

# LINCOLN BAPTIST CHURCH, CANTERBURY, NEW ZEALAND

## - A HISTORY OF 140 YEARS (1876-2016)

### INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's past since European settlement may be presented as passing through three eras (Belich, 2001). The first was the period of *Progressive Colonisation*. Belich describes it as: "...the fastest form of societal reproduction the world has seen". The neo-British population of New Zealand grew from 2000 in 1840 to about half-a-million in 1882. They were "...optimistic, robust and dynamic, as well as ruthless", but the rapid growth had bubble characteristics and in the 1880s it burst so that the pace of change slowed dramatically<sup>1</sup>.

The second era was one of *Recolonisation*. Increasing independence of Britain was replaced by closer links, particularly of the protein industry built on exporting huge quantities of frozen meat, cheese and butter to Britain. Economic benefits ensued but were balanced by casualties in two world wars. Being collectively subordinate to Britain was balanced with individual superiority at rugby and in war. This second era lasted from the 1880s to 1973 when as Belich puts it: "...Mother Britain ran off and joined a Franco-German commune".

The third era Belich describes as *Decolonisation*, which began in the 1970s and continues to the present. This era has been facilitated by modern developments, such as the Jumbo jet, television, faxes, email, the internet and most recently social media, which have overcome the tyranny of distance and its consequence, isolation. Now Belich says is the epicentre of one of the greatest systemic changes in New Zealand history.

The history of Lincoln Baptist Church follows these eras. At the end of the era of *Progressive Colonisation* the church is established and goes through rapid growth and relative influence up to about 1910. Then follows a period of marking time which corresponds to the second era, which I have called the dormant years. That ends slightly later than Belich's second era, when the third phase begins with a renewal of the dynamism of the early church at Lincoln around 1980. The history which follows is organized around these three eras. It begins by setting the township of Lincoln in its colonial and migratory context, provincial Canterbury in Victorian New Zealand.

Then the focus shifts to the role individuals can have in furthering God's plans. The life of Thomas Avis Pannett, one of the first Baptists in Canterbury is recounted. His family's story is closely associated with the founding and development of the Baptist church in Canterbury and more specifically at Lincoln. Writing the history around one individual and his family is to give readers "...an easy to follow narrative thread"<sup>2</sup>, using original writings and recollections of the period whenever possible. The second era picks up the story after these initial years of the church. After an initial flurry of activity and growth, the second era is one of relative stagnation. Then the third era is marked by a relaunching of the church in 1980 from its near moribund situation.

Much of the initial period can be described from contemporary archive sources. The second era is not as well served by archive sources. No Minute books exist for the period and secondary sources have to be relied upon. It was also a period with only intermittent ministers and a lot of temporary preaching arrangements. During this period of dormancy the church was kept going by a small number of dedicated adherents. Then when the third era begins the structures are all in place for the revitalised church to be re-launched in a rapidly growing Lincoln community, with its own university, research institutions, and a potential world-wide impact. Sources for the third era are more complete, with surviving minute books, written accounts from former members of the church at the time of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, and oral accounts from current members. The author and his wife joined the church just after the re-launching and have lived through most of the current era. Throughout a social science strategy of triangulation is used. Explained simply this means that one mention or piece of evidence of something is only a possibility, two mentions or sources is a probability, and three mentions or sources is a relative certainty.

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1. Belich, James (2001) "Presenting a Past". Paper presented to the *Catching the Knowledge Wave Conference*, 1-3 August 2001, Auckland, p. 1.
  2. McAllister, Janet (2004) "The perils of Cornish church-going", *Listener*, 21 August 2004, pp. 44-45.