appointed non-denominational chaplain to the Albertland Settlement, and failed to fit in either the Congregational or Baptist churches, founded his own liberal non-denominational congregation in Lorne Street Hall. In Christchurch the former Anglican minister James O'Bryen Dott Hoare formed Our Father's Church in 1894 where he advocated liberal and humanist values. Congregationalists also led the way in liberal theology. Yet the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches did not excommunicate their prominent nineteenth century exponents of liberal views, William Salmond, James Gibb and Charles Garland, nor John Gibson Smith or Lloyd Geering in the twentieth century. For this reason there were few schismatic movements from the mainstream churches. If anything the drift was the other way.

A few liberal congregations were founded. The Unitarian Church was not founded until 1899, and thereafter attracted liberals discontented with the other churches, as well as freethinkers longing for spirituality. The story of James Chapple leaving the Presbyterian Church for the Unitarians was, however, exceptional. Another example of this is the church of the Friendly Road found it necessary to split from Methodism to make room for its leader's views and practices. Some of the liberal schisms were in fact from existing smaller churches. The Forward Movement in Wellington

came out of Congregationalism. The Church of Christ Life and Advent attracted Baptist supporters of conditional immortality in the early 1880s, and survived for more than one hundred years before most of its churches were welcomed back into the Baptist Church. This example shows how much eschatological debates provoked schisms. There were extensive debates over hell and the afterlife in the nineteenth century. This was an aspect of the appeal of the Brethren and the Christadelphians. It later provoked the formation of the Commonwealth Covenant Church and the Worldwide Church of God both of which embraced British Israel ideas. The Jehovah's Witnesses who arrived in the 1910s as the International Bible Students were also distinguished by their eschatology. Sometimes reformist groups moved beyond the penumbra of Christianity. The Swedenborgian New Jerusalem church is one example. Spiritualist ideas circulated extensively from the 1880s, and spiritualist churches were founded in the early 1920s. Theosophy was a very significant movement in late nineteenth century New Zealand, gaining support from Harry Atkinson, erstwhile premier of the colony, Edward Tregear, the radical civil servant, and Lilian Edger, daughter of Samuel Edger. There soon were small Theosophical Halls in many towns of New Zealand. Christian Science ideas were first introduced by the charlatan, Arthur Bentley Worthington in Christchurch, and were revived in the 1920s, when they became very popular at that time. Thus the story shades into the growth of new age movements. Much more research is warranted into these reformist movements and their religious roots.

FUNDAMENTALIST INSTINCTS

When Joseph Kemp arrived at the Baptist Tabernacle in 1920, he brought with him experience of the emerging Fundamentalist movement in the United States, which had reacted sharply to the relaxation of confessional standards in the larger Protestant churches and seminaries, and increasingly defined orthodoxy as adherence to what was termed the literal truth of the scriptures. It was a profound theological battle. In the United States this increasingly became a war against accommodation with modern culture and Darwinist doctrines. In New Zealand these ideas reshaped some of the smaller churches. A United Evangelical Church was founded on fundamentalist lines in 1919, but came to little. The denominational splits which happened in America were averted because Kemp avoided a narrowly Fundamentalist stance and had instead steered the Baptist Union in evangelical directions. His vision for a lay Christian training centre led to the formation of the Bible Training Institute, which could be vehemently critical of incipient Modernism. This sharper and more combative thinking bolstered and reshaped traditional evangelicalism in the main churches, (although, as Lange emphasises, they preferred British evangelicalism to American-style fundamentalism).[5] It also refocused and united the traditional revivalist churches, moving them out of sectarian ruts, and giving them a new evangelical theological focus. The early Pentecostals went through the same move from sectarian to evangelical. Their small denominations were very much like other small churches, on the one hand combative in defending their convictions, but in other respects quite like revivalist and fundamentalist groups, seeing to convert and to reform.

OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS A BROAD RANGE OF SEPARATIST CHURCHES HAS EMERGED IN NEW ZEALAND, MANY OF THEM BRANCHES OF INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS OF SEPARATISTS

The resurgence of liberal theological ideas in the Presbyterian Church in the 1960s brought a new wave of conservative supporters into the smaller churches. A few Presbyterians who left the denomination as a result of the Geering controversy formed separatist Orthodox Presbyterian churches, but others drifted towards other conservative churches, especially the Reformed Church, formed by Dutch and South Africans who came from more conservative Reformed churches and did not like the inclusiveness of Presbyterianism.

Over the last fifty years a broad range of separatist churches has emerged in New Zealand, many of them branches of international networks of separatists. The Wesleyan Methodists, the various Bible Baptists and Churches of Christ of the non-instrumental variety are all examples of this. Also within the existing churches there has been an increasing influence from the "Bible Church" movement in the United States. Various Churches of Christ, Brethren and Baptist congregations have reshaped themselves along these lines. Small churches are now international phenomena. They reflect disquiet at trends in the larger churches, but they also are not as narrow as outsiders might assume, and the energy in these churches is striking.

5 Stuart Lange, *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand 1930–1965* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013).

THE CHARISMATIC WAVE

By the 1960s many of the smaller churches were thus expanding and at the same time converging. Brethren and Salvationist leaders became more prominent in such significant Protestant organisations as the Churches Education Commission and the Bible Society. It seemed that the evangelical churches were gaining momentum, as the main churches were losing it.

The Charismatic Movement radically changed these patterns. It introduced a new pattern of church life and interaction with the community. Reflecting new cultural patterns, and hostile to the old Nonconformist ethos, it quickly led to the formation of new congregations. While they rejected denominationalism, soon most of the various Christian Fellowships joined together in the New Life Movement. The independent Charismatics shared common ground with charismatics in the main denominations, and although resistance was strong from most of the smaller churches, eventually some Baptist and other congregations were caught up in the new phenomenon. The Charismatic movement renewed and reshaped large parts of the smaller church world.

CHURCHES FOR OTHER ETHNICITIES

Ethnic churches were, from the outset, another type of smaller church. The most significant of these were founded by Māori people. Māori independent churches emerged in the early stages of the Christian mission, in particular the Ringatu movement in the Bay of Plenty. While the smaller churches did some outreach among the Māori from the twentieth century, their settler orientation meant that the work of the Brethren, Salvation Army and the Baptists and Pentecostals often tended to lack support. The Latter-day Saints meanwhile made a huge impact among those Māori unhappy with the main denominations. Ratana is a very striking denomination, which began as a healing movement endorsed by many denominations, but then separated over theological issues and a desire for indigenous leadership. All these churches have a striking role in the Māori community, combining political and religious functions.

Migrants too have created ethnic churches. Lutherans were the first, providing spiritual solace to the small groups of German settlers in Ranzau and Marton, the Danes in Palmerston North and other Scandinavians in Hawkes Bay. They struggled to get established because each ethnicity wanted ordained ministers able to speak their language, and there were political tensions between Germans and Scandinavians. The Reformed Church was organised a century later by Dutch people from the more conservative of the three Dutch reformed churches, who did not fit within the Presbyterian Church. Recent arrivals from the South African Reformed Church have often ended up in the Reformed Church. Another and much larger example of this pattern is the arrival of Pacific islanders raised in the traditions of island Congregationalism and Methodism. These groups did not easily fit within the ethos of the Congregational Church, and so the Presbyterian Church agreed to provide for them in what became the Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church. Here, and in the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Pasifika people now exercise a significant influence on the sponsoring denomination. Nevertheless, compromises are involved, and the result has been schisms especially of Samoans and Tongans who prefer to remain affiliated to the church in their home islands. Similarly the Assemblies of God are increasingly an ethnic denomination, but some prefer to affiliate to the Samoan AOG. Korean Protestant churches have also been reluctant to affiliate with their New Zealand denominations. Yet in the long run migrants lose their links with their home country. Once most Germans and Scandinavians were able to speak English, the appeal of the Lutheran Church sharply diminished, and the same trend is likely to occur among Pacific Islanders and Asians.

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SMALL BUT ACTIVE

Each of these churches was very different in its form of worship, its theology, and its form of church government. Each in effect was a private world, a little "bethel" which was somewhat opaque to outsiders. Yet in their external life, the churches were similar, engaging with the community in parallel ways. Each had a level of activity that probably far outweighed the mainstream Protestant churches. They were particularly committed to Sunday schools for the children of their communities, but later expanded to offer youth groups, uniformed and ununiformed, camping, evangelical outreaches, charitable work and overseas missions. Many also cooperated with others in teaching in Bible in Schools programmes,

temperance work, public evangelistic ventures and Bible distribution.

Ministry focused on general community needs was less common. This was a consequence of the priorities and the limited resources of the smaller churches. Most of their energies were devoted to forming new congregations. Yet the closeness of their fellowship meant that they were quick to provide charity towards members in need. The Salvation Army was unusual because it had a highly engaged philosophy of social action, although this was very much focused on rescuing the individual by acts of charity. General Booth's ministry in the East End of London had convinced him that evangelism and social work went hand in hand. Similarly in New Zealand, the Army soon began with work among "fallen women", prisoners and the homeless poor. This focus drew favourable attention from politicians who entrusted to it the care of habitual drunkards and provided Rotoroa Island for their care. Although the Army was a small church, it was outward looking, and was able to take advantage of public respect by soliciting financial support. The evangelistic and holiness role of the Salvation Army were somewhat inconsistent with their social work but its stance on social issues was relatively conservative, for the Army did not believe that New Zealand could be saved by transforming society. Only in recent years has Salvationist thinking along with some evangelical thinking moved from charitable to transformative concepts of ministry, and in general smaller churches have been suspicious of such a focus.

ALTHOUGH THE ARMY WAS A SMALL CHURCH, IT WAS OUTWARD LOOKING, AND WAS ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PUBLIC RESPECT BY SOLICITING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In direct political terms, the small churches had limited opportunities to bring about change. Yet they frequently felt strongly about the state of the nation. Even when the churches did not want to speak publicly, their members wanted a voice, and for some members of small churches, the lack of a loud voice from their church made them eager to speak in the public arena. This seems to be true for that quintessential Congregationalist, George Fowlds, for example. One of the very interesting strengths of Laurie Guy's survey of how church voices affected public issues in New Zealand is the weight that he gives to minority voices,[6] especially Baptist voices. His evidence, and that of John Tucker, shows that Baptists voiced opinions on most of the key moral issues of the day.[7] This was very consistent with the traditions of English Dissent, since it was Dissenters in England in the nineteenth century who carefully developed the so-called Nonconformist conscience, railing against immorality in politics. Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists were vociferous where the state church (or in New Zealand's case, the largest church) was mute. Furthermore the characteristics of this were strongly critical voices from the pulpit, and popular action from the pews.

The same phenomenon is very apparent in New Zealand, although the Presbyterian Church was vastly more effective in this because of its size. There was no voice from the smaller churches to quite equal that of James Gibb or Rutherford Waddell. Yet the Temperance Movement was in essence an act of the Dissenting conscience. Pulpit leadership and high levels of activism made this a force to be reckoned with, and the influence that it gained was a tribute to the commitment of its leadership, despite the striking incongruity of this movement in the Dominion.

There are other examples. Activism for shorter hours and better conditions for urban workers was associated with A. H. Collins at Ponsonby Baptist Church. The leadership of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was largely drawn from the Nonconformist elite. Alarm and concern about a moral foreign policy also surfaced. Perhaps the most striking example is J. K. Archer, president of the Labour party and mayor of Christchurch, with a strong sense of motivation from his perspective as a Baptist pastor. From other churches one could note Clyde Carr, a congregational minister who became Labour M.P. for Timaru. Furthermore, the smaller churches would often rally to defend the Protestant nation, which they did not equate with an established church. The great Baptist leader J. J. North was especially eloquent in this cause, but others generally felt the same concern, even when they believed that that Protestantism was a distraction from the cause of evangelism.

Other small churches without a Dissenting background began by abhorring the public political arena. Brethren, for example, feared pollution from the world if they participated in its structures, for example by military service. Most Brethren also disapproved of the Temperance Movement as trying to reform a world which had no hope

6 Laurie Guy, *Shaping Godzone: Public Issues and Church Voices in New Zealand 1840–2000* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011).

7 John Tucker, *A Braided River: New Zealand Baptists and Public Issues 1882–2000*; International Theological Studies (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013).

without redemption. Pentecostals by and large took the same view. Dispensationalist eschatology doubtless contributed to this silence, as did their sectarian outlook. Sometimes apocalyptic views led to a conspiratorial outlook on politics. Yet in New Zealand the state is unusually active, and thus the more open and evangelistic they were, the more they wanted to be heard. So, as the Brethren and Pentecostals became less isolated from the world, they started to voice their fears at the way society was being restructured. They felt most strongly on matters of personal morality, and had no broad social agenda. For this reason the National Party appealed, and Graeme Lee and other evangelical politicians had no doubt that this was the right political stance. But broad political parties have mixed messages and many lay activists from evangelical churches longed for a party which would not compromise on moral issues. The unhappy history of these parties, beginning with Christian Heritage, but also embracing the Future New Zealand, Destiny, Family, Kiwi and arguably the Conservative parties does not need to be recounted here. By the 1960s the Anglican Church became more engaged in political activism, and the National Council of Churches encouraged church campaigns on social and international issues. As if in reaction, most of the smaller churches except the Quakers and Unitarians recoiled from these liberal politics. The Baptist Church, which was once likely to join Methodists and Presbyterians in its public politics became increasingly conservative and declined to join the Council of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand, the successor to the NCC. Baptists and Pentecostals have become more aware of Māori issues in recent years, but they remain conservative in outlook.

The political conservatism of the evangelical churches is because they perceive an alignment between liberal theology and liberal politics. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Rob Muldoon sought support from the more conservative smaller churches, and such flattery was appealing. Moreover churches that emphasised biblical inerrancy tended to shape their politics on Old Testament Israel. Small churches also often had close ties with American co-religionists, where the political and religious right had coalesced and flourished together.

Other smaller churches have not gone down this conservative path, but all have felt the challenge of an invasive state. Quakers for example maintained their peace testimony during the two world wars, and placed themselves on the liberal side of a range of national debates, expressing their voice with surprising force. Other smaller churches have taken the same stance down the years; the Richmond Mission in Christchurch, for example, along with a group of radical Baptists and Brethren rejected engagement in the First World War. But this only worked when the church as a whole supported them. The smaller churches have so intimate a sense of community that they find it very difficult to tolerate divergent voices within.

MEGACHURCHES

The collapse of the Council of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand has had a significant influence on the role of the smaller churches. Very few small churches were willing to join the Council. Once it was gone, the New Zealand Christian Network which grew out of the Evangelical Alliance, sought to provide a coordinating role, since the large denominations seemed too distracted to replace it. Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist leaders did not welcome the increasing prominence of the smaller churches, but it was difficult to gainsay the impetus from these new quarters. The bi-annual national Christian leaders meeting in Wellington also played an increasing role. This meeting brings together the forceful personalities of small Pentecostal churches and the archbishops and moderators of the large churches. However, they have not been able to break into the meeting with government ministers, which is organised by the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, and is restricted to six churches, including the Salvation Army and the Baptist Social Services.

THERE IS SOME ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE THAT CHRISTIANS ATTENDING THE MEGA CHURCHES OFTEN ARE BIBLICALLY AND THEOLOGICALLY ILLITERATE, SUFFERING ALL THE DEFICIENCIES OF WHICH MAINSTREAM PROTESTANTS WERE ONCE ACCUSED

The changing fortunes of the larger churches changed the perspective of the smaller churches. Church growth was touted as a great opportunity. Old traditions of the faithful remnant were derided. Significance was increasingly measured by the number of people in congregations. By these criteria, the main Protestant churches are in fact the small churches, struggling to maintain their small congregations and the burden of a national infrastructure. Many small denominations have very few congregations, but in the main cities, a single Vineyard, or Arise, or City Impact Church

has a large staff and no room for small thinking. The megachurch has many efficiencies and such congregations have a high profile, but its impact on society is much less than is often assumed. In fact Pentecostal numbers as a whole have been in decline, although some may be categorised in the census as Christians not further defined. Yet Christians not further defined are also Christians without a precise self-identification and there is some anecdotal evidence that Christians attending the mega churches often are biblically and theologically illiterate, suffering all the deficiencies of which mainstream Protestants were once accused.

INDIRECT IMPACTS

Statistics from the census show that there was a steady rise in the proportion of Christians who belong to smaller Protestant groups which continued in the 1960s after the decline in the large churches commenced. The high point came in 1991 when 6.2% of the population identified as adherents of small Christian churches. I have excluded sectarian groups (Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses in particular). Over the twenty years since then, however, the tide has changed. The numbers of small Protestant adherents which stood at 239,499 in 2006 declined to 226,461 in 2013, the first numerical decline since 1916! This modest decline of small Protestants is so far less disastrous than the wholesale decline of the main Protestant churches, which before World War II were more than seventy percent of the population, and are now just over twenty percent. However some of the small denominations have experienced very significant decline, while virtually none have grown. This decline may be distorted by the rise of census category of "Christian not further defined", which has been since 1996 about 5.1% of the population. However this category too has been relatively static over recent years.

WIDER INFLUENCE

Members of the dissenting churches in Britain had a striking role in the industrial revolution and in the emergence of modern society. The same pattern is harder to trace in New Zealand, but there were certainly prominent members of the community who belonged to such churches, including Robert Laidlaw, George Fowlds and Lance Adams-Schneider.

A final factor to consider is the influence of those who have escaped from the narrowness of the smaller churches and have achieved prominence in public life. Many names could be cited of people with a dissenting or sectarian background who have left, either affiliating with the larger churches or abandoning their religious faith. I recall many years ago meeting Robert Wade at the London School of Economics, and discovering the Brethren background of this eminent economist. He is one of those whose departure from the Brethren enabled them to accomplish much, yet who took something of the Brethren with them. Rae Julian, formerly the Human Rights Commissioner, Michael Parmenter, the dancer, and John Britten the motorcycle engineer, have much the same story. I do not have any evidence to claim that ex-members of small churches have been especially significant, but certainly those who have abandoned the close but claustrophobic atmosphere of these churches frequently retain a strong vision for the transformation of society.

A FINAL FACTOR TO CONSIDER IS THE INFLUENCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE NARROWNESS OF THE SMALLER CHURCHES AND HAVE ACHIEVED PROMINENCE IN PUBLIC LIFE

But overall the influence of the smaller churches has been as churches. Precisely because they are groups with a high expectation from their members, they have achieved far more in Christian terms than their small numbers might imply. As we celebrate two hundred years of Christianity in New Zealand, it is important not to forget the role of these small churches both individually and collectively.

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