

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

THE SOCIAL CRUSADER: JAMES GIBB AT THE  
AUSTRALASIAN PASTORAL FRONTIER, 1882-1935.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in History at Massey University.

Lawrence Harold Barber  
1975.

The Social Crusader: James Gibb at the Australasian  
Pastoral Frontier, 1882-1935

ABSTRACT

The phrase 'pastoral frontier' is generally used to identify the periphery of farm settlement; the advancing borderland between territory newly won by farmers and a region of untamed virgin land. This thesis is concerned with a different 'pastoral frontier', although related to the former. Using the term 'pastoral' as indicative of the ministrations of priests and ministers to their flocks, this 'pastoral frontier' is the ever changing border area where the Church penetrates society and society re-shapes the Church.

The key figure is James Gibb, who led the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand for over three decades; a Scot who came to Otago after a short ministry in Victoria, and a pastor who faced the 'pastoral frontier' for fifty-three years. Gibb was a church leader par excellence; founding father of a national Presbyterian Church, Moderator, pioneer of social services and founder of church schools. He was a social crusader who emphasised a social ethic and social redemption. His Scottish Presbyterian conviction that the Church was duty-bound to transform the state into a Christian commonwealth led him into a series of public campaigns and political encounters that had as their goal the making of a less sinful New Zealand.

This thesis argues that Gibb adapted the Social Gospel, the new social interpretation of Christianity emphasised by European, British and American theologians from the close of the nineteenth century, to the New Zealand 'pastoral frontier'. His central role in church affairs, and his placement as a campaigner and lobbyist in the political field, allow an assessment of his successes and failures as a social crusader to indicate the successes and failures of the New Zealand Protestant churches in their attempts to penetrate national life and mould society to their own design. The rise and fall of Gibb's social crusades reflect the rise and fall of the Social Gospel in New Zealand.

Gibb's 'pastoral frontier' was not static and during his Australasian ministry he planted his social crusading flag at three

frontiers:-

1. A Limited Frontier, 1882-1903.
2. An Expanded Frontier, 1903-1922.
3. A Contracted Frontier, 1923-1935.

1. A Limited Frontier, 1882-1903

This frontier was circumscribed by the narrow boundaries of Presbyterian interest and opportunity in Victoria and Otago. In the Presbyterian Church of Victoria Gibb found himself embroiled in a fierce conflict between theological revisionists and Calvinist Confessionalists. His ministry in Melbourne was dominated by the Charles Strong affair. In Otago he found himself in a provincial church planted by Free Church of Scotland ministers who lived in the mental climate of the Scottish Disruption of 1843. A provincial perspective, the rigid confessionalism of an imported theology, and attempts to impose Calvinist social controls over marriage, Sabbath observance, drinking and dancing, were the hall-marks of this Church's impact on society. Gibb's leadership of the Bible-in-Schools movement was prompted by a concern to make the state education system accept Biblical studies as a foundation for all other knowledge. Between 1886 (when he arrived in Otago) and 1902 Gibb and his Church were not entirely dominated by intra-mural concerns but they were mainly concerned with polishing their denominational badge and attaching it to others. Towards the close of this period a developing sense of national identity aided Gibb in creating the united Presbyterian Church of New Zealand yet even then some of his Otago supporters were more concerned with Presbyterian hegemony than with the challenge posed by the creation of a national church.

2. An Expanded Frontier, 1903-1922

The 'pastoral frontier' expanded dramatically from 1903. Gibb responded with a more self-conscious programme of nation building. He failed in his attempt to manufacture one national Protestant Evangelical church, incorporating the nation's Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists. He succeeded in planting a Presbyterian minister and agent in almost every settlement, in town and back-blocks, and broke with traditional Scottish Church polity in so doing, by creating a new order of ministers-home missionaries. This expanded frontier extended to the Pacific Islands and into China with Gibb leading petitions for British

control of the New Hebrides and attacking the opium trade to China. The Church still demanded the right to legislate national social control, and crusades in favour of prohibition and Bible-in-Schools grew in intensity and impact, with Gibb encouraging back-block ministers to rasp-off pioneer rough edges and polish colonial rough diamonds. The 1914-1918 war brought conflict within the Church as imperial patriotism and Christian principles met in tension. Consolidation of settlement and post-war despair and failure to return to 'normalcy' ended an era of self confidence.

### 3. A Contracted Frontier, 1923-1935

From 1923 the 'pastoral frontier' began to steadily contract. The 'crusades' - Bible-in-Schools, Prohibition, Disarmament, and a united Protestant Church - all failed. The Church's national impact was further weakened by her failure to prevent increasing economic and political polarization within society, her failure to convince an increasingly mobile and pleasure-seeking society, her failure to create a disciplined and coherent national Church, the decline in dynamic that followed the closing of the internal frontier, state acceptance of social service roles, the impact of Barthian theology, and her inability to hold back or accommodate the flood of secularism.

## Table of Contents

|   | page  |
|---|---|
| Abbreviations                           | iii   |
| Glossary                                | iv  |
| List of Illustrations                   | vii   |
| Introduction                            | 1   |
| <br><u>PART I</u>                       |   |
| <u>A Limited Frontier, 1882-1902</u>    |   |
| Chapter 1                               | Apprentice Inquisitor, 1882-1886 17   |
| Chapter 2                               | Into the Fire, 1886-1893 46   |
| Chapter 3                               | Steering the Ark, 1894-1902 79  |
| <br><u>PART II</u>                      |   |
| <u>An Expanded Frontier, 1903-1922</u>  |   |
| Chapter 4                               | Social Crusader, 1903-1913 118  |
| Chapter 5                               | The Grand Design, 1903-1913 162   |
| Chapter 6                               | The Christian Patriot's Dilemma, 1914-1922 193  |
| <br><u>PART III</u>                     |   |
| <u>A Contracted Frontier, 1923-1935</u> |   |
| Chapter 7                               | The Last Crusade, 1923-1929 224   |
| Chapter 8                               | The Black Frost of Barthianism, 1930-1935 253   |
| Conclusion                              | 285   |
| Appendix                                | 299   |
| Bibliography                            | 301   |
| Maps                                    | -   |
|   | Placement of home missionaries by the Presbyterian Church Extension Committee (Northern), 1906.               |
|   | Placement of home missionaries by the Home Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1913. |

# Abbreviations

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| AJHR                     | <u>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</u>                    |
| First Church Session     | Minutes of the Kirk Session of the First Church of Otago, Dunedin                    |
| <u>Free Lance</u>        | <u>The New Zealand Free Lance</u>  |
| <u>General Assembly</u>  | <u>Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand</u> |
| NZPD                     | <u>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</u>   |
| ODT                      | <u>Otago Daily Times</u>   |
| Presbytery of Dunedin    | Minutes of the Presbytery of Dunedin   |
| Presbytery of Wellington | Minutes of the Presbytery of Wellington  |
| St. John's Session       | Minutes of the Kirk Session of St. John's Church, Wellington                         |
| <u>Synod</u>             | <u>Proceedings of the Presbyterian Synod of Otago and Southland</u>                  |

NOTE: All correspondence, unless otherwise indicated, is from the Gibb Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

## Glossary

- Arminianism** The doctrine set forth by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and his followers. Arminianism rejects the deterministic logic of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and insists that Divine sovereignty is compatible with free-will in man. Arminius held that Christ died for all men and that each man, when confronted with the gospel, must exercise his free-will to accept or refuse Christ's offer of redemption.
- Classical Calvinism** A broader Calvinism than Scholastic Calvinism (q.v.) and one that attempts to hold in balance the full range of biblical teaching without the conclusive and comprehensive dogmatism of Scholastic Calvinism. The Classical Calvinist regards theology as a never-ending search for truths about God and man. In contrast, the Scholastic Calvinist affirms that the answers are already stated in the Church's Confessions of Faith and regards the Confessions as perfect summaries of Biblical doctrine.
- Confessionalist** One who holds that the official theological statement of his Church is a constitutional document that must be accepted in all parts by Church members on pain of ecclesiastical discipline.
- Declaratory Act** In 1879 the Scottish United Presbyterian Church passed an act relieving its office-bearers from their obligation to subscribe to every item of the Westminster Standards (q.v.). Similar acts were passed by most English-speaking Presbyterian Churches in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.



|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Evangelical Churches | Non-episcopal and anti-Romanist Protestant Churches that emphasise preaching above the sacraments and aim to awaken in their hearers a deeper personal religious experience.   |
| Higher Criticism     | The critical study of the literary sources and context of the Biblical documents. This term (in contradistinction to 'Lower' or textual criticism) came into vogue following the publication by W.R. Smith of <u>The Old Testament in the Jewish Church</u> , in 1881. |
| General Assembly     | The highest court within the Presbyterian ecclesiastical system. It consists of ministers and elders elected to represent the whole Church, over which it exercises supreme jurisdiction.  |
| Interim-Moderator    | A minister appointed by a Presbytery to administer the sacraments, provide regular preaching, exercise pastoral oversight, and chair the Kirk Session (q.v.) in the absence of a settled minister.   |
| Kirk Session         | The local court governing a Presbyterian parish. It is chaired by the parish minister and its members are the parish elders.   |
| Moderator            | The title bestowed upon the elected chairman of every Presbyterian court.  |
| Presbytery           | A district Church court comprised of ministers and representative elders from the parishes within its bounds.  |
| Preterition          | The abandonment to damnation of those not elected by divine decree to salvation.   |
| Scholastic Calvinism | The legalistic Calvinism of the seventeenth century Westminster Confession of Faith (q.v.)   |

and of those who subsequently have held the Westminster Standards (q.v.) to be immutable definitions of Presbyterian doctrine.

#### Social Gospel

A Protestant theological movement that sought to bring society as well as the individual into conformity with the teachings of Jesus. The movement was given impetus by a growing nineteenth century appreciation of the evils that attended industrialisation and urbanisation. It was inspired by the theology of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1899) and Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), its clearest exponent, held that the Kingdom of God could become an earthly reality to the degree that society was brought into harmony with the teaching and spirit of Christ.

#### Synod

A provincial ecclesiastical court. The Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland was governed by a synod.

#### Westminster Confession of Faith

The statement of belief drawn-up by an assembly of divines summoned to Westminster in 1643 to prepare a scheme to unify the churches of Britain.

#### Westminster Standards

Beside the Confession of Faith the Westminster Assembly also prepared a Form of Church Government, Directory for Public Worship, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Together these are known as the Westminster Standards.

List of Illustrations

|  | page |
|--|------|
| James Gibb, Presbyterian elder statesman, 1926.                        | viii |
| The new minister of the First Church of Otago, 1886.                   | 45   |
| Gibb in Moderator's robes, 1901.                                       | 76   |
| Gibb and the First Church Young Ladies' Bible Class, 1901.             | 77   |
| James Gibb and the Synod of Otago and Southland, 1901.                 | 78   |
| Three cartoons caricaturing Gibb's contest with Seddon, 1904.          | 123  |
| Cartoon. Seddon upsetting Gibb's Bible in Schools' barrow, 1904.       | 124  |
| Cartoon. Gibb and North attack the play 'The Girl from Rectors', 1910. | 160  |
| Cartoon. 'The Presbyterian Doctor', 1904.                              | 161  |
| Cartoon. The Wellington clergy, 1909.                                  | 192  |



James Gibb, Presbyterian elder statesman, 1926.