

DOWNGRADE DOWN UNDER Conflict and Cohesion among New Zealand Baptists

A telling measure of the strength of any organisation is its ability to cope with conflict. The British 'Downgrade' controversy of 1887-8 is a famous case. As E.A. Payne lamented, the controversy 'cast a shadow over the Baptist denomination for more than a generation.'¹ Yet the Baptist Union in Great Britain was able to survive the defection of its most prominent individual - a signal of the diversity and depth of its membership as well as a pragmatic concern to preserve unity. Not so familiar is a parallel controversy played out in New Zealand over the same period. Parallel, but not the same. As in Britain, the New Zealand crisis ostensibly turned on theological purity but, due to the distinctive character of the colonial context, its course and immediate outcome were quite different. An examination of the controversy, however, reveals the remarkable degree to which the concerns of the denominational leadership mirrored those of their counterparts at 'Home'.

The Baptist Union of New Zealand was formed in 1882, in the final glow of a period of colonial optimism and expansion. This prosperity was not just economic: church attendances climbed during the 1880s, Baptists benefiting with the emergence of a few large churches. Yet there was little progress in the forging of a uniquely New Zealand version of Baptist life. Denominationalism had been self-consciously transplanted.² Britain provided all the models, the most conspicuous individual example being Charles Spurgeon: through the 1880s no human figure was more revered among New Zealand Baptists. Spurgeon's publications were widely available and eagerly read, his pronouncements respectfully reported in the denominational magazine. Most importantly, his emissaries were everywhere. Lacking a training scheme of their own, New Zealand Baptists of necessity sourced most of their Pastors from English Colleges. For those few men who left the colony to train, Spurgeon's Pastors' College was a natural choice. To that small group were added those induced to emigrate from Britain to assist struggling causes in the new land. More than half of the ministerial arrivals in the 1880s were Spurgeon's graduates. Standing out among these was Charles's own son and eventual successor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. From 1882 Thomas Spurgeon was the hugely popular and successful pastor of the Auckland Tabernacle. It became the largest church in Australasia during his time. Although many of the Pastors' College graduates served only briefly in New Zealand, in a Baptist community with only one recognized minister for every 1,025 adherents, their collective impact was considerable.³

In a context so open to Spurgeonic style and concerns, a student of the master could expect to be well received. Thus, when the Revd Charles Crisp Brown arrived in the colony in 1884 armed with a letter of recommendation from Charles Spurgeon, he was welcomed. Yet, before long, Brown would find himself at the centre of a colonial 'Downgrade'. The controversy would provide a focus for

underlying tensions within the fledgling Union. Personal, pragmatic and theological issues were at stake, all magnified by reports of the unfolding English crisis. The Brown affair highlights both the degree to which the Baptists of New Zealand perpetuated the assumptions and forms of their British counterparts, and the inadequacy of those structures for the colonial context. It fell into two phases.

PHASE ONE: 1885-1888 CONFLICT AND EXPULSION

In 1885 C.C. Brown became minister of an almost defunct cause in Timaru in South Island. The church was in recess - divided, with the status of its property in some confusion. Although it had been a founding member of the Union, it was suspended for a year between the 1883 and 1884 Conferences, whilst enquiry into its affairs was made.⁴ Brown thus took on a church which already had a history of tensions with Union leaders. Nevertheless, under his energetic ministry, baptisms, members and optimism returned. A series of ebullient reports from the Timaru cause appeared in the *NZ Baptist* late in 1885.

Yet, in the wider Baptist community, there was growing doubt about Brown himself. In particular, disquiet was felt at his theological views. By his own account, Brown, whilst still a student in the early 1870s, had 'abandoned the belief that the wicked would suffer eternal punishment'. He became convinced of the 'Life in Christ only' position of the Congregationalist, Edward White, who for a while adopted Baptist rather than paedobaptist views.⁵ Brown apparently made no effort to hide his views from his New Zealand colleagues but it was not until 1886 that discomfort at his doctrinal position was transformed into action. It was the beginning of an increasingly bitter process of censure and alienation.

The founding constitution of the Baptist Union of New Zealand was almost silent on doctrinal matters. The sole clause with any theological edge merely affirmed that 'the Union fully recognises that every separate church has liberty to interpret and administer the laws of Christ, and that the immersion of believers is the only Christian Baptism'.⁶ This reflected the position of the British Union. There was, accordingly, no constitutional ground for censuring Brown on the basis of doctrine alone. Nevertheless an attempt at coercion was made.

Encouraged by early signs of renewal under Brown's ministry, the Timaru church applied to the Union Committee (the executive body of the New Zealand Union) for assistance in supporting its new minister. This was granted, in the sum of twenty pounds, but on the condition that Brown was not to promulgate his conditional immortality views.⁷ Bridling at this interference in what they regarded as local matters, Brown and his church appealed to the Conference in November 1886. They were unsuccessful. After a long debate the gathered delegates endorsed the actions of the Committee. A stand-off ensued and the grant remained unpaid. More importantly, hints of further trouble surfaced. During the Conference debate, Thomas Spurgeon cited a letter from his father in which Spurgeon senior distanced himself from Brown's views and effectively repudiated his letter of endorsement.⁸

This sounded a personal note which would echo through the affair. The Spurgeon factor would increase in importance as the controversy developed.⁹

The matter was now public. Through 1887 a series of articles by senior figures was published in the *NZ Baptist*, attacking Brown's position. Brown replied in the pages of the *Bible Standard*, a publication promoting the conditional immortality view.¹⁰ So prominent was the debate that the matter could not be kept from the agenda of the 1887 Assembly. Again, the Union Committee took the initiative. On its behalf President Philip Cornford moved for expulsion: 'That, in the judgement of this assembly, the Rev. C.C. Brown, of Timaru, has identified himself with the distinctive views of another body, and is hereby requested to withdraw'.

This meat was too strong for the delegates: an amended motion was passed, 'without a dissentient', to the effect: 'That this Union regrets to know that Mr Brown holds and gives prominence to the distinctive views of the body represented by Mr Aldridge,¹¹ and considers it right to declare that such views are not in accordance with the views of the Union.'¹²

The matter might have stopped with this censorious inaction were it not for Brown's provocative conduct in reading aloud the testimonial from Charles Spurgeon which he had brought to New Zealand. As has been noted, his right to claim this influential endorsement had been challenged a year before by none other than Thomas Spurgeon. Brown's timing was not good. On the same day on which it expressed its strong disapprobation of Brown's views, the Union elected the junior Spurgeon as its new President.

That Brown's persistence in using the great man's name would rankle is of little surprise, particularly as the affairs of Charles Spurgeon were at that time on everyone's mind. Spurgeon had resigned from the British Baptist Union in October. In the same issue of the *NZ Baptist* which reported the 1887 Conference it was noted that 'misapprehensions and misrepresentations are rife concerning the import of the action of the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon in relation to the Baptist Union in the Mother Country'.¹³ News of the developing crisis at 'Home' was to run parallel with exchanges over the Brown affair through the next crucial year.

Brown himself immediately invited further criticism. He wrote a pugnacious account of the Conference for the *Bible Standard*¹⁴ and, travelling north, spoke in similar vein to public meetings sponsored by conditional immortality groups in Auckland and the then still prosperous mining town of Thames; he explained his views, celebrating what he regarded as his proper escape from expulsion and the 'very harmless resolution' which was eventually passed. To this - effectively a claim to victory - Brown's Baptist critics took umbrage. There was more. Brown linked his cause directly to the simmering English 'Downgrade'. The report of the Thames address records that Brown made reference 'to Pastor Spurgeon and his secession from the Baptist Union because it would not preach the doctrine of eternal torment, which in [Brown's] opinion, was an awful blasphemous doctrine, while it was not supported by the Bible'. This daring criticism of his former mentor was spur enough

to Brown's Baptist detractors, but even it was eclipsed by his concluding reference to 'the tendency of many orthodox ministers to preach anything for money, and also to the fact that few cared to debate or search the scriptures'.¹⁵

Brown's personal propensity for controversy found a ready match in the new editor of the *NZ Baptist*. The Revd Lewis Shackleford had arrived in New Zealand in 1884, the same year as Brown. After a brief, unsuccessful pastorate at Wanganui¹⁶ he took up the cause at Greendale in Canterbury. Shackleford was appointed editor at the 1887 Conference and was intimately involved in the handling of Brown's case at that gathering. With one other, he had been commissioned to confer with Brown 're his status in connection with this Union' before the resolutions on the question were brought to the floor.¹⁷ Through 1888, in the pages of the *Baptist*, he would pursue the controversy with vigour and some venom.

In January and February 1888 Shackleford allocated extensive space to Brown's Thames address and the angry correspondence which attended it. In the March issue he and Brown clashed head on. Responding to his critics Brown laid down the gauntlet to the Union: 'At the next Conference, let a resolution be carried to the effect that all members of the Union must subscribe to the doctrine of eternal torments for every soul outside the number of the elect. This will change the basis of the Union. As I could not subscribe, I should immediately tender my resignation.'¹⁸

Shackleford responded to this challenge by linking the controversy theologically and personally to Charles Spurgeon and the 'Downgrade'. The article in the *NZ Baptist* which immediately preceded Brown's provocative dare was a long report, taken from the *British Weekly*, on attempts to reverse Spurgeon's withdrawal from the English Union. This juxtaposition can hardly have been coincidental. In the two-columned text a paragraph complimentary to Spurgeon as a 'common-sense Englishman' is printed side-by-side with a response to Brown by Shackleford which appropriates the revered name whilst casting grave aspersions on the integrity of his opponent. It is important enough to be quoted at length.

It will be sufficient to allude to one point only in Mr Brown's letter. He says: 'When I joined the Union it was known I held "Life in Christ Only" views'. He came, we believe, furnished with a letter from the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon, which was deemed sufficient guarantee that Mr Brown was not the kind of man he has since shown himself to be. How came he by that letter? The question opens a chapter of history which we are afraid is not altogether to Mr Brown's credit. It is convenient for Mr Brown to make the issue between the Union and himself one of doctrine; but we hold ... that the question at issue is primarily not so much a doctrinal one as a moral. Is it likely, in the light of recent controversies at Home, that the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon recommended Mr Brown to the Baptist Union of New Zealand, knowing that he held and intended to teach what he holds and teaches? We put the question to the common-sense of our readers.¹⁹

Despite Shackleford's claim to have shifted the controversy from 'doctrinal' to 'moral' grounds it is clear that the real issues were personal. Spurgeon senior, so esteemed in the Colonies, was under intense pressure at 'Home'. For Brown to continue to claim his endorsement at this time, whilst holding the very views Spurgeon rejected, was beyond toleration. Shackleford's appeal to the 'common sense' of his readers - a quality already attributed to the great man - subtly marked Brown as the outsider.²⁰

Stung by this new tone, Brown ultimately appealed directly to Charles Spurgeon for confirmation of the authenticity of the testimonial. In a letter dated 6 June 1888 he outlined the dispute, explained his own views and proceeded 'simply to beg from you the favour of half a dozen lines to the effect that *you* do not charge me with double dealing, dishonesty or want of morality in connection with your letter of recommendation'.²¹ Brown's hope was to be able to publish these 'lines' in the *NZ Baptist*. Spurgeon, it seems, did not accede to his request, as no such statement appeared. Indeed the controversy faded from the pages of the denominational paper for a time after the June issue. The Brown matter was, however, not yet settled.

In the September issue of the *NZ Baptist* notice was given of a motion to add to the Union's constitution the following clause: 'That the Constituencies and List of Members may be revised by the *Committee*, and their decision shall be duly notified to the persons concerned, who shall have the right of appeal to the Assembly' [original emphasis].²² The mover was the Revd Alfred North,²³ a member of the Union Committee since its inception and the key individual in the Union leadership. North was proposing a considerable appropriation of power by the executive body of the Union. No overt link was made to the Brown case (North was preparing another motion, of which no public notice was given, dealing with that) but the effect of the constitutional change would be to allow a speedy means of expulsion.

At least one body of Baptist leaders made a connection between North's motion and Brown.

Oct. 26/88. A meeting of Pastors and Deacons of the Tabernacle and Mt Eden Churches was held at [the] Tabernacle to consider matters as far as possible that will come up at the conference in [Christchurch]. The matter of the Rev. C.C. Brown was especially referred to. A motion will be submitted to Conference requesting him to withdraw from the Union. It was moved by Rev. Bray, 2nd Mr Stone that the delegates agree to support this motion, also the motion of which Rev Mr North has given notice in [the] Baptist.²⁴

Further significant resolutions of this crucial meeting will be referred to below. It is clear, however, from this first motion that moves to expel Brown and North's proposed constitutional change were understood to be linked.

The Seventh Annual Conference of the Union was held in Christchurch in November 1888. Thomas Spurgeon was in the Chair. In the first session, North's constitutional amendment was passed 'with one dissentient'. Almost immediately after, North moved 'That in the judgement of this Assembly, the Rev. C.C. Brown

has so far identified himself with another denomination that he ought no longer to continue a member of the Union, and that therefore he be, and is hereby requested to withdraw'. After a lengthy debate, during which Brown vigorously defended himself, the motion was carried by a total of 31 votes to 5. Brown 'bowed to the decision of the Assembly and accordingly withdrew'.²⁵

On the face of it, in expelling Brown the New Zealand Baptists had responded to doctrinal controversy in a way markedly different from their fellows in Britain. The British Baptist Union, at its Conference in April that same year, had reached a compromise solution, driven by the desire to prevent a damaging split. Charles Spurgeon, unhappy that the compromise formula had failed to achieve a purified Baptist Union, declined to retract his resignation. The New Zealand outcome appears almost the polar opposite. The result was not the withdrawal of the concerned conservative, but the exclusion of the heterodox *provocateur*. Unlike its British counterpart, the New Zealand Union had exorcized the Downgrade demon.

Or had it? A careful consideration of the underlying causes of Brown's demise suggests a challenge to that sharp contrast. The concerns of the New Zealand Baptists were in fact very similar to those in Britain. Only the context in which those concerns manifested themselves was different. Individual factors and the unique challenges of a colonial situation played key roles in the outcome.

The part played in the affair by Brown's polemical attitude must not be discounted. The Baptist Union of New Zealand was very small, its ministerial cohort even smaller. Brown marked himself as an outsider early in the controversy and had little hesitation in criticizing leading ministers. His aggression was matched by that of Shackelford, whose brief tenure as editor of the *NZ Baptist* included the period in which the dispute reached its public height. With cooler heads controlling it than these two, the course of the controversy might have been very different.

There were, however, broader forces at work. In an illuminating article on the British controversy, Mark Hopkins has identified the role of denominational rivalry in provoking public response to Spurgeon's allegations. The cloud cast over Nonconformity in general gave opportunity for criticism, even gloating, from sectors of the Church of England.²⁶ In New Zealand the situation was quite different - there was no established Church - but this tended to intensify, rather than calm sectarian sensitivities. With no obvious ecclesiastical adversary in the colony, those with Dissenting origins lacked both a clear sense of their own identity and a negative incentive to unity.

Of particular concern to Baptists in the 1880s was the presence of activist 'Churches of Christ'. Occupying a similar place on the ecclesiological spectrum, these churches were distinguished from the Baptists largely by their views on 'Life and Advent' - conditional immortality and the end times. Although Brown maintained throughout that his denominational loyalties were not divided, he found a naturally sympathetic audience among these groups. He spoke to their meetings and contributed to their magazine the *Bible Standard*, in whose pages he was lauded

in the 'hope that his influence be felt within the Baptist denomination in the direction of leading many to a knowledge of sound doctrine'.²⁷

That denominational rivalry played a large role in the reaction to Brown is manifest from the wording of the resolutions concerning him. As has been noted, in 1887 both the original resolution calling for his withdrawal and the weaker censure eventually passed lamented that Brown had 'identified himself with the distinctive views of another body'. A year later the wording was more direct. Brown's withdrawal was not sought for heresy, but because he had 'so far identified himself with another denomination'.

As in Britain, then, denominational standing was a factor in the outcome of the controversy. It was not, however, the whole picture. There were other parallels between the British and colonial crises. Most important was an overriding concern for unity on the part of denominational leaders. The evidence shows that Brown's exclusion was engineered to avoid a crippling split.

Throughout the 1887/88 row, the colonial protagonists kept an eye on the unfolding events in London. If there were fears in Britain that the Downgrade might lead to a damaging split in a Union which had lasted more than half a century, these were magnified exponentially among the leaders of a fragile body of a mere twenty-six churches, which had been in existence only half a decade. Moreover, the risk of division implicit in the British controversy became explicit in New Zealand at the Conference in November 1888.

Though principled, Charles Spurgeon's action in resigning from the British Union in October 1887, soon after the start of the controversy, was a tactical blunder. He had fired all his guns and had thereby excluded himself from direct intervention in the ensuing debate. His 'son Tom' did not make the same mistake. At the 1888 Conference, after the motion demanding Brown's withdrawal was moved but before it was debated, a letter was read from Thomas Spurgeon's Auckland Tabernacle and the associated Mt Eden church recording 'an emphatic protest against Mr Brown's proceedings in Auckland and elsewhere after the Union meetings of last year'.²⁸ The pairing of the motion for exclusion and the written protest made the clear inference that the defeat of the motion and the consequent continued presence of Brown would be unacceptable to the Auckland group. Whilst neither the minutes of the 1888 Conference nor subsequent reports of proceedings in the *NZ Baptist* record an explicit threat of repercussions, the *Bible Standard* declared that 'it was generally known that if by any mischance [Brown's] name remained on the Union's rolls ... a serious disruption would at once take place'. The report goes on to quote Alfred North as declaring 'the laws of self-preservation demand the withdrawal of Mr Brown from our ranks'.²⁹

The *Bible Standard* was hardly a sympathetic witness to the actions of the Baptist Conference. There is available, however, clear substantiation of its claim that disruption was threatened. It is found in the record of the meeting of Auckland Church leaders on 26 October to which I have already referred. The first resolution

of this meeting has been cited. There were three more. The second and third authorized the written protest which was read to the Conference and appointed three people to draft it. The fourth resolution makes the seriousness of the move clear: 'That in case the motion of Rev. North's be not carried, the delegates be requested to notify the intention of the Tabernacle and Mt Eden churches to withdraw from the Union at the end of the session'.³⁰

A clear risk of division thus hung over the Conference of 1888. By retaining the threat of possible resignation or withdrawal, Thomas Spurgeon's party was able to influence events more powerfully than had his father in Britain. Nevertheless, it was Charles Spurgeon's Downgrade crusade which had first raised the spectre of disunity over the doctrinal questions with which Brown was identified. Indeed, it is arguable that the key personality in the New Zealand controversy, in its first phase at least, was not Brown, Shackelford or North, but Charles Spurgeon.

Brown miscalculated in citing that Spurgeon's endorsement again in the midst of the controversy. To associate Spurgeon's name with the very doctrines he was at that time heroically fighting was highly offensive. When to that impertinent blunder was added the presence and enormous influence of Spurgeon senior's favoured son - pastor of the largest church in the country and about to enter his presidential year - it is clear that Brown faced impossible odds. The charge of denominational disloyalty, important as it was, paled next to the coincident threat of secession if he was not firmly dealt with. The power of that threat depended on Spurgeon's prestige among NZ Baptists in the late 1880s.

Faced with the defection of an influential group, the New Zealand Conference opted to sacrifice the individual. In this, far from taking the opposite tack to its British counterpart over the Downgrade question, the New Zealand Union mirrored the fears and anxieties of the 'Home' body. The immediate outcome may have been different but the pragmatic concerns which prompted it were the same. Although they faced unique colonial constraints, the New Zealanders were still dominated by the assumptions and categories of the British Baptist milieu. As the affair entered a second phase it would become evident that the 1888 'resolution', wrought under those assumptions, was inadequate.

PHASE TWO: DISQUIET AND REINSTATEMENT 1889-1892

The history of Charles Crisp Brown and the NZ Baptist Union did not end with his expulsion in 1888. He was welcomed home enthusiastically by his Timaru church.³¹ Although Timaru did not formally withdraw from the Union, the church was not represented at the 1889, 1890 or 1891 Conferences and it failed to pay the annual subscription required under the Constitution and Rules of the Union.

The Union Committee was not inclined to tolerate Timaru's non-participation. North's constitutional amendment of 1888 was soon brought into play. On 15 November 1890 it was resolved 'that the Church at Timaru be struck off the list', no subscription from the Church having been received'. This was a severe reaction,

considering Timaru had been seeking financial support only a few years before. It was particularly unfortunate, given the fact that the decision was made five days after Timaru's chapel was destroyed by fire.³²

Perhaps in part because of this turn of events, the resolution was not carried out.³³ However there was a rapid twist in affairs which would have long-term consequences. After steeling themselves to build anew, the Baptists in Timaru were presented with the 'providential' opportunity to purchase a better building at a bargain price from the local Congregationalists. The net result of these dealings was that within two months of the fire they were able to report that 'happily the Timaru Church is perfectly sound financially'.³⁴ This 'providence' would come to haunt Brown and his congregation.

The Committee reapplied the pressure. In November 1891 an expanded resolution was made in the following terms: 'That in view of the evident lack of sympathy on the part of the Timaru Church with the Union, as evidenced by their abstaining from contributing to its funds, and their refusal to send delegates to Conference, it be removed from the list of Churches comprising the Union.'³⁵

Other developments were, however, catching up with the Committee. Significant cracks were beginning to widen in the Union structure. Complaints surfaced at the 1891 Assembly that the Union was dominated by three large city churches (in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin) and that the concerns of smaller, regional churches were discounted. The increasing tendency of the Committee to exercise centralized power was also resented.

The problem lay with the very idea of a national Union. A single body was scarcely appropriate for a scattered Baptist community in a colony in which communications were rudimentary. Further, centralized authority could only be acceptable if even representation was guaranteed. This was at least theoretically possible in Britain, as the much larger number of churches provided some buffer against the domination of a few. In New Zealand, distortion was inevitable, and ultimately resented.

In the face of the complaints, the 1891 Conference authorized the setting up of regional bodies. Three emerged during 1892. Two - Auckland and Otago/Southland - identified themselves closely with the Union, undertaking to promote its objects. The first draft of the Canterbury constitution by contrast did not mention the Union at all. Even in its final form, the now expanded Canterbury and Westland Association pledged only 'as far as practicable, to co-operate' with the national body.³⁶ Canterbury's stance was little surprise - regionalism had always been strong there and an Association of Baptists had existed before the Union was formed. Canterbury was also the region which included Timaru and Charles Crisp Brown. In a strongly worded letter, printed in the October *Baptist*, Cantabrian S.R. Ingold decried the continued isolation of Timaru and its minister and protested a gradual arrogation of power to the Union Committee.³⁷

In this atmosphere, the Timaru church exercised its right to appeal to the 1892

Conference against the Committee's decision to remove it from the list. With the appeal was lodged the demand that Brown be reinstated as a ministerial member. The fate of these two petitions is revealing.

The case of the church was relatively straightforward. In the first session of the 1892 Assembly, on Tuesday afternoon 15 November, it was unanimously resolved 'that the Conference having heard the appeal of the Timaru Church is of opinion that the action of the Committee though perfectly justifiable at the time should not be insisted upon now that assurances have been given of the loyalty and sympathy of the Church towards the Union in the future'.³⁸ By this wording the Conference managed simultaneously to indicate complete support for the Committee and satisfy Canterbury's delegates.

The case of C.C. Brown was much more difficult, as to re-admit him would mean overturning a decision of the Conference itself. The Committee considered the matter on Tuesday morning 15 November and met with Brown that night, a meeting at which Brown is recorded as making 'a full expression of regret for the course he had taken'. He was asked to give a written assurance that 'he would refrain from any similar action in the future'.³⁹ This he duly did, and the Committee agreed to recommend his reinstatement. At no time did Brown indicate that he retracted his doctrinal views. The presenting issue remained his behaviour in parading his difficulties with the Baptists among the Churches of Christ during 1887-88, which had provided the formal grounds for his expulsion. Importantly, the Committee's recommendation to the Conference preserved the earlier disquiet over Brown's views in stressing 'that the resolution passed at Wellington at the session of 1887 remains in force' [see above].⁴⁰

The recommendation was brought to the floor of the Conference on Thursday, 17 November. A long and inconclusive debate ensued, in which thirty-two of the forty-one delegates present spoke. No vote was taken and the Committee was asked to consider the matter further. This it did, only to adhere to its original recommendation. On Friday, 18 November, after a further twenty speeches, the motion was put to the Conference and passed by twenty-six delegates' votes to fifteen. Brown was immediately received back into full standing.⁴¹

The Committee had been wary about re-admitting Brown. It had demanded written assurances and had had these read over again when asked to reconsider the question. Nevertheless it maintained support for his re-instatement in the face of an obviously uncomfortable Conference. This was a remarkable turn-around, given the history of the affair. The decision was pragmatic. A number of pressures, similar in type to those which bore on the decision to expel Brown in 1888, were present again in 1892. This time, however, they pointed to a very different result.

Personality factors had changed. In 1892, Brown displayed a contrite and conciliatory attitude. His principal protagonist during 1888, Lewis Shackelford, was no longer in the country. More significant was the waning of the Spurgeon factor. Things had altered in this area in several ways. By November 1892 the British

Downgrade was but a memory in New Zealand. Charles Spurgeon himself had died early in the year; Thomas Spurgeon had returned temporarily to Britain. Spurgeon junior's former church base in Auckland, which had played such an important role in 1888 was struggling to recover from a disastrous pastorate under his successor, William Birch.⁴² There was, accordingly, little momentum from this quarter to maintain Brown's exclusion.

In 1888 Brown's contacts with an unfavoured rival group contributed to his exclusion. In 1892 the concerns of a more acceptable denomination militated towards his reinstatement. Once more Brown was in the eye of a storm. At issue was that 'providential' purchase of the Congregationalists' building in 1890. At exactly the same time as it was considering its position on Brown's case, the Committee was receiving representations from Congregational leaders who were unhappy with what they saw as the Timaru Baptists' opportunistic appropriation of the building for no more than the cost of the outstanding mortgage. The Congregationalists asked the Committee to 'use its influence with the pastor and officers of the Timaru Church to restore the property on equitable terms'.⁴³

This development was not communicated to the Conference itself. The Committee was thus placed in an invidious position. Baptists had historically close links with Congregationalists. It was noted in the *NZ Baptist* that, in England, talk of union between the groups was as common as 'roast mutton in the bill of fare of a colonial restaurant'.⁴⁴ In New Zealand an 'intimate relation' had developed between the two bodies, symbolized by a combined Baptist/Congregational cause in Thames.⁴⁵ The Committee were anxious to maintain good relations, yet how could the Committee claim sway over a minister and church it had excluded? 'Influence' with Timaru would obviously require concession to the demands for re-instatement.

In the end the price was felt worth paying - the more so, as once again the threat of disunity hung around the question of Brown's status. The Timaru case was a symbol of more general concerns. The extent of dissatisfaction with the Union, particularly in Canterbury, provided added pressure for a reversal of the 1888 decision. Although a significant number of delegates maintained their opposition to Brown, all the Canterbury delegates voted for re-instatement as, to a man, did the Committee.⁴⁶

Between 1888 and 1892 everything and nothing had changed. Changes of personnel, the decline of the Spurgeon influence and the concerns of a favoured denomination set up a situation very different from that which had pertained in phase one of the Brown affair. Unchanged however was the pragmatic concern to preserve the Union in some semblance of cohesion. On the face of it, the inclusive outcomes of 1892 were much more in line with the result of the British Downgrade than was the decision to expel Brown in 1888. Nevertheless, the fundamental interests of the leadership of the New Zealand Union had always been similar to those of their 'Home' counterparts. Doctrine was important, but unity was essential.

Brown would remain minister at Timaru until 1895, when a further financial

squeeze forced the sale of their building back to the Congregationalists. He resigned in October that year. The loss of both their building and their pastor was too much for the church, which again went into recess. Denied the support of the Union Committee, Brown did not serve in another Baptist church.⁴⁷

The conclusion of the affair was hardly more satisfactory for the wider Baptist community. The Union had survived its first major test but underlying tensions between local churches and the national body remained unresolved. The search for an authentic identity, with structures and forms appropriate to a new country, had barely begun.

NOTES

- 1 Payne's treatment is found in *The Baptist Union - A Short History*, 1959, pp.127-143 and 'The Down Grade Controversy: A Postscript', *BQ*, XXVII, October 1979, No.4, pp.146-158. More recently M.T.E. Hopkins has rounded out the picture considerably in 'Spurgeon's Opponents in the Downgrade Controversy', *BQ* XXXII, April 1988, No.6, pp.274-294 and 'The Down Grade Controversy: New Evidence', *BQ* XXXV, April 1994, No.6, pp.262-278. See also M. Nicholls, 'The Downgrade Controversy: A Neglected Protagonist', *BQ* XXXII, April 1988, No.6, pp. 260-274.
- 2 Even as momentum for a Union grew, it was felt necessary to defend denominationalism. A sermon on the subject was published in *The Baptist*, January 1880, pp.3-12 (the first of only two issues under that name, a stage in the evolution of the local, Association organ, *The Canterbury Evangelist*, into the national, Union publication the *NZ Baptist* between 1876 and 1880). See also the editorial on 'Udenominationalism', *NZ Baptist*, August 1881, p.104. Figure from an analysis in *NZ Baptist*, March 1887, pp.40-41. Baptists had the lowest ministerial ratio. Comparisons include: Church of England 1 in 901; Presbyterians 1 in 816; Congregationalists 1 in 458; Wesleyans 1 in 430. See the several entries regarding Timaru in the Minutes of the Union Committee, October 1883 - October 1884. NZ Baptist Historical Society Archives - Acc.no.B1/119. *NZ Baptist*, April 1888, pp.57-8. On White see R.T. Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962*, 1962, pp.248-50, 264-5. A useful discussion of the first constitution of the Baptist Union of New Zealand is found in P. Tonson, *A Handful of Grain*, Vol 1, Auckland, NZ Baptist Historical Society, 1982, pp.110-113.
- 7 One of the first decisions of the Union Committee (approved at the 1883 Conference) had been to reserve to itself the right to insist that Churches receiving grants confer with it over matters of pastorate and constitution - see Minutes of the Union Committee, 11 October, 1882 (f.2). The claiming of this right would later be cited by groups concerned at the increasing power of the Union executive body. The Union Committee minutes of 16 October 1885 (f.27) record a decision to make a grant to Timaru and two other Churches, payable 'as soon as the Union exchequer will permit'. By the publication of the Official Report in February 1886, unspecified 'conditions' were signalled. See *NZ Baptist* February 1886, p.3. At the Conference in 1886 delegates acknowledged and endorsed the restriction on promulgating Brown's views. Disquiet at this action prompted H. Olney of Christchurch, a trustee of the Union, to fire the first shot in a campaign for dominance in the Union executive - *NZ Baptist*, December 1886, pp.186-7.
- 8 The reading of the letter is not recorded in the minutes of the Conference but Thomas Spurgeon spoke in the debate and later referred to his use of his father's note at that gathering. See *NZ Baptist*, May 1888, p.74.
- 9 Compare this with the treatment in England of Samuel Cox: J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, 1994, pp.167-71.
- 10 There were cross-currents in this debate. P.H. Cornford published a series of articles on 'Immortality' in *NZ Baptist*, June-September 1887. Cornford, a respected senior minister, was President of the Union in 1887. George Aldridge, the editor of the *Bible Standard*, responded in a parallel series - *Bible Standard*, July-October

1887. Revd Charles Carter, a noted Baptist scholar and linguist, defended Cornford - *NZ Baptist* August 1887, pp.113-5. Brown responded to Carter, *Bible Standard*, September 1887, pp.129-131. Carter replied in *NZ Baptist*, October 1887, pp.146-149 to which Brown in turn responded, *Bible Standard*, November 1887, pp.161-164. Similar debates took place in British periodicals.
- 11 George Aldridge was a leader among the Churches of Christ in New Zealand and editor of the *Bible Standard*.
- 12 Minutes of the Conference of the Baptist Union of New Zealand, 17 November 1887 (ff.65-66), NZ Baptist Historical Society Archives Acc. no.B1/172.
- 13 *NZ Baptist*, December 1887, p.184.
- 14 *Bible Standard*, December 1887, pp.185-6.
- 15 See the report in and subsequent letters to the *Thames Evening Star*, reprinted in *NZ Baptist* January 1888, pp.5-6. The meetings were also reported in the *Bible Standard*, December 1887, p.191. Brown denied making the statement about money but the *Evening Star* stood by and indeed reinforced its report - See *NZ Baptist*, February 1888, pp.27-8; March 1888, p.43.
- 16 On Shackelford's brief tenure at Wanganui see A.K. Smith, Manuscript 'History of the Wanganui Baptist Church', held in the Carey Baptist College Library, pp.9-12.
- 17 *NZ Baptist*, December 1887, p.183.
- 18 *NZ Baptist*, March 1888, p.42.
- 19 *NZ Baptist*, March 1888, p.42.
- 20 This isolation was reinforced through 1888, as relevant columns were headed 'Mr C.C. Brown and the Union'. Here too was a double implication, as reports of the English Downgrade fallout were generally headed similarly 'Rev. C.H. Spurgeon and the Baptist Union'.
- 21 Letter, C.C. Brown to C.H. Spurgeon, 6 June 1888, NZ Baptist Historical Society, T. Spurgeon archive, Vol.1, f.69.
- 22 *NZ Baptist*, September 1888, p.136.
- 23 On North see S.L. Edgar, *Alfred North*, NZ Baptist Historical Society Monograph, 1955.
- 24 Minutes of the Mt Eden Baptist Church, 5 November 1888. NZ Baptist Historical Society Archives Acc.no.M13/a.
- 25 Minutes of the Conference, Tuesday 13 November 1888, pp.72-4.
- 26 Hopkins, 'Spurgeon's Opponents', pp.277-280.
- 27 *Bible Standard*, December 1887, p.191.
- 28 Minutes of the Conference, Tuesday 13 November 1888, pp.72.
- 29 *Bible Standard*, December 1888, p.178.
- 30 The Mt Eden Church members were invited to approve the resolutions, which they duly did - Minutes of the Mt Eden Baptist Church, 5 November 1888.
- 31 See the report in the *Timaru Herald*, 21 November 1888.
- 32 The destruction of the chapel on 10 November was notified in *NZ Baptist* December 1890, pp.184-5. In a letter to the editor Brown and his officers notified a 200 pound loss and sought financial assistance.
- 33 Minutes of the Union Committee, 15 November 1890 (f.71).
- 34 *NZ Baptist*, January 1891, pp.3-4.
- 35 Minutes of the Union Committee, 21 November 1891 (f.77).
- 36 See the reports in *NZ Baptist* April 1892, pp.51-2; May 1892, p.76; July 1892, pp.100-102.
- 37 *NZ Baptist*, October 1892, pp.158-9.
- 38 Minutes of the Conference, Tuesday 15 November 1892, (f.121) (the entry is mistakenly headed 'Tuesday Nov.16th').
- 39 Minutes of the Union Committee, 15 November 1892 (f.81).
- 40 Minutes of the Union Committee, 16 November 1882 (f.82).
- 41 Minutes of the Conference, 17 & 18 November 1892, (ff.123-6).
- 42 See my article on Birch's tenure at the Auckland Tabernacle, "Downgrade with a vengeance": New Light on a Tabernacle Controversy', *NZ Journal of Baptist Research*, Vol.2, October 1997, pp.79-96.
- 43 Minutes of the Union Committee, 17 November 1892 (f.83).
- 44 *NZ Baptist*, January 1892, p.9.
- 45 See *NZ Baptist*, December 1890, p.185 and July 1892, pp.102-3.
- 46 A full list of those voting for and against Brown's reinstatement is given in the Conference Minutes, 18 November 1892, (ff.125-6).
- 47 See the Minutes of the Union Committee, 15 November 1895 (f.117) and the brief obituary for Brown in *NZ Baptist*, February 1926, p.31.

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