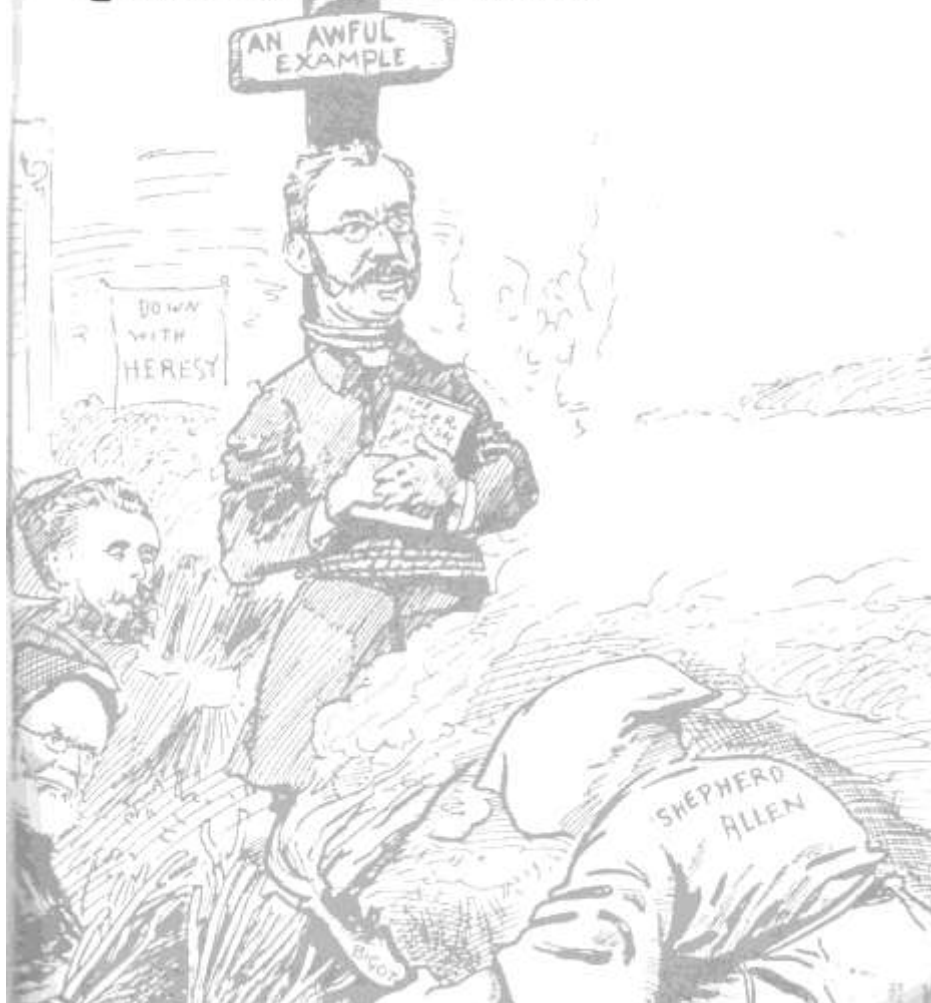


Wesley Historical Society Proceedings No. 78 2003

METHODISTS AND A QUESTIONING FAITH



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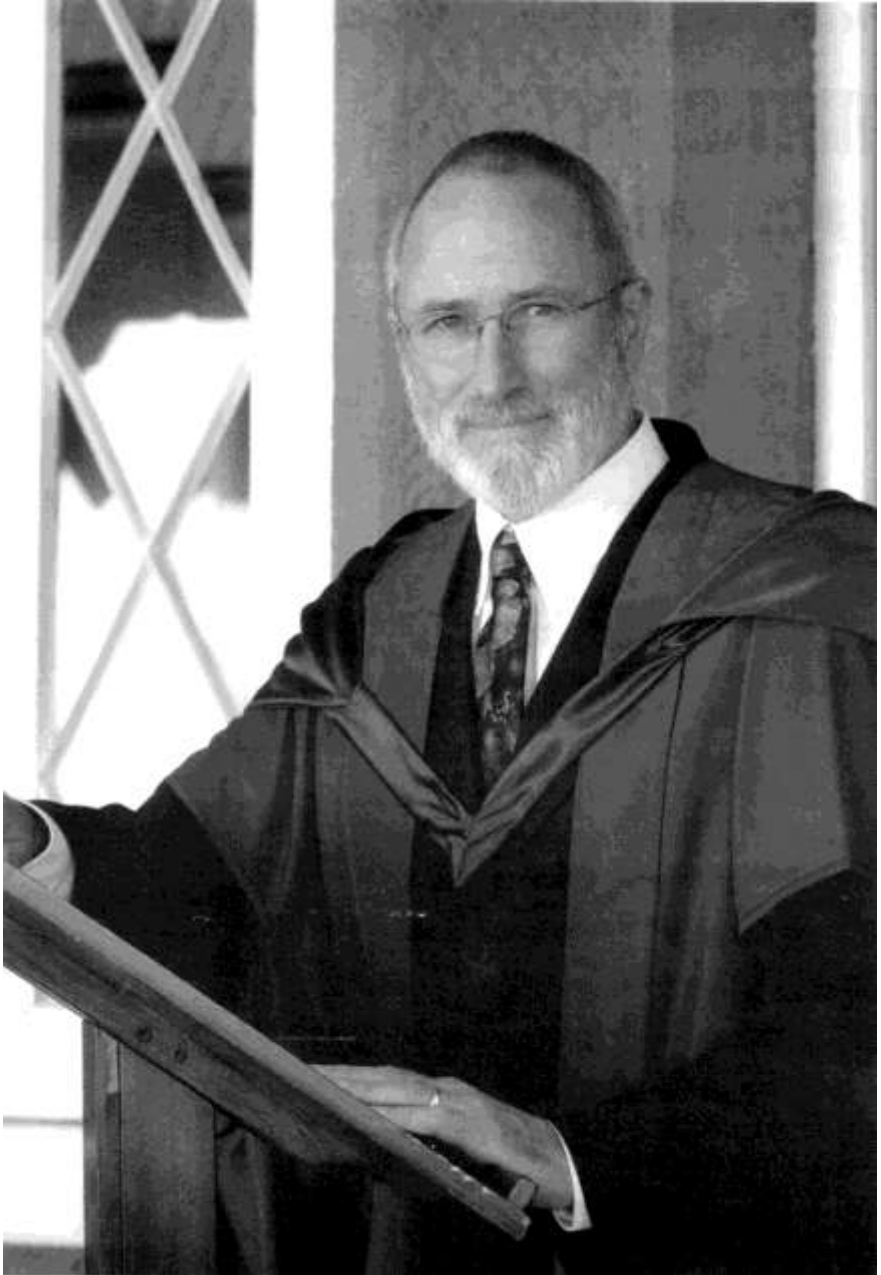
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FOREWORD

As John Salmon notes in the introduction to this volume, Christian faith has often been contestable. While some groups within the Christian community have viewed faith as essentially unchanging, there have always been individuals and groups who have challenged received interpretations and sought to re-shape faith for both a new time and context. The 78th Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society (New Zealand) focuses on some of the debates that have arisen within New Zealand Methodism when previously accepted matters of faith have been questioned. The Society was extremely pleased when John Salmon accepted our invitation to be the guest editor of this publication. John's retirement as the Principal of Trinity Methodist Theological College brings to an end a significant period in the college's history. New initiatives have been taken in the academic and practical training of Methodist students for ministry. In his own spiritual journey, John has been a person for whom faith involves "stepping out... without any certainty or answers, but in an attitude of open curiosity". As an educator this has led him to interrogate received theology in the light of contemporary questions and perspectives, and to seek new ways of preparing students for ministry in the twenty-first century. This has not always taken him to a comfortable place, but like the other Methodists whose stories are told within this volume, he has lived, worked and questioned out of a deep sense of commitment to the moving of God's Spirit.

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INTRODUCTION

METHODISTS AND A QUESTIONING FAITH

John Salmon

Throughout its history, the Christian community has experienced a tension between preserving 'the faith' as it was passed down from those who had gone before, and responding to new questions and challenges in working to shape 'faith' for the present.

Of course, some groups within the broad Christian community find it easier and more in tune with their sense of identity to be 'preservers', while others are more comfortable with 'questioning' and 're-shaping'. And the same is true for individuals: some feel it is their role or preference to maintain carefully what has been passed down as tradition, and others sense the need or obligation to explore new insights or possibilities in their particular setting. Given that, it does seem that in most periods of Christian history there have been individuals and groups who have raised new questions, related the 'received faith' to new situations, or attempted to respond in faith to new questions or discoveries.

In such a process, faith is understood as dynamic. It is appreciated as a living part of human communities as they move through different experiences and encounter different world-views, and is always appropriately open to new insights and interpretations. Such a view of faith sees that faith as both able to raise questions of the ideas and experiences of the world around it, and prepared to explore its own received interpretations and assumptions. In this way, it may be regarded as a *questioning faith*.

During times of crisis and change for the Christian community, it seems that those aspects of the community that work best with 'questioning faith' come out of the crisis or change with the strongest base. I believe we see this in critical times for the Christian community such as moving out of the original Jewish base with Paul's influence, integration into the Roman Empire in the 4th century, the late middle ages' 're-discovery' of Aristotle's ideas, the upheavals surrounding the Reformation, and a variety of responses to the Enlightenment and the modern world that followed. I am convinced that this remains true today, as the church faces the challenges of late-modernity (or postmodernity). Will we be able to find a questioning faith in this context? Or will we build higher walls to preserve ourselves?

There are things to be preserved, but crisis and change call for creative questioning that re-works what is preserved so it resonates effectively with the new situation. So, for example, at the point where Christianity was being secured as the official religion of the Roman Empire, with all the changes that brought, it was the synthesis produced by Augustine that provided the new base. He structured the ideas of Christian thinking in an ordered way - suitable for the ordered style of the Imperial rule. And he drew on the framework of philosophical concepts in neo-platonism in order to do that. We

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have come to see that theological structure as 'orthodoxy' - and so it was identified - but it nevertheless represented a new way of presenting Christian thinking at the time. It was, of course, in continuity with what had been going on before that, but it was put together in a radical new way that responded to its new context. In doing so, among other things, it cemented in place those Greek philosophical categories which were part of the wider thinking of that time but meant a re-working of the biblical theological ideas.

In the 15th and 16th century setting of radical social and political upheaval in Europe, the Reformers questioned the underlying assumptions and the core practices of the church. Again, we tend to see these now as 'truths to be preserved', forgetting that they were sufficiently radical and challenging in their day for those who explored the new ideas and emphases to be persecuted by the church, tortured and killed in some cases, and eventually pushed out of the church to form new Christian groupings. In that setting, the Reformers' challenge to prevailing theological ideas and the expressions of faith were designed to respond (even if largely unconscious of this) to the shifts in the prevailing thought-patterns and priorities of their day. At that point, these were the views that enabled the Christian community to move on through that period of change with strength.

John Wesley stands in this tradition. We don't readily think of him as a 'faith-questioner' (or a 'questioning-faither') but I want to argue that that's exactly what he was, and that's precisely why he was successful in his day. The changing social conditions of the 18th century are often pointed to as the stimulus for Wesley's determination to find a new way of presenting the gospel, and they were indeed a major influence, which shaped the organisation and emphases and style of the Methodist movement. Alongside that also is the unsettling swirl of changing ideas that we now refer to as the Enlightenment. Here is the growth of greater reliance on both reason and experience, as experimental science begins to take hold. And both of these moves influence Wesley, forcing him to respond to new questions and to ask how faith might be reconsidered so as to be effective in this context.

We might not call Wesley an 'Enlightenment man', but he certainly was a man influenced by the shifting emphases and approaches of the Enlightenment. Though Wesley was concerned to preserve the faith located in scripture, shaped by early church councils, and promulgated by the Church of England, he also was concerned to ensure the latest scholarship and learning was drawn on to enable relevance in the current scene. He wanted the very best biblical scholarship to be available in helping interpret the bible for the day. He drew on the insights of philosophers and scientists, and re-worked their ideas to help re-shape an understanding of faith. Thus Wesley sees an important place for reason alongside both the bible and tradition; and he introduces 'experience' (similar in meaning in his time to 'experiment' - he even spoke of 'experimental religion') as a source for theological insight. However we might evaluate Wesley's key contributions and emphases, I would argue that his determination to express the gospel so it connected with life experience in his day

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required him to pose new questions. It also moved him to interact with scientific methods and discoveries. His written resources for Methodist preachers and society members, for example, included medical and related matters as well as biblical reflections and spiritual or theological material. His was a questioning faith, in this sense.

So it is not surprising that among Wesley's followers have been a number of questioning but faithful people. It might be that the commitment to questioning is as much an ingredient in 'Methodist faith' as is evangelism or social service or biblical commitment. A history of education, of scholarship, of exploring relevant evangelistic communication, and of engaging with social issues in differing contexts, all point towards this open approach. It is an open questioning designed to ensure the core of the faith is preserved in a form that connects with *this* world.

It is as part of that stream of Methodist engagement that the Revs C.H. Garland and J.G. Chapman stand, aspects of whose stories are presented here. That's certainly the basis for *my* determination to pick up on contemporary questions and perspectives and to interrogate received theology in their light. Elsewhere¹, Donald Phillipps quotes Thomas Cook, an English Methodist minister, as saying on a visit that "Methodism in New Zealand is of a very active and advanced type"². Phillipps goes on to suggest that Methodism in New Zealand has always tended towards being 'liberal' and that theological education here has been centred on biblical scholarship and a freedom of interpretation that would echo Garland's emphases. The open questioning approach has been part of what is to be Methodist in this setting.

As I intimate in *A Spiritual Journey* included here, my own research and reflection point to intellectual questioning or exploration as a component in that which we term 'faith'. Faith is not a blind or unquestioning adherence to sets of ideas presented from some other source, but an active engagement with ideas that create meaning, confidence and hope for us. One of our difficulties is that the English words 'believe' and 'faith' have developed somewhat different connotations in usage. Out of the work of the Reformers, added to by rationalist and empiricist influences from the Enlightenment and modernity, 'belief has come to be understood as 'intellectual assent'. It tends to include an element of *certainty*. This helped the early protestants state their personal belief-based case against the certainty of views established by the institutional church. It became important in the emerging scientific age, when empirically established 'facts' provided the bases for certainty, for truth and belief.

I would suggest that this 'certainty of belief then attached itself to faith, in a way that stressed what a person *believed* as a test of their faith. Orthodoxy becomes set in lists

¹ Notes of lectures given at Trinity Methodist Theological College for a University of Auckland BTheol course on "The Methodist Church: Its History, Ethos, and Theology" in 2000 and 2002.

² Thomas Cook, *Days of God's Right Hand*, London 1896, p242.

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of 'items of belief' - Westminster Confession or Thirty-Nine Articles or The Fundamentals of the Faith. Because we do not have a verb or a personal pronoun in English for 'faith', 'belief' filled these places and came to be interpreted as reflecting 'certain intellectual assent'. Thus our talking of 'believing' or the 'believer' takes this form.

That seems to me to be a long way away from the concept of 'faith' as expressed in the biblical material or in earlier approaches to Christian faith. If we were able to speak of 'faithing' or a 'faither', this would help us see the difference (and would translate Paul very well, I believe). If we acknowledge (with the letter to the Hebrews) that Abraham is a model of faith, then we observe that his faith consists in leaving home without any certainty of where he was going. Biblically and theologically, I'm convinced, the concept of faith is roughly the opposite of certainty. It does involve being 'convinced', but in hope rather than in certainty. If that's the case (and I'm convinced it is!), then the counterpoints to certainty are *doubt* and *faith*. Thus these two stand together in the face of any claims to certain knowledge. Questioning is a positive form of doubt, so that 'questioning faith' might properly be what faith is always about!

Whether that can be agreed or not, it is the case that there have consistently been faithful people who have raised questions about faith in the light of their world and its insights and perspectives. This is, naturally, a risky business, both for the person concerned and in the difficulty of enunciating new ideas that will prove helpful and relevant for the Church. Unfortunately, the Church seems rather keen to avoid the risks by avoiding hard intellectual work or difficult questioning, and so making life difficult for those who do engage in this faithful enterprise. Though our contemporary 'postmodern' environment raises new issues about the role of reasoned argument, I am convinced that critical thinking and focused questioning remain crucial elements in effective Christian leadership.

This edition of the *Proceedings* picks up some examples of questioning in the Methodist Church, noting that such questioning tends to come with a price. Others, whose primary faith concern is to preserve, raise their own questions in reply, so that disagreement and debate become an inevitable (and healthy) part of the process. 'Heresy' is a ready response used by some, aiming to negate the new questions by calling on an old tool of control and protection used in the Christian community. A 'heretic', of course, is simply someone who disagrees with the prevailing belief-system - so Christians were regarded as heretics in the Greco-Roman environment because they refused to acknowledge the gods and the prevailing religious beliefs of the surrounding culture.

The three pieces which constitute these *Proceedings* identify some persons in the New Zealand Methodist Church who have held a questioning faith. Their stories show something of the conflict, and perhaps confusion, evoked by this. However, they also show that the Church in its formal life recognises and accepts the place of that questioning and of the debate that might follow. These are not seen as negating

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Methodism's core insights and commitments, nor as undermining the faith we share and proclaim as Christians. Similarly to the case of J.G. Chapman, the President was asked in 1993 to rule on the limits of Biblical interpretation and theological exploration by those involved in teaching others in the Methodist Church. That ruling is instructive, in outlining that ongoing interpretation and the use of the latest scholarly insights and tools do not contravene Wesleyan 'doctrines' or Methodist Church laws³. The important thing for the Church is that open dialogue and constructive discussion between differing points of view can take place, recognising that difference is inherent in a dynamic living body.

We are grateful to David Bell and to Donald Phillipps for their research, and for presenting us with insights into debates which have helped shape New Zealand Methodism in the past. The case of C.H. Garland is of particular interest to me. After all, he survived this encounter, and went on to become the Principal of the NZ Wesleyan Theological College. He was also my great-great-uncle! So I was very glad to be invited to contribute this *Introduction* and to act as guest editor of the Wesley Historical Society *Proceedings No. 78*, 2003.

³ See *Minutes of Conference 1993* and Keith Rowe, "John Wesley's Standard Sermons & His Explanatory Notes on the New Testament and their role in the Methodist Church in our day", a 14-page pamphlet published to provide a background to the ruling.

GARLAND'S GHOSTS

Tackling Hard Issues About the Intellectual Contribution to Methodism in New Zealand by the Rev. Charles Hughlings Garland (1856-1918)

David Bell

Introduction

We begin by asking some basic questions. What were the key intellectual concerns in New Zealand Methodist churches as the late-19th century turned into the early-20th century? What theological issues did church leaders think about, talk about, preach about? How did congregations react to new theological ideas? Was there much interchange of theological opinion among clerics and lay leaders? Did the hard theological issues ever really get discussed by ordinary church members in their homes around the Sunday roast?

The answers suggested in this paper may cause some surprise, even a little embarrassment, and will certainly crush a few of the assumptions upon which much Methodism has been based in recent decades. That, of course, is no bad thing.

To begin with, we set down the drivers of intellectual life and thought for the clergy. Above all else, many leaders held deep concerns about what the Bible really was. That is not so obvious amid the noisy clamour of anti-drink campaigners, advocates of universal suffrage, fiery workers-rights and anti-sweated labour stalwarts, and the host of other church voices raised over social concerns. At the time when the Church seemed triumphant, when missionary and evangelistic fervour was at its peak, when Methodist numbers were at unheralded proportions in our country's history, the deepest doubts were in fact rising in the hearts and minds of prominent clergy. The foundations of Biblical truth had been under huge and sustained attack since the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, in 1858. The curtain of the temple of Biblical inerrancy had been torn in two. The opponents of Christianity had the upper hand. One book deserves particular mention. Andrew Dickson White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*⁴ 1896 was most successful. It provided a dogmatic base for the freethinkers and emergent secularists. Although this popular work was riddled with historical inaccuracies and poor analysis nevertheless it continued in publication for decades.

So exactly what was the Bible for New Zealand Methodist leaders at this time? One book among many, or the book of books? Sacred scripture, verbally inspired by God, inerrant and containing all things necessary for salvation? Or human record, full of

⁴ Andrew Dickson White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, London, Macmillan, 1896

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myths and legends and old gods that now could be safely assigned as remnants of a less scientifically advanced era, the embellished tales of a primitive people? Now, in 1900, no less a figure than the Rev. Dr William Morley could say exactly that of Maori origins: "In the story of their migrations, fact and fiction, history and mythology, are strangely blended."⁵ Yet these are exactly the terms of reference of Biblical criticism in its Victorian form. I suspect Morley knew only too well that he was applying to Maori mythology precisely the lessons of the "Higher Criticism", that is, literary and historical theories on the origin and development of the Bible. It was an elegant comment by which to open important themes about Methodist history in colonial New Zealand. Certainly it was not a comment which fell upon stony ground, for few books in Methodist circles have been as widely read as Morley's great 1900 centennial history.

Was it an isolated comment? I believe not. The ground had been well-prepared in Methodism by a series of notable clergy figures, including the Rev. A. R. Fitchett of the Wesleyan Connexion and the Rev. Daniel Dutton of the Primitive Methodists. These two were outstanding intellectuals in the service of the two major Methodist causes in New Zealand, both of whom left in order to find happier, more congenial ministries in other denominations. Fitchett went to the Anglicans, Dutton to the Presbyterians. Both had endured an anti-intellectual bias that could rise to the surface in these two branches of the New Zealand Methodist family.



Rev. A. R. Fitchett (in 1871) - Morley

⁵ William Morley, *The History of Methodism in New Zealand*, Wellington, McKee, 1900, p. 17.

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It was Charles Hughlings Garland who threw down the gauntlet, challenging that anti-intellectualism. He made a very great impact upon the Wesleyan Conference articulating themes of Higher Criticism, along with Adam and Eve and evolution. Curiously, Garland was not of the same theological calibre as Fitchett or Dutton, and this was to cause subsequent problems by creating an atmosphere where, under the guise of scholarship, a certain rigidity of thought was all too evident. It all happened when he gave the Wesleyan Conference lecture in Dunedin, 1893.



Rev. Daniel Dutton -Haigh

1893 Conference Lecture

Garland lacked a formal university education, but his friends knew him to be a gifted preacher and 'original thinker'.⁶ Garland, in fact, was a man of great importance in the life of the Methodist Church and the significance of his contribution ought not to be overlooked. He was not a scientist, but his broad range of interests in the intellectual climate of his times meant he had sympathy for scientific thinking and its consequences upon social life.⁷ Born in London in 1856, his parents were very active in the Wesleyan Seaman's Mission and encouraged him in various aspects of Church life.⁸ This included such diverse duties as playing the organ at services, conducting cottage meetings and becoming a local preacher at the age of sixteen, although his

⁶ Memorial, *Minutes of Conference, Methodist Church of New Zealand, 1919*, pp. 15-6.

⁷ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol.IX, No. 24, p.381, 29 March 1919.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.232. Cf. E.W. Hames, *100 Years In Pitt Street, Centenary History Of The Pitt Street Methodist Church, Auckland*, Auckland, Pitt Street Methodist Church Trustees, undated, C.I 965, p.36.

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close friend C.H. Laws noted that Garland's initial attempts were not indicative of the "pulpit gifts" which were to follow.⁹ Garland was a school teacher until the age of twenty when he entered Headingly and Handsworth Colleges for theological training.¹⁰ His upbringing in a background of Wesleyan piety, energy, and vision well suited him to life as a minister, and he had little difficulty relating to many different types of people.¹¹



Rev. Charles Hughlings GARLAND - *Williams*

Response to Tragedy

In 1881 the British Conference received an urgent request for three trained students in order to overcome the shortage caused by the untimely deaths of the Revs. J.B. Richardson and J. Armitage, who were drowned when the ship *Tararua* sank off Waipapa Point, on 29th April.¹² They were returning from the General Conference of Australasia, and their loss had a severe impact on New Zealand Methodism. Richardson, President of the New Zealand annual Conference, was a very able minister, not only in terms of raising congregations, and housing them in suitable

⁹ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 29 March 1919, p.232.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 29 March 1919, p.233.

¹¹ See obituaries by C.H. Laws and J.T. Pinfold, *ibid.*, Vol.IX, no. 15, 23 November 1918, pp.232-3.

¹² W. Williams, *Centenary Sketches*, Christchurch, 1922, p. 172.

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church buildings, but also because of his concern for theological education.¹³ Armitage was also a gifted minister. In 1870 he had started the undenominational newspaper *The Christian Observer* which a year later was transformed into *The New Zealand Wesleyan*, no longer under Armitage's guidance but controlled by a Church committee based in Christchurch.¹⁴ Armitage was subsequently appointed to the editorship after Fitchett resigned from the Methodist Church.¹⁵ The British Conference responded to the Tararua tragedy by sending the Revs. C.H. Garland, McKenzie Gibson, and T.N. Griffin, but it was Garland who was to display the greatest talent and aptitude for the ministry.¹⁶

Misdirected and Misunderstood Theological Talents

Whereas Fitchett and Dutton had eventually balked at the sheer grind of the itinerancy of Methodist ministry. Garland accepted the discipline, and served at various times in Christchurch, Auckland, Cambridge, Wanganui, New Plymouth, Nelson, and finally in Auckland as the Principal of Dunholme, the Methodist Theological College.¹⁷ He held a wide variety of District and Conference administrative and secretarial responsibilities, and was President of the Conference in 1909.¹⁸

However, it was his delivery of the Wesleyan Conference Lecture, in March Conference 1893 was held at Trinity Church, Dunedin - Morley 1893, at Dunedin, that brought recognition of his theological talents. Garland had theological acumen. He could discern the weakness of any and all dogma built upon the notion of inerrant Scriptures. But he had little idea of the subtlety of thought involved in the Darwinian debates over evolution, let alone the constraints that scientism imposed on the flight of the imagination. With the advantage of hindsight we can see clearly that evolution itself is a strange blend of "fact and fiction, history and mythology", to borrow Morley's telling phrase. And that is exactly the case with Biblical criticism too. Garland's gifts were extensive. However, his breadth of outlook was not sufficiently wide to see finally that all truth is ultimately imaginative not analytic, lived rather than thought, partial and convergent rather than merely partial. Garland was not a scientist, although some of his colleagues and 'fathers' in ministry were, and they were particularly gifted in their domains. The subsequent paths of Methodist theology

¹³ E.W. Hames, *Out Of The Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era, 1840-1913*, Wesley Historical Society of N.Z. Proceedings, Vol.27, Nos 3 and 4, 1972, p.49.

¹⁴ W. Williams, *Centenary Sketches*, pp. 173-4.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁶ See the obituaries by C.H. Laws, J.T. Pinfold, and H.E.B., *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol. IX, no.15, 23 November 1918, p.232; and an appreciation, 'Memories of C.H. Garland', by S.E. Hulbert, *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol. IX, no. 17, 21 December 1918, p.267.

¹⁷ J.T. Pinfold, 'Conference List of Ministers', *Minutes Of Conference, 1913*, pp. 12-3.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.12-3.

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might well have been different had there been better science in the heady, intoxicating brew that Garland offered the 1893 Conference.

Getting Higher Criticism into Ordinary Homes

The lecture was entitled "The Bearing of Higher Criticism On Leading Evangelical Doctrines" and subsequently was published in full.¹⁹ Garland's introduction to the lecture has an interesting anecdote about the widespread growth of rationalism and Higher Criticism.²⁰ Garland had asked a Sunday School boy how the Old Testament accounts of David's slaying Goliath could be reconciled in the following instance. At 1 Samuel 17:31-40 it is clear that Saul knew who David was, while in the same chapter at verses 55-58 it is clear that Saul does not know who David was. According to Garland the Sunday School boy replied "the documents of which the story was compiled had got mixed".²¹ Moreover, the boy "directed me to the 'Cambridge Bible for our Schools and Colleges'".

The particular point Garland stressed was that Biblical criticism was not a phenomenon which could be ignored, and had already taken root not just among the clergy. "It has entered our homes".²² That is, in my opinion, the single-most significant sentence in the lecture. One may fairly conclude that after morning worship, when families returned to their homes, not only was the Sunday joint dismembered for eating pleasure, but sermons were as well. The world of intellect was alive, at least in some Methodist homes.

Undermining Inerrant Scripture with Inerrant Scripture

But it was not merely Higher Criticism which occupied Garland's thinking. Rather, he identified three strands woven together to form a single cord, but "in a threefold cord it is not easy to gauge the exact value of a single strand".²³ The strands were "the advanced physical sciences, modern philosophy, and Higher Criticism".²⁴ Garland was well aware of the cumulative effects of all three together, and perceptively remarked on the vast educational and theological changes that had occurred during his lifetime. He had been taught to read the Pentateuch as if it had been "dictated verbatim to Moses by God or by an angel".²⁵ But that applied to most, if not all, the people at the Conference, so that no one in the recent past would have accepted "any geological

¹⁹ C.H. Garland, *The Bearing Of Higher Criticism On Leading Evangelical Doctrines*, 1893, Dunedin.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.2.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.2.

²² *ibid.*, p.2.

²³ *ibid.*, p.3.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.3.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.5.

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truth" if it could not fit into the scheme of Genesis.²⁶ Garland maintained that the real change wrought by Higher Criticism showed that Genesis was neither history nor science, but a magnificent epic.²⁷

On the question of inerrancy and the nature of Biblical authority Garland was particularly lucid. His selection of Biblical texts to illustrate the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of strict literalism is of particular interest. Besides various Pentateuchal references, Garland alluded to the Methodist preoccupation with the evils of drink. In a reference to Methodism's most ardent temperance clergyman, Garland judged that on no account would the Connexion's doughty temperance campaigner the Rev. L.M. Isitt be prepared "to endorse" certain Old Testament verses, which encouraged the liberal use of strong drink.²⁸



Rev. L M. Isitt - Morley

Similarly, later on in the lecture Garland referred to the practice of the Methodist Church appointing women to speak and preach in Church, as recorded on Circuit preaching plans.²⁹ This plainly contradicted the authority of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians on the matter of women keeping silent in Church. Garland peppered his lecture with other examples showing the difficulties of holding to a strictly orthodox doctrine of Biblical inspiration. He finally arrived at the conclusion that the authority of the Bible rested not on its literal contents, but upon the gospel within the Gospel, a

²⁶ **ibid., p.5.**

²⁷ **ibid., p.5.**

²⁸ **ibid., p.8.**

²⁹ **ibid., p. 13.**

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concept articulated by Martin Luther.³⁰ Garland argued that the Bible is not the Word of God, but contains the Word of God.³¹

Darwinism as faith's 'friend'

Direct references to the scientific and philosophical strands are few, but nevertheless exert a strong influence on Garland's thinking. He quoted Sir John Herschel on Darwinism in particular, which had appeared as an implacable foe of the Christian faith in its early stages, but now with the advantage of hindsight could be seen more truly as a friend.³² Garland went on to argue that Darwinism had forced a theological sharpening of the understanding of God's immanence, having noted that it was false to believe "that God can be an occasional visitor".³³ Now, again in hindsight, it is easy to see that Darwinism (that is, a philosophy of materialistic evolution based upon Darwin's theories of biological evolution) was not a friend to faith, but quite inimical to it. Those clergy and laity caught up in the Darwinian debates were not necessarily sufficiently steeped in theology or philosophy or science to give sober assessments.

So, how was this material received by the Dunedin Conference? Had they found the approach acceptable or not? Certainly the concepts of Biblical analysis were by no means new to the clergy, and Garland carefully underscored that point.³⁴ He drew attention to the earlier work on Higher Criticism done by the Rev. W. C. Oliver at the 1885 Conference lecture, also held in Dunedin.³⁵ Oliver had attacked the theory of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Moreover, Fitchett's able defence of the Higher Criticism in the *New Zealand Wesleyan* two decades before meant the subject had been well aired over a lengthy period.³⁶ So when Garland suggested that the majority of the laity would have "scarcely read a line on Higher Criticism" he probably meant that the issues were not as widely discussed as clergy might have wanted, and that insufficient laity had advanced or developed theological thinking.³⁷ Perhaps the initial decades of Methodism in the colony were the most intellectual of all, and conservative pressures had built up in reaction to that. Perhaps, too, the influx of new immigrants

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 13.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 13.

³² *ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.3.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁶ See A.R. Fitchett's article on 'Spirit Deliverance', *New Zealand Wesleyan*, May 1873, which critically assesses the adequacy of theories of verbal inspiration.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.3. Perhaps it is from this suggestion that Allan K. Davidson & Peter J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity; Documents Illustrating Aspects Of New Zealand Church History*, 2nd edn, Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 1989, p.211, have highlighted the 1893 Conference with the words, 'C.H. Garland introduces Methodists to Higher Criticism'.

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was disturbing the emergent patterns of theology, developed from the time of the Rev. Samuel Leigh, the first Wesleyan missionary, in 1822.³⁸



Rev. W. C. Oliver - Morley

So, despite previous exposure to the methods and content of Higher Criticism, Garland was sensitive to the laity who wanted to know whether it was "friendly or hostile to the precious old Book".³⁹ Most of the New Zealand Methodists were immigrants from Great Britain, and it has been noted that among the religious public "the Wesleyan Methodists were the most anti-Darwinian of the Free Churchmen, equalled only by the Anglican evangelicals".⁴⁰ This may explain Garland's insistence to the Conference that although prominent English Methodists had until as recently as just two years before, in 1891, held to a doctrine of verbal inspiration, it had since been "solemnly abandoned".⁴¹ Clergy and laity attended Conference in approximately equal numbers from the 1870s onwards, so the point, we may reasonably conclude, was primarily addressed to laity, the clergy being well-acquainted with the methodology of Higher Criticism.

³⁸ In fact, Leigh arrived first in 1818, from New South Wales, but this was a brief visit. He returned in 1822 to start the Wesleydale Mission near Kaeo, in the far north.

³⁹ C. H. Garland, *The Bearing of Higher Criticism*, p.3.

⁴⁰ John Kent, *From Darwinism to Blatchford: The Role of Darwinism in Christian Apologetic, 1875-1910*, 1966, London.

⁴¹ C.H. Garland, *The Bearing of Higher Criticism*, p. 10.
Wesley Historical Society (NZ) Publication #78

Implacable enemies

Some members of the Conference reacted favourably to Garland's lecture, but not all were impressed by any means. It was the kind of speech that was bound to evoke extreme reactions both in and beyond the Church. A subsequent cartoon in the *Auckland Observer*, depicted Garland as a heretic burning at the stake.⁴²

W. Shepherd Allen, a highly influential layman from the Morrinsville Circuit, was moved to publish a polemical reply of considerable magnitude.⁴³



W. Shepherd Allen - *Cyclopedia of NZ*

Allen had emigrated to New Zealand with both money and influence, having been a member of the British House of Commons for twenty years.⁴⁴ But although a Liberal and generous benefactor to the Methodists both in England and New Zealand, he held to a very conservative theological position.⁴⁵ According to Allen, few of Garland's colleagues in the ministry shared the views expressed at the Conference, and among

⁴² Cited by E. W. Hames, *100 Years In Pitt St*, p.38.

⁴³ William Shepherd Allen, *A Reply To The Lecture Delivered By The Rev. C.H. Garland On "The Bearing Of Higher Criticism On Leading Evangelical Doctrines"*, Auckland, Wilson & Hoi-ton, 1893.

⁴⁴ W. Williams, *Centenary Sketches*, p. 191.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 193.

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the laity such ideas were generally "condemned".⁴⁶ The great majority of Allen's attack was concerned with issues of Higher Criticism, namely:

- (a) the authorship of the Pentateuch;
- (b) the authorship of Isaiah;
- (c) the new doctrine about the limitations of Christ's own knowledge;
- (d) the assertion that the Bible contained rather than was the Word of God, thereby displacing it from its position of supreme authority.

In this last matter, (d) above, Allen could fairly claim that the Bible was, in John Wesley's view, the supreme authority in matters of faith. But it was a misunderstanding of Wesley's theology to defend the idea that the Bible was the Word of God rather than simply containing it.

Evolution attacked

However, Allen's attack on evolution was more limited. He correctly claimed that there were widely differing views on evolution. In fact, there was far more variation than is commonly realized today. For example, Darwinism was virtually unknown in France at that time, with the evolutionary theory of Lamarck holding sway there. Allen again correctly stated that some push the evolutionary theory to "an absurd extent". T.H. Huxley, Darwin's 'bulldog', could have been in his mind. Certainly Garland was numbered among these people, which accounted for "many things in his lecture".⁴⁷ In Allen's final summing up he noted that had such a lecture been delivered in the context of the British Methodist Conference, it would have resulted in "a storm of protest".⁴⁸ Allen was absolutely clear in his denunciation of the Higher Criticism, articulated against the equally clear proposition of Garland, namely, "Higher Criticism, physical science, modern philosophy, are certainly our allies".⁴⁹

Allen was by no means the typical Methodist layman in late-Victorian New Zealand Methodism, and nor was his reaction necessarily typical. The question must be raised, however, what impact did Garland's speech have on the wider Church beyond the confines of the Conference? Wesleyan local preachers in Auckland had indeed discussed the topic of Higher Criticism's methods long before Garland's speech.⁵⁰ In 1885, the Rev. T.G. Carr had delivered a lecture on hermeneutics to Auckland's Wesleyan lay preachers. He had quoted "Ellicet" (sic, presumably the British scholar C.J. Ellicott?) who had constructed a methodology which brought systematic Biblical

⁴⁶ W.S. Allen, *A Reply*, p.5.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.40.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.44.

⁴⁹ C.H. Garland, *The Bearing Of Higher Criticism*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ **Local Preachers' Association Minute Books 1884-87, Friday 3 October 1884.**
Wesley Historical Society (NZ) Publication #78

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study to all serious students of the scriptures, including the desire to study grammatical construction and meaning, as well as the need to pay close attention to the context of the texts.⁵¹



Rev. T. G. Carr - Morley

But discussion also ranged over the scientific problems of Darwinism. In 1886 the lay preachers were introduced to Drummond's *Natural Law In The Spiritual World*, which, in the opinion of Mr Jessop was a "total failure", a judgement which again caused serious discussion.⁵² His opinion was hardly shared by all of his colleagues, some of whom regarded his conclusions as beyond the pale.

Auckland presbyters debate science

In 1898 the Wesleyan ministers in Auckland debated various competing theories with much vigour.⁵³ The Rev. J. G. Chapman presented a paper "Evil and Evolution", to five of his ministerial colleagues, which drew the ire of the Rev. J.H. Simmonds in a severe critique.⁵⁴ When the subject was opened for general discussion it generated considerable interest. Science had rapidly become the new centre within the locus of intellectual belief. Just as science had gained a rightful foothold in the universities, it could not be denied a place in the discussions of a well educated ministry. The universities began to grant science degrees by 1884.⁵⁵

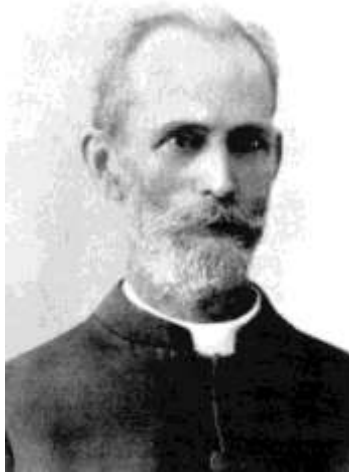
⁵¹ **Ibid., 3 October 1884-87.**

⁵² **Local Preachers' Association, Minute Book, 1884-87.**

⁵³ **Wesleyan Ministers' Association, Minutes Book, 1898.**

⁵⁴ **ibid., 12 September 1891.**

⁵⁵ **This was in line with Oxford and Cambridge finally recognizing the status of the sciences as disciplines in their own right.**



Rev. J. H. Simmonds - Williams

However, in some quarters the humanities and the sciences were still not considered to be separate disciplines. This demarcation was brilliantly explored and exploited by the biologist F.W. Hutton. "[T]heologians had to recognise Darwinism as 'one of the foundations - perhaps the corner stone of Natural Religion'".⁵⁶ These words, taken from Hutton's important lecture, "Biology in An Arts Curriculum", delivered to the 1882 opening session of Canterbury College, illustrates his deep concern over the general reluctance of the Church and the wider public to acknowledge the increasing importance of science. This movement within the universities was bound to be popularized in the Church sooner or later. It is part of Garland's great contribution that he seized the opportunity that came to him.

Garland's later ministry

Nineteen years after his vigorous and largely popular Dunedin speech, when Garland was appointed Principal of the Methodist theological training institution, he deeply impressed his students with his "fertile, discerning, discriminating" mind, which often found a theological lesson from the "Word in Nature", according to C.H. Laws.⁵⁷ It was not a view shared by all. His old opponent, Shepherd Allen, had returned to England. Allen's opinion of the doctrines espoused by Garland were attacked with renewed polemical vigour.

⁵⁶ F.W. Hutton, *Darwinism And Lamarckism, Old And New*, pp. 109-28. The lecture is published in this volume as 'Darwinism and Human Affairs', but is essentially a reprint of the earlier essay. The preface to *Darwinism And Lamarckism* is another significant illustration of Hutton's belief that science illuminated the humanities, (p.vii)

⁵⁷ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol. IX, no. 15, November 1918, pp. 232-3.

Methodists and a Questioning Faith

His 1911 pamphlet *The Present Position Of Wesleyan Methodism And The Causes Of Its Decrease In Numbers* ran to two editions and ten thousand copies.⁵⁸

Allen believed that Higher Criticism was full of baseless assumptions,⁵⁹ caused "incalculable" harm,⁶⁰ and was work achieved only "by leading an unnatural life".⁶¹

However, the dispute in New Zealand had by now run its course, and Garland's ecclesiastical position was very different from the time of the provocative Dunedin Conference speech. Laws had been asked to take up the position of Principal in 1912, but instead he had nominated Garland.⁶² During the war years the theological college was depleted, as indeed was the supply of ministers for the general work.⁶³ By 1916 there were no students left in the college. All had either enlisted for war service or been appointed to fill vacancies in the Circuits.⁶⁴ Garland accepted the position of minister at Mt. Eden Methodist Church, in addition to numerous other administrative duties.



Rev. C. H. Laws -Morley

⁵⁸ W. Shepherd Allen, *The Present Position Of Methodism And The Causes Of Its Decrease In Numbers*, Manchester, J. Brooke & Co., London, R.S. James, 1911.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.33.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.36.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁶² Wesley Parker, *Rev. C.H. Laws, B.A., D.D., Memoir And Addresses*, Wellington, A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1954, p.68.

⁶³ E.W. Hames, *Out Of The Common Way*, p. 130.

⁶⁴ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol. IX, no. 15, November 1918, pp.232-3
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After Garland died in 1918, there was a temporary appointment for the position of Principal, and then Laws was appointed.⁶⁵ Garland's achievements in ministry were manifold, and he was greatly admired during his principalship. Although Laws stated at Garland's funeral service that his friend had not sought academic distinction, his ministry, nevertheless, "was modest", embracing new learning and new directions.⁶⁶ Science was undoubtedly a major corrective force for theological error in Garland's philosophy. This would have had some influence on his pupils, many of whom regarded him as the "perfect principal", according to Hames.⁶⁷

Garland's Ghosts

Evolution continued to be vigorously debated in Christian circles, but not very much in the Methodist Church. Why was this? Garland's acceptance of Darwinism undoubtedly played a major role in this apparently easy accommodation in the Methodist Church between the Biblical faith and evolutionary science. The students for the ministry would have taken their cue from him, and accommodated the shift from Bible to science.

Garland had, perhaps, a rather exaggerated faith in science as the paramount form of knowledge, along with naive assumptions about the nature of the Biblical mythos. The intellectual doubts he raised were perfectly valid, but the conclusions he reached were surprisingly limited. The 1893 address shows no evidence that he took into account any of the numerous scientists who did not accept Darwinian evolution, nor the even more numerous and very well-educated clergy who regarded the methods and conclusions of Higher Criticism as often suspect and occasionally inimical to faith.

In this respect, he did set a pattern that has been repeated by clergy in positions of authority and leadership in their pronouncements on the concerns of evangelicals, fundamentalists and traditional thinkers in the Methodist Church. The pattern was not only to neglect to do the necessary depth of analysis on the liberal side, but also to give due weight to other theological opinions. Leaders subsequent to Garland have tended to assume, rather simplistically, that the latest currents of thought must be better, usually at the expense of older Christian traditions. For a full example of how the Higher Criticism worked itself out in the contemporary evangelical terms of Garland's time, see Farrar's *Life of Christ*.⁶⁸ This kind of work had the capacity to hold together a broad Church understanding. Garland's lecture did not. It ultimately set in motion the repetition of the pattern of intellectual neglect. This in turn had the effect

⁶⁵ W. Parker, *Rev. C.H. Laws*, p.68.

⁶⁶ Reprint of C.H. Laws' address at Garland's funeral, *New Zealand Methodist Times*, Vol. IX, no. 15, 23 November, 1918, p.232.

⁶⁷ E.W. Hames, *Out Of The Common Way*, p. 130.

⁶⁸ F.W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, London, Petter and Galpin, 1874. Farrar's views on rabbinical Judaism are rather instructive to those grappling with the issues of anti-Semitism today.

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of marginalization of that loose grouping of the theologically conservative and hence caused a diminution of its status.

Garland's legacy is a gaggle of intellectual ghosts that continue to haunt the conservative schools of thought within the Methodist Church. Rarely have such clergy or laity had either the necessary expertise, or the theological sophistication, to articulate what is limiting in methods of Biblical criticism. Even fewer could reason their way through the extreme weaknesses inherent in a strict adherence to neo-Darwinism and other forms of scientific materialism, which have run rampant since 1900. Certainly what was left among Methodism's more theologically conservative clergy was basically a dispirited, disenfranchised and scientifically illiterate rump.

The long and the short of it is that Garland's ghosts impelled us to take unproductive paths. At the time, Garland overlooked the problem of mind, which is now the preeminent problem in philosophy, science and theology, all the fields of enquiry he wanted to embrace. But, most significantly, it was the preeminent problem in Garland's time also. That he overlooked it, or ignored it, truly makes the 1893 Conference Lecture a turning point in New Zealand Methodist thought. Fields of intellectual enquiry which leave out the phenomenon of consciousness end up in dead ends, are non-sequiturs. Punch and F. W. Frankland's brilliant articles⁶⁹ in the New Zealand Institute, which Garland conceivably might have heard about through ecclesiastical colleagues highlighted the issue with great clarity. As Punch said,

What is matter? Never mind!

*What is mind? No matter!*⁷⁰

Conclusions

So, in summary, Garland's enthusiastic embrace of Darwinism was a mistake, albeit well-intentioned. Moreover, he lacked the theological sophistication to live in the poetry of Biblical mythology, and preferred instead to take direction from historico-literary critical schools. Regrettably, he simply did not see the need to take into account the phenomenon of mind as the primary fact of life. His speech fired the popular imagination on both sides of the fence, as evidenced by the cartoon and Allen's polemical attacks. Yet, in the long run, it provided no succour to either side. The evangelicals had to look elsewhere to find a more integrated approach, using both the traditions and the new Biblical criticism.

Garland helped to set a pattern, albeit unwittingly, of not conjuring with the whole range of theological possibilities. It was easiest to assume that Darwin was right, as were the protagonists of Higher Criticism. That was what his successors did not notice

⁶⁹ F.W. Frankland, 'On the Doctrine of Mind-Stuff, *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, Vol.12; 'Non-Euclidean Geometry Vindicated', Vol.16.

⁷⁰ Cited by C.W. Richmond in the footnote, *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, Vol. 2, p.280.

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about Garland's theology, and precisely what they too assumed. Thus, the theological rigour necessary to sustain a broad intellectual Church life was lost over a couple of generations.

I have implied that in those times most liberal thinkers like Garland did not truly understand both the strengths and the weaknesses of evolution. They certainly did not grasp the difference between good science and bad science. That is a crucial point. The Church is not a company of scientists exclusively, but it is a very skewed company indeed if does not have some scientists and mathematicians as fellow travellers on the road of pilgrimage. A gaggle of scientists might have been better able to exorcise Garland's ghosts. At least, good scientists would not have allowed the Wesleyan emphasis on spiritual experience to wither slowly away, only to be replaced sometimes by social concerns of the day, sometimes by no constructive thought at all. But we lacked a gaggle of scientist-clerics. Consequently we do have to live with Garland's ghosts.

Having said all that, I do believe that Garland could more than rise to the occasion in terms of demonstrating an open mind, a questing heart, and a sincere desire to lay to rest the ghosts and the demons of any era, in order to let the Gospel shed its light. That was a great achievement, one of the greatest in Methodist intellectual history, and it cannot be wrested from him. Nor should it. It need not be wrested from fine minds and hearts today. He was quite magnificent in bringing these great concerns to the attention of the Church. However, the prior loss of many outstanding thinkers, such as Fitchett and Dutton, meant Garland's courage and honesty was not matched by theology at depth in the rest of the Church. The 1893 speech marked a symbolic turning point, and increasing intellectual irrelevance has been a feature of Methodism since then.



Conference 1893 was held at Trinity Church, Dunedin. - Morley

AN OUTSPOKEN PARSON

Cartoon and article from the *NZ Observer and Freelance*, 12 August 1893



It was hardly to be expected that the lecture delivered by the Rev C. H. Garland on "The Bearing of Higher Criticism on Leading Evangelical Doctrines" at the Wesleyan Conference, Dunedin, in March last, would be allowed to go unchallenged, or that the views and assertions therein expressed would meet with universal acceptance. We English folks, as I have remarked on many previous occasions, are terribly conservative as a people. We are slow to adopt new ideas, even in the matter of dress or social usage. We are slower still to accept the teachings of science, we are slowest

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of all to change our views on matters religious. The particular faith our fathers held is, in the great majority of cases, the faith we hold. We may tolerate, indeed, the religious opinions professed by others, but are nevertheless too often filled with a sort of contemptuous pity for the people who do not believe exactly what we believe, think precisely as we think.

But while the older people cling fast to the faith in which they were brought up the fact is indisputable that an enormous amount of scepticism in spiritual matters obtains among the men of the present day, while it is no less certain that a very large proportion of these sceptics are 'honest doubters' who would gladly believe if they could only see their way to do so. The intelligent sceptic will read with great interest and ought to profit by the Rev Mr Garland's now famous conference lecture.

For Mr Garland deserves not the censure meted out to him by the Rev Shepherd Allen whose "Reply" to the Conference lecture is strictly speaking, no reply at all, but the thanks of all who are not hopelessly biased and bigoted.

That a minister of the Gospel - a dissenting minister moreover - should have had the courage of his opinions, and thus plainly and forcibly given expression to his views, I regard as a very significant sign of the times. Mr Allen sneers at the labours of the 'higher critics' in connection with the Bible. But if those labours result in the clearing away of serious obstacles in the path of the would-be believer, if they serve as a lamp to guide the feet of the sceptic eager and anxious to believe but unable to do so because the dogmatic dictum 'accept all you are told to accept with question or hesitation', frightens him away, who shall dare to call them labours in vain?

I am well aware that Mr Allen, and those who share his narrow views, will tell me that Mr Garland's address is calculated not to bring conversion to the sceptic but to confirm him in his scepticism. That is certainly not the opinion of the more liberal and enlightened Wesleyans, clerics or laymen. The growth of public opinions on these matters may be slow but it is sure, and it is perfectly safe to predict that a hundred years hence Mr Garland's views will be held by thousands, where now they are held by scores.

But, it may be asked by those who have not yet read this remarkable address: What are these views which have so dreadfully shocked Mr Allen? Unfortunately the limited space at my disposal prevents me from answering the question, save in the briefest fashion. An epitome of the address may be found in a quotation used by Mr Garland from the writings of H.P. Hughes. In discussing the alleged infallibility of the Bible, Mr Hughes says: "Do we (the higher critics) discover errors in God's revelation?" Higher Criticism presumes to make no such absurd claim. It says: 'If God had given us a book containing only a divine revelation, we could regard it accordingly. But here is a library (the Bible) of sacred literature containing history as well as revelation - men's thoughts of God as well as God's words to men - and our love of God's Word demands us to reject what is clearly not that Word.'

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Because Mr Garland and those who believe as he believes would sift the false from the true, the chaff from the wheat, they have incurred the wrath of the Allenites, who are not merely prepared to swallow everything they are asked to swallow, but are 'pained' and indignant and shocked and scandalized because other people, just as conscientious probably, just as anxious that the truth shall prevail, and certainly more reasonable in their demands, will not swallow them too! Well may Mr Garland, writing to an Auckland friend under date July 1st, say: 'Truly the spirit of the persecutor is not quite dead, and I really believe there are Methodists who would with pleasure vote for a bonfire round the Conference lecturer of 1893.'

THE NEW ZEALAND METHODIST.

No. 12.—NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 1893.

Price One Penny.

line of sympathy with such a well-meant endeavour.

A STIRRING DELIVERANCE.

The Conference Lecture this year created more stir than any production of the kind has done for many years. We had not the privilege of hearing it; we have not yet read it with sufficient care to justify any criticism, even if we were inclined for such a task. It was published *verbatim* in the *Star*, and has since been published in the form of a pamphlet. It has been highly praised by some; it has been severely condemned by others; both causes will contribute to the wide circulation of the lecture in its published form. It deals with a topic of burning interest in the theological world, and both those who praise and those who blame join in predicting that the lecturer, the Rev C. H. Garland, by his bold outspokenness and undoubted ability, is a man who will be heard of again. For next year another lively topic is announced in the shape of the Second Coming of Christ, and all who know the lecturer-elect, the Rev J. S. Smalley, F.R.G.S., will be satisfied that there will be no lack of vigour and effectiveness in its treatment.

A WELL-MERITED TRIBUTE.

It was altogether becoming that the prospective departure to South Australia of the Rev.

THE 1912 HERESY HUNT

Donald Phillipps

In July 1912 a Wellington Methodist layman, Walter Clement Burd, charged the Rev. J.G. Chapman, minister of Wesley Church, Taranaki Street, with false preaching and teaching.



Rev. James Gates Chapman - *Morley*

Mr Burd was a member of that congregation and described himself as a Lay Preacher and Lay Pastor, though the nature of the latter position is unclear.⁷¹ He wrote to the Chairman of the Wellington District, the Rev. S.J. Serpell, claiming that Mr Chapman was "promulgating doctrines contrary to those contained in John Wesley's Notes on

⁷¹ **Walter Clement Burd (c 1848-1920) had lived in Timaru prior to coming to Wellington about 1898. He was employed as a clerk/storekeeper with the New Zealand Railways.**

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the New Testament and the first fifty-three of John Wesley's Sermons, as at present published". He further charged him with breaches of Methodist discipline. Mr Burd followed his July letter with a second in November, elaborating on the charges he had made earlier.

The doctrinal charges related to:

- 1 Future Punishments and Rewards;
- 2 The Holy Scriptures;
- 3 Sin and Death;
- 4 The Fall of Man.

In each case Mr Burd supplied shorter or longer quotes of what Mr Chapman had said. He did not offer a rebuttal of Mr Chapman's words, nor did he set out what he regarded to be an orthodox statement on these theological issues. He appears to have assumed that their unorthodoxy or falsity would be themselves sufficiently clear to the District Chairman and the members of the Synod to whom they would naturally be referred.

His fifth and sixth charges, relating to Methodist discipline, were of a more general nature, referring to Mr Chapman's disregard for "the Church's orthodoxy" and "conformity to the traditions of a past age". He disapproved of his minister speaking favourably of Robert Blatchford, a socialist writer, and Charles Bradlaugh, the freethinker. His last complaint was that such preaching had driven many away from Taranaki Street Church, and had caused "general unsettlement" amongst the congregation, including his own family.

All these charges were "investigated" by the Wellington District, and must have been discussed at the Annual Synod held that year in Napier. It would appear that Mr Burd had been present at that meeting. Nevertheless, the Synod "unanimously considered the charges unfounded" and expressed their confidence in Mr Chapman. Mr Serpell and Mr Jones, the Synod Secretary, each made reference to the context in which Mr Chapman's statements had originally been made. Mr Serpell referred to Mr Chapman's avowal of his belief in and loyalty to "the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion", while Mr Jones noted that Mr Chapman had "declared his loyalty to Methodist doctrine as understood today".

Mr Burd was unimpressed by Synod's decision, and was particularly incensed that he had not been called to give evidence, which he felt was discourteous. It was clear in his response to Mr Serpell that he was astonished, or shocked, that "not even one dissentient voice" was raised, "not even the Chairman". He believed the "hearing" was quite illegal and a "travesty of justice", that the case had not been given "careful attention", and that the basis of the charges before the Synod were not those he himself had brought. He made it clear he would now ensure that the charges were brought before the coming Annual Conference.



Rev. S. J. Serpell - *Morley*

The appeal to Conference, which met in Auckland, was heard on March 2nd, 1912. It was not an open hearing, but was before a Committee appointed by the Ministerial Session of Conference. The Committee reported its findings back to the Ministerial Session. Mr Burd was given to understand that the exact nature of the charges had never been made clear to the larger group of ministers in the first place.



Conference 1912 was held at Pitt St Church - *from a postcard*

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One of the problems for the researcher is that there is no record at all of any of the discussions in the Conference minutes, nor in the full coverage of the Conference proceedings in the *New Zealand Methodist Times*.⁷² Mr Burd claimed that this was "most reprehensible, and the omission must have been with the deliberate intention of keeping our people uninformed of this most serious matter". It is hard to disagree with his judgment on this matter.

There was, however, a fairly brief, 'garbled', newspaper report, under the heading "A Heresy Hunt".⁷³ A delegate had suggested that the full finding of the Conference (which must have been submitted to it by the Ministerial Session) should be published and that discussion should be taken in open Conference. By then "the original version of the affair" had appeared in a Christchurch newspaper, and this is what had been copied by the *New Zealand Herald*. The President, in making a statement on the matter to the *Auckland Star* two days later, indicated that one of the members of the specially appointed committee had divulged the information to the Christchurch paper.

Conference, nevertheless, decided to discuss the charge in committee, and the following information was issued for publication over the signature of the Rev. William Ready, the President:

1. The charges of heterodoxy do not refer to doctrines peculiar to Methodism, and specially guarded in our constitution, but to doctrines held by the Christian world in the 18th century.

2. In regard to Holy Scriptures, Mr Chapman uses the well-worn formula that 'they contain the Word of God', and appeal to our moral sense to discover those parts that breathe an un-Christian spirit. Wesley, also, in his preface to his version of the Prayer Book, explains that he had omitted the imprecatory Psalms as unfit for Christians to repeat.

3. Mr Chapman believes in and preaches future consequences of sin as 'wages' or natural results, not as arbitrary inflictions or tortures. He does not deny the eternal duration of these consequences, but regards that as an open question, and the word as indefinite.

4. If we regard Wesley's sermons apart from Wesley and his history, we must frankly say that Mr Chapman's views differ from Wesley's. By this we do not mean that they necessarily contradict Wesley's.

We beg to point out: —

1. That Wesley's main doctrine, that of free grace, was a revolt and a strenuous battle fought in vindication of the character of God from the awful

⁷² This coverage is found in the issue of 23 March 1912.

⁷³ *New Zealand Herald*, 1 March 1912.

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reflections cast upon it by the earlier and contemporary puttings of the doctrine of election.

2. That the compassionate heart of Wesley was tortured by the prevailing views of hell. He tells us that he sought diligently for a way of escape, and declares, 'weeping', that he found none. Here again his heart was in revolt against prevailing opinions of the Divine character. After 150 years, a loyal son of Wesley may feel the same heart revolt, and be in the true line of march.

3. The recent Ecumenical Conference sent a message to be read to every Methodist pulpit in the world. That authoritative message urges, 'Let us unite steadfastness in the faith with complete intellectual freedom and confident ability to march with the times.'

4. In view of these things we cannot recommend the Conference to censure a frank and courageous man, whom we regard as loyal to all that is essential to the teachings of our Church.

5. The evidence leads us to think that misconception as to Mr Chapman's theological position arises mainly from the manner in which he has sometimes expressed himself, the effects being to alarm minds unaccustomed to new statements of old truths. In this respect your Committee feel that Mr Chapman somewhat indiscreetly antagonised those who differ from him. At the same time we recognise that advanced thought and critical research necessitates change of emphasis in the delivery of our message, and we should thankfully receive all the light that an intelligent study of the Bible and the discoveries of science can put upon those vital and eternal truths of experimental religion that have ever been the strength and glory of the Methodist pulpit, and on which the salvation of the world depends.

6. Finally, we congratulate Mr Burd on the admirable clearness, spirit, and temper with which he presented the case. It is also due to Mr Chapman to say that he replied with quiet frankness to the charges, admitting the utterance of some statements, denying the use of some, and explaining or resetting others.

The publication of the finding in the *Auckland Star* apparently stirred up quite a local reaction. There was a well-attended meeting at Albert Park the following Sunday, called to consider "The infidelity of the churches, with special reference to the Methodist Conference, and its complicity with infidelity". The matter was taken up immediately by the *Sydney Evening News*, using Chapman's denial of hell-fire as their headline. The newspaper interviewed a number of church ministers who all roundly condemned both the Conference and Mr Chapman. In April *The Bible Investigator and Inquirer*, a monthly religious journal based in Melbourne, made it the subject of a lengthy article, with a similar emphasis. Mr Burd reported he had received letters of support.



Rev. William Ready - Williams

During 1912 three sixteen-page pamphlets were published in New Zealand attacking the new Methodist theological orthodoxy. The first appeared within about two weeks, and was written by the Rev. George Aldridge. He was a notably independent Church of Christ minister from its Life and Advent stream, based on West Street, Auckland. His work was entitled *Rhetorical Flourishes: Heresy in Methodism*.⁷⁴ The second originated in Dunedin, its author being William Anderson.⁷⁵ His booklet, written in a somewhat more journalistic style, was called *How Methodists meet Heresy: Is Dogma Dead?* The third, also published later in the year, was by Mr Burd himself. It is entitled *Heresy in the Methodist Church* and is the only source available for the factual background of the case.

Mr Burd's argument has been largely traversed already, though mention needs to be made of the final section in which he sets out those passages in the Law Book which relate to doctrine. He then goes on to provide support for each of his charges by using

⁷⁴ George Aldridge (1854-1926) was for 42 years the minister of the congregation at West St. Auckland, and was the author of twenty tracts and pamphlets on religious subjects.

⁷⁵ Taking into account the language of the pamphlet, it seems more than likely that the author was William Peter Anderson (1876-1957). This is the assumption made by Bagnall in his *New Zealand National Bibliography*. William Anderson was a newspaperman who, having started with the *Lyttelton Times*, moved to the *Mataura Ensign* and then to the *Clutha Leader* before joining the staff of the *Otago Daily Times*. He remained with them until the end of his career, becoming chief sub-editor. He retired to Broad Bay, and at the end of his life wrote the history of the Methodist cause there.

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words from some of Wesley's sermons. The other two booklets attacked the Methodist Conference for its failure to take positive steps to counteract what the writers believed to be a denial of the truths of scripture.

The introduction to Aldridge's booklet was written by Louis E. Falkner, a member of an evangelical network in Auckland. He stated that:

*The action of the Methodist Church in condoning the proclamation of doctrines so widely divergent from the plain statement of the Word, and its acquiescence in the mutilation of the Bible and denial of its inspiration and authority, have antagonised and grieved many faithful Christians, among whom are not a few members of the Methodist Church. Such action on the part of an authoritative Church Conference with its consequent disturbance of the faith of those who look to it for guidance, cannot be passed by without comment and protest; and it is surely the duty of those who would contend earnestly for the faith to state in no uncertain terms their surprise and disapproval of the findings of the Conference. It is to be hoped that the finding does not really represent the attitude of the Methodist Church but is a hasty and ill-considered attempt to save the Conference from an unpleasant duty, and that if the matter be re-considered, a more sane and satisfactory decision may be arrived at which will save that body from merited condemnation, and from public division.*⁷⁶

Anderson adopted a rather more subtle approach, though his final judgment was clear.

*It turned out, however, that a hunt was wholly unnecessary, for Mr Chapman, the accused, came boldly into the open, faced his accuser, and stood to his guns. Was heresy proved? Few, we venture to say, will question it; that is, if there be such a thing in the present day. It does seem now almost impossible for a man to apostatise to the extent of bringing himself under the ban, or even the censure, of his Church, much less of incurring his suspension. Mr Chapman's case was undoubtedly one of heresy in the superlative degree, black as night, with the very hiss of the serpent in it, while all the time denying the existence of that reptile as the mouth—piece of Satan in the Garden of Eden.*⁷⁷

James Gates Chapman (1863-1925) was a Londoner by birth, who came to New Zealand in the 1880s. He was received on probation in 1889, and served successively at Hawera (1889-1890), Leeston (1890-1892), Thomdon (1892-1893), Milton (1893-1895), and Balclutha (1895-1897). He was then given permission to visit England during 1897-1898. It was already evident that Chapman possessed "rare gifts and outstanding ability as a preacher," and from then on he was appointed to represent the Church "in some of our most important Circuits."⁷⁸ He was stationed at Mt Albert (1898-1901), Devonport (1901-1904), followed by Wanganui (1904-1909), and New

⁷⁶ George Aldridge, *Rhetorical Flourishes: Heresy in Methodism*, Auckland, 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁷ William Anderson, *How Methodists meet Heresy: Is Dogma Dead?*, Dunedin, 1912, pp.4f.

⁷⁸ Conference Minutes, 1926, p. 17.

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Plymouth (1909-1911). He was then at Taranaki Street from 1911 till 1920, at which point he retired from ministry due to ill health. It will be noted that the charges were levelled during his first year at Taranaki Street but that he continued there for a further eight years, a length of appointment almost without parallel in New Zealand Methodist parish ministry. He continued preaching in 'Evangelical' churches around Wellington until his sudden death at the end of 1925.



The charges against Rev. J. G. Chapman were made during his time at Wesley Church, Taranaki Street, Wellington. - Williams

Since the charges were made during his time at Taranaki Street it is interesting to read the comments in Charles Freeman's history of Wellington Methodism. He described Chapman as "a keen scholar, a great reader, honest and fear-less, an original thinker, modern but strongly evangelical, a good preacher, an excellent visitor".⁷⁹ These words follow what was in Chapman's obituary in the Conference Minutes, which also spoke of him as "a prince of preachers and a capable admini-strator...". The comment made when his retirement from ministry was finally recognised by Conference probably goes near to acknowledging the 1912 furor. The 1923 Minutes spoke of Chapman as always "maintaining the evangelistic note, with a fearless statement of the truth in its application to modern problems".

The editor of the *New Zealand Methodist Times*, appointed in 1910, was Lewis Hudson, then stationed at Timaru. Within three months of the 1912 Conference he

⁷⁹ **Charles J. Freeman, comp.. *The Centenary of Wesley Church, Taranaki Street, Wellington, New Zealand, 1840-1940*, Wellington, 1940, p.41.**

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invited Chapman to write the guest leader. Under the heading "The Value of a Creed", Chapman went on the attack, with a statement of faith which was, he said, forward looking, rather than based on blind adherence to old creeds and, presumably, to traditional scriptural interpretation. He affirmed that "the world is organised for righteousness; that Jesus Christ is the highest we know; that death does not end all; that our eternal destiny is settled by each of us."⁸⁰ That Chapman was given the privilege of such a public response strengthens the impression that the Church leadership was not going to allow individual attacks on ministerial orthodoxy to undermine Conference's authority in such matters.

The Church newspaper gave no space to, or mention of, the matters which had so obviously disturbed the even tenor of Conference. Mr Burd had noted that he had received letters from Primitive Methodists who now thought, in the light of the failure of Conference to maintain Methodist orthodoxy, that the proposed union with the Wesleyans should not proceed. No such change of direction was made by the Primitive Methodists in their movement towards the union which was consummated the following year.

The strong impression is that, for Methodists of that time, so long as their minister was committed to the Methodist evangelical tradition, he could say very much what he liked. Eric Hames aptly sums up the gap between pulpit and pew during this period:

However, the conservative reaction that showed itself after the first world war would seem to indicate that on the one hand the rank and file of the ministry can have done very little to educate their congregations, and that on the other hand a not inconsiderable proportion of the members must have slept through the whole controversy.⁸¹

Clearly, John Gates Chapman was not one of the "rank and file", and maybe at least one of his congregation was wide awake.

⁸⁰ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 29 June 1912, p. 1.

⁸¹ Eric Hames, *Out of the Common Way: The European Church in the Colonial Era 1840-1913*, Wellington 1972, p.81.

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

John Salmon

This address, "A Spiritual Journey", was presented to Auckland District Synod in August 2002, as one of an ongoing series presented by Methodists in the District. It has been altered slightly for publication.



Epsom Methodist Church, pre-1960

- Methodist Archives, Auckland

When I was seven, I stood at the front of the Epsom Church and sang a duet of the "Purple-headed mountain" verse of the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful".

That was the beginning of my 'up-front' ministry and worship leadership. Things progressed from there - though no one ever again asked me to sing! (In fact, I'm one of what seems to be a rare breed: Methodists who are not 'born in song' nor moved particularly by hymns nor who find singing particularly spiritually uplifting....)

In my teens I had the privilege of Bible Class leaders like Bryan Burton and Murray Print. Their great gift was that they accepted questions, and helped me and others to do our own exploring, rather than suggesting there were right answers to the life issues and theological grappings I and others raised. I guess I haven't stopped asking those questions! I suspect that's the beginnings of being a theologian, a theologian who

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wants always to be on the edge of the next questions. That's a critical part of my faith, my life, my spirituality.

Reflecting on those experiences leads me to see faith as involving deep commitment; together with its *expression in action* - a lifestyle, if you like; and *ongoing exploration of the ideas that give meaning* - our theology. Out of that experience, I have come to consider faith is not about fixed beliefs, but involves stepping out - as Abraham did - without any certainty or answers, but in an attitude of open curiosity, in which doubt and questioning are important tools. Maybe one of our biggest mistakes is giving young people closed answers at the point where they start asking questions, because that imprisons the excitement of faithful discovery in the box of certain truth.

So those teen-years mentors were of great significance to me.

Around the same time I also became involved in drama, presenting plays as part of worship. So I began to experience 'performing in the sanctuary', if you like. And my worship leadership has grown out of that. In fact, I have used various forms of 'role theory' - whether from drama or from sociology - in my understanding of self and of ministry. I don't think of an identifiable 'self that is the 'authentic' *John*, but of my Johnness being expressed in different contexts in different ways, always seeking to act in a form relevant to the context.

I 'act out' who I am - probably appropriate for one whose parents were both actors (and my father was struck off the lay preachers' list for acting the part of Bishop Pompallier in the Catholic Church's centennial celebrations - which added ironic colouring to me being co-convenor of the first official Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue in New Zealand).

Following my teen years, life rolled on in a fairly stable way from the late 50s to the early 60s, with regular and satisfying involvement in church life.

Then, at the end of 1963, John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

That drew me up short: my youthful idealism was challenged, and it made me think about what I did with my life. At the time I was an accountant holding management positions. Where did life go from there?

It took me several rather painful years to sort through that, toying with such things as politics. Then came the challenge to ministry. Alan Newton was minister at Epsom at the time - newly and enthusiastically charismatic, right at the beginning of that movement in the mid-60s. The charismatic movement captured my energy, gave me motivation for ministry, and alienated many around me. In fact, the conflict in the congregation meant that my home church would not support me as a candidate. (That's an important thing for me to keep remembering as I respond to candidates and students for ministry today...)

At Trinity College, under the guidance of Dave Williams, J. J. Lewis, John Ziesler, Bryan Walker, and John Silvester, I developed an approach to theology that remains

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challenging. I was strongly charismatic in my personal commitment and worship style, while shaping a theology built on the radical views of Rudolf Bultmann, existential philosophy, and Wittgenstein's view of language. This meant I saw biblical language and ideas as mythological, which could be appropriately re-interpreted in different settings, and from my perspective. I saw no conflict between de-mythologising biblical stories on the one hand and using those stories with all their traditional language in prayer meetings on the other. Theologising was woven into my spirituality.



Rev. Dr J. J. LEWIS, Rev. Dr D. O. WILLIAMS, Rev. Dr John ZIESLER, Rev. John SILVESTER
- Kinder Library

In many ways, that's still how I work. For me, different settings use ideas in different ways, and express these in different forms of language. It might all be 'English', but each setting understands and uses key words in ways special to them. That's largely why we 'talk past each other' in the church, out of our different groupings.

In parish ministry in Dunedin I was drawn into ecumenical activity, which added another dimension for me. This was at the time of the most intense church union discussions, and sitting across the green from the Anglicans and being surrounded by Presbyterians on all sides was exciting and provocative. Since then I've hardly ever worked in a solely Methodist environment, and although church union is dead and gone (along with the modernism which spawned it), I'm convinced that ecumenical co-operation is crucial to the future of the Christian community in a country like ours. Co-operative ventures are a sign and symbol of this, as well as a significant practical outworking of it, that we overlook at everyone's peril.

I also undertook postgraduate work as my probation study in Dunedin. This enabled me to work both in education and in pastoral studies - and to pick up teaching in both the Education Department and the Faculty of Theology at Otago University. Increasingly, what undergirded my work were the insights and tools of philosophy (giving theoretical strength to my question-asking approach), coloured by a theological world-view and practical pastoral concern.

My subsequent PhD drew together philosophy, education, and religious studies, held in tension by my theological study and reflection. That brought me trouble in the University Department, because my theological view - highly existentialist - was in conflict with the prevailing educational view - behaviourist. The professor forbade me

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to work in certain areas, because my philosophical perspective undermined the department's position! I like to think that was a small triumph for theology in a secular university, because it made quite a ripple, and it wasn't too long before attitudes and priorities changed.

All the while, I retained my charismatic conviction and style. The movement was enabling people at that time to move out from traditional and formalised ways of being church, and provided a vitality in worship and in personal spirituality.

Increasingly, however, I found myself being pushed to the edge of the movement. It took a while to realise what was happening. At first, the main influence I was exposed to came from charismatics in the Catholic Church. This brought with it some very creative work in liturgy and music, including new communion material, liturgical dance, and a fresh use of the bible (the bible having just been 'released' to the church following Vatican II). My interpretive approach fitted well. During the 70s, however, the Pentecostal influence increased, bringing with it a biblical literalism and a rather rigid belief system.

This was much more alien to Methodism - at least to the Wesleyan brand of it that was my heritage (all but one of my great-grandparents' families were members of Auckland Wesleyan churches at the start of last century).

By now I was part of a team ministry in a Co-operating Parish with Anglicans. The tension became quite great, between the liturgical development I experienced with the Anglicans and the biblical literalism I found in the charismatic-Pentecostal groups. At about this time, I had the opportunity to undertake a biblical studies programme at Princeton Theological Seminary. That extended my theological base and gave me some new insights and skills. The time away also made me realise that trying to hold together the various groups I'd worked with was not being productive. So I came back determined to let the more theologically explorative side take over. I also came back refocused in the area of education, and with a deeper appreciation of the relevance of linking faith with politics.

I had become politicised - like many of my generation - during the Vietnam war. But now I had some tools, sharpened through groups I worked with in the States. I put these together with my educational experience, and began to work on educational approaches that helped people engage with political issues, using a biblical and theological base. This was now the time of the 1981 Springbok Tour, so political issues were sharp in both church and society.

Soon after, I joined the Church's Education Division, with justice education being a key focus of my position. When the decision was made in 1983 to work towards a bicultural church, I was seconded to this work as part of that focus.

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That was a very difficult time. We were in a new area, with no models to follow, and undoubtedly (in retrospect) made mistakes in our educational approaches. At the same time, there was considerable misunderstanding and talking past each other in the church. It was difficult to get across that this movement arose out of a concern for evangelism, that it had a spiritual core, that the groups involved were committed to the church and spent much time in biblical study and theological reflection. The gap between what was seen as a political issue and the spiritual and theological motivation of those involved could not be closed easily.

That forced me to work even harder at my own theological development. Contextualisation was a key aspect, exploring how the Christian gospel might be shaped to connect with the deep experiences of Aotearoa-NZ. Members of the Maori Division (now Te Taha Maori), key among them Rua and Joy Rakena, kept challenging us to explore that. The significance of context - of time and place, of culture and history - has continued to be significant in my theology and my spirituality. A further period of time in the US enabled me to look closely at liberation and feminist theologies, and to integrate these into my overall theological framework, providing important lenses for looking at theological ideas. That time in the States also gave me the chance to get up-to-date with the most recent theological writing.

Ongoing reading, personal reflection, and explorative interaction with the world here and now have been central aspects of my journey. And those have always drawn from a range of sources, across what have often been regarded as uncrossable boundaries - so education and sociology and philosophy have interacted with biblical studies and theology and pastoral studies in all my reflection. And that theological reflection cannot be severed from my personal faith and spiritual life.



Rev. Rua RAKENA and Joy RAKENA, 1994

When I came to teach at a theological college - and then to become Principal - this approach continued. My theology, as a teacher, seeks to be exploratory and question-asking, to draw from across the various disciplines, and always to relate to this

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context, now, and in Aotearoa-New Zealand and the South Pacific. And I see the principles of management as being just as relevant as those of the bible in this process.

It's not always easy to communicate out of that mix, when it's not expected by others. I've often felt misunderstood and marginalized in the life of the Church, I suspect partly because my determination to keep asking the questions that probe behind accepted and assumed ideas and positions is not readily understood in the Church. That's especially the case when the Church community is feeling somewhat threatened or insecure. And I think that's been exacerbated when jobs I have been asked to do have been in areas of conflict or confusion - such as the bicultural journey. I've felt I've been the scapegoat for people's anger at times, as though the depth of my commitment, my faith, my spirituality, has been unrecognised or devalued on the one hand, and the role I have played on behalf of the Church has been confused with my selfhood on the other.

But here, this morning, I make my claim, out of the depth and breadth of my journey:

- commitment, action, and exploration are core to my faith;
- my spirituality might not make too much of song, or of prayer in traditional forms, but it's real for all that;
- that spirituality is linked at depth to the world in which I live and the God-presence I experience within it, focusing attention on what is life-giving and life-sustaining;
- my Wesleyan Catholicism goes back many generations and is not readily snuffed out - even in this postmodern, post-Christian, post-denominational age.

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