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**Jesus in New Zealand  
1900-1940**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
History**

**at Massey University  
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New Zealand**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses pervasive ways in which New Zealanders thought about Jesus during the years from approximately 1900 to 1940. In particular, it considers ways that he appeared within discourse, contexts in which he was especially invoked, and ends for which he was employed. It examines Jesus as a religious icon, but also as a reflexive tool for examining the place of religion in New Zealand culture and society. In this sense, it addresses Jesus as a phenomenon of social and cultural history. The thesis draws on a wide range of sources and methodologies, and is organised thematically into chapters that highlight predominant images of Jesus and important contexts that helped shape them. It considers Jesus in the languages of doctrine and devotion, social reform, and for children. It further assesses images of Jesus' masculinity, and representations of him as an 'anti-Church' prophet.

The overarching argument is that Jesus constituted an increasingly important focal point in New Zealand religiosity during the period under investigation. Especially within Protestant Christianity, Jesus became a more important discursive focus and acquired new status as a source of authority. This movement reflected wider social and cultural shifts, particularly related to understandings of the nature of society and notions of personality. The increasingly Jesus-centred orientation of Protestant religiosity was fundamentally an attempt to modernise Christianity and extend its reach into the community. In particular, Jesus was invoked as the simple core of Christianity – the attractive essence of 'true religion'. Jesus-centred religiosity provided evidence of a changing social and cultural situation, demonstrating that religious language and ideals could be sensitive indicators of such shifts. The rise of Jesus as a focal point in religion was a response to change that reoriented Protestant Christianity in the process.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AJHR	<i>Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives</i>
ANZ	Archives New Zealand, Wellington
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
CC	<i>Church Chronicle</i>
DNZB	<i>Dictionary of New Zealand Biography</i>
ENZ	<i>Encyclopaedia of New Zealand</i>
EP	<i>Evening Post</i>
JRH	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
MAC	<i>Minutes of Annual Conference, Methodist Church of New Zealand</i>
MW	<i>Maoriland Worker</i>
NZB	<i>New Zealand Baptist</i>
NZH	<i>New Zealand Herald</i>
NZJH	<i>New Zealand Journal of History</i>
NZMBC Link	<i>New Zealand Methodist Bible Class Link</i>
NZMT	<i>New Zealand Methodist Times</i>
NZOYB	<i>New Zealand Official Year Book</i>
NZPD	<i>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</i>
NZ Tablet	<i>New Zealand Tablet</i>
ODT	<i>Otago Daily Times</i>
PGA	<i>Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand</i>
PGS	<i>Proceedings of the General Synod of the Church of the Province of New Zealand</i>
TS	<i>Truth Seeker</i>
YCU	<i>Yearbook of the Congregational Union of New Zealand</i>