

‘As the Sunshine Dispers the Darkness of the Night’:

SETTLER PROTESTANT CHILDREN’S MISSIONARY MAGAZINES IN NEW ZEALAND c.1840–1940¹



IN 1909 THE NEW ZEALAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH launched a new children’s missionary magazine (*The Break of Day*). The inaugural editor, the Rev. James Aitken, immediately fostered an ongoing relationship with his young readers, and letters to the editor quickly became an enduring feature. When readers were asked what they thought of the title, one girl responded by writing that it meant that ‘as the sunshine dispers the darkness of the night, so Christianity means the spiritual Break of Day to the heathen’.² The magazine quickly established itself amongst Presbyterian children as a focal point for fundraising, as a tool for creating a sense of community, and as a controlled juvenile forum. This was epitomized in the somewhat emotionally fraught tale of a girl anguishing over her perceived fundraising responsibilities for the annual Christmas Gift project in South China:

One night I had been thinking about [how to fundraise] just before I went to sleep, and sure enough, I dreamt about it. I dreamt that I built Dr Kirk a hospital from foundation stone to tower, and that the work took years. At the end of the time I was rewarded by the noble sum of threepence. ... but then I went through a series of the most wonderful adventures, in which I was robbed and even kidnapped for the sake of that threepenny bit. When I at last reached [New Zealand] again, I was told that I was many years too late, and that the [*The Break of Day*] had long ago passed out of existence. Although none of these events really took place ... yet I expect you know that dreams are vividly realistic while they are being dreamt; so I hope you will accept my threepenny bit as having been really earned.³

Jeanine Graham noted in her 1991 Hocken Lecture that, irrespective of institutional connections, ‘[v]ery few children were devoid of contact with religion in some form or other’ in colonial New Zealand.⁴ Despite an important programmatic essay by Geoffrey Troughton in 2006,⁵ understanding this relationship between childhood and religion is still a work in progress.⁶ One important factor to consider is the material culture that shaped and supported juvenile religious identity, particularly the role of religious literature. This article focuses on the juvenile missionary magazine as one element of religious material culture. In so doing it adds another angle to wider discussions on print culture and colonialism, by thinking specifically about children’s contributions to ‘writing the empire from below’.⁷ The article argues that

while colonial New Zealand magazines were by no means unique or new – they readily adopted and adapted Western literary forms, materials and emphases – they assumed a local form and indicated that missions, children and adolescents were increasingly central to denominational priorities. However, they were complex literary productions that also need to be read and interpreted beyond their more immediate religious contexts. In addition they acted as a primary means by which settler youngsters encountered and perhaps internalized cultural difference. Therefore this article argues that these magazines embedded settler young folk in their own locale, simultaneously reinforcing British Protestant perceptions and discourses and providing a means by which they might actively or mentally engage with that wider world of difference. After considering the pertinent historiographical and contextual issues, this article uses representative examples (largely but not exclusively Presbyterian) to ask two leading questions: how did these magazines evolve? And how can we usefully read them, in terms of both their historical context and their function as historical sources for juvenile religion and for childhood history more broadly conceived?

Contextual Considerations

By the late nineteenth century, despite a slow start,⁸ juvenile periodical literature was a cheap and accessible literary form across the Anglo-American and European world and, in popular opinion, was often deemed to be more influential than books.⁹ Religious magazines took on greater significance with the growth of Protestant Sunday schools, acting as ‘inducements’ for regular Sunday school attendance and ‘as painless vehicles of spiritual and moral teaching’.¹⁰ Missionary magazines, as a subset of juvenile religious literature, were equally ubiquitous. They constituted part of the ‘vast’ body of ‘literature created for informing and instructing’ the ‘home front’ of Christian missions.¹¹ By the early 1900s they were normative in Western church circles. Delegates at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) argued that ‘a children’s magazine is (at least ideally) the most useful form of literature for children’; this was particularly true if they were of a high quality, regular, pedagogically useful and edited by someone with an ‘intimate human touch of a “personal” kind’ and who ‘writes in the first person direct to his [sic] readers’.¹²

Such literature is still only partially understood.¹³ Esther Breitenbach suggests, for the Scottish context, that juvenile missionary literature was qualitatively different from that geared at adult readers and needs to be framed more specifically within the Victorian and Edwardian ‘construction of childhood’.¹⁴ Furthermore, despite their historical ubiquity, missionary

periodicals can be viewed as ‘a boring medium, “covered in a pietistic haze”’. They may have been scoured for what they can provide, but ‘there has been little research undertaken on missionary periodicals as comprising a [distinctive] genre’.¹⁵ An emerging international interest in modern-era missionary periodical literature currently focuses on its role in shaping adults’ and children’s cultural or political attitudes.¹⁶

In the British context the term ‘genre’ has been usefully if sometimes uncritically applied to general nineteenth-century missionary literature,¹⁷ and is exemplified in the important work of Anna Johnston on the relationship between missionary writing and empire.¹⁸ More recently it has been used to theorize missionary periodicals as a specific subset of the much larger corpus of missionary literature. Employing Tzvetan Todorov’s notion of genre as being both historical and discursive, Hanna Acke argues that ‘genre’ can be used as ‘an analytical category’ that opens up discussion on periodicals’ historical significance in terms of their form, function, rhetorical structures and thematic content.¹⁹ This also serves to highlight their historical materiality and their role in ‘evoking emotional attachment’, providing ‘tools of identity and community building’, and acting as ‘sources of authoritative knowledge’. What emerged was the establishment of a ‘quite distinct genre of missionary periodicals’ whose properties ‘enabled missionary societies to inform, engage and unite people around the common cause of Christian missions abroad as well as at home’.²⁰ I would argue, further, that they also legitimately existed as complex historical sources in their own right. With respect to children, these magazines do at least two things. They provide entry points into historical constructions of religious and cultural knowledge. Furthermore they contribute to an understanding of how children’s lives were expressed through word and visual elements, and the degree to which their voices were given a place in colonial Protestant society. Therefore any meaningful hermeneutic needs to take into account both genre and source function and the inherent complexities of each.

Children’s missionary periodical literature is not a completely neglected element of this genre, though it is often considered within the broader contexts of literary form, of the adult world and of British imperialism.²¹ Yet Breitenbach’s notion of a qualitative difference between adult and juvenile forms highlights the need to differentiate more carefully within the genre. She identifies this difference, for example, in terms of a ‘heavy-handed moralising and sentimentality’²² that proliferated in Scottish juvenile missionary literature at least. However, the nuances may be more finely drawn than this. While missionary literature (as a genre) was a subset of a much broader body of children’s religious literature, it can be differentiated in at least one important

way. The case of the London Missionary Society (LMS) *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (1844)²³ helpfully elaborates this distinction.²⁴ It resembled popular literature through its availability, accessible writing style, morality stories and 'informative articles on natural history and modern technology'.²⁵ Michelle Elleray argues that its innovation lay in the ways that children were able to actively relate to their world as reader-participants through the text, especially as fundraisers for the LMS mission ship *John Williams*. This early magazine therefore signalled a sea change in that it 'differs from other contemporary religious publications for children, in the relationship between reader and text, and in turn the relationship between the child and the child's world. [As such it] encourages a participatory relationship, repeatedly invoking the child's [economic and spiritual] agency.'²⁶ In the context of other Victorian children's juvenile or moral literature²⁷ this formed a 'radical break'. Children progressively took on the unprecedented role of 'an active agent' and adopted a 'dialogic relationship with his or her world'. Furthermore, while such magazines 'provided a circumscribed arena in which children are understood to have agency, and while the goal of the child's philanthropic gesture is determined by adults, the assumption of philanthropic agency demonstrates a cultural shift that attributes the child with the ability to enact meaningful change in his or her world'.²⁸

Elleray's work helps to elaborate what is distinctive about any hypothesized genre of juvenile missionary literature. On a broader front, her contention also resonates with the nature of children's missionary periodical literature as it emerged from the late nineteenth century in colonial contexts like New Zealand. This genre of literature acted as an enduring and durable product that continued to appeal to children and young people in religious contexts over many decades and in vastly different settings, while at the same time adapting to local needs and expressions.

Imported, Adopted and Adapted

In the first place, how did these magazines for settler children evolve from the mid-nineteenth century onwards? As well as physically carrying or importing British magazines, British Protestants brought to New Zealand the knowledge of what was available at home. Over subsequent decades they also began to produce and subscribe to their own periodical literature in their own colonial locales. Missionary magazines emerged within two decades of the renewed Protestant missionary interest from the 1790s, spurred on by growing public demand for more popularized forms of information. In terms of Scottish connections, this interest was also partly fuelled by the evangelical energy still flowing from the 1843 Disruption and

the subsequent creation of the outward-looking and activist Free Church of Scotland.²⁹ This did not occur in a religious, cultural or mental vacuum. Early to mid-nineteenth-century European immigration and colonization coincided with the energetic production of religious periodicals in Britain, Europe and North America.³⁰ In turn these were part of a wider penchant for periodical reading that reflected ‘an imperial textual field in motion’, an ‘existing swirl’ of British and ‘colonially produced magazines’ circulating around the British Empire.³¹ Periodicals in one imperial location routinely cut and pasted from those of other locations, acting as a kind of ‘imperial textual commons’³² that partially democratized information and writing. Therefore, for the New Zealand colonial setting, a useful approach to juvenile missionary literature is to think in terms of importation, adoption and adaptation; these are chronologically synchronous categories that indicate the evolving nature of the genre.

a) Mid- to Late Nineteenth Century Local Importations and Adoptions

Dedicated juvenile magazines began to appear in the 1840s as British children and young people emerged as a strategic market for missionary publicity and support in the context of religious institutionalization.³³ This was also part of a general trend for missionary societies and denominations to provide ‘more specialized titles of greater or lesser sophistication’.³⁴ In Britain the LMS *Juvenile Missionary Magazine* (1844) was joined by publications like the Anglican *Church Missionary Juvenile Instructor* (1842), the Wesleyan *Juvenile Offering* (1844), the Baptist *Juvenile Missionary Herald* (1845), the Free Church of Scotland *Children’s Missionary Record* (1846) and the Church of Scotland’s *Juvenile Missionary Record and Sabbath Scholar’s Magazine* (1849). They were initially small, simple and text-dominated; changing technology allowed the progressive introduction of illustrations and photographs. British juvenile magazines quickly reached impressive distribution figures. The *Juvenile Missionary Herald* had an initial circulation of 40,000 copies, and other magazines reached as high as 80,000 over subsequent decades.³⁵ The *Children’s Missionary Record* went from an initial circulation of 32,000 copies in 1846 to 76,000 by 1881. In the Scottish context, up to a third of Presbyterian households received various missionary periodicals by the early 1900s.³⁶ Typically they focused on personal religion and the roles that children could play in practical missionary support. Tables of Sunday-school giving were commonplace, as was the sentiment that ‘God can make use of a little child’, just like a small tool in the hands of a master craftsman whose mind is ‘made, and kept, and used by the great God’.³⁷ All of this was familiar to early settlers in New Zealand.

Three observations are pertinent to the emergence of settler children's periodical material up to 1900. First, despite a lack of direct evidence, British magazines were imported and subscribed to by denominations on behalf of their children and young people. In 1881 the Southland and Otago Presbyterian Synod circulated among its Sunday schools discounted copies of magazines like *Good News*, the *Children's Missionary Record* and *Band of Hope*. By 1883 seven juvenile magazines were regularly subscribed to, of which five were British.³⁸ These materials were doubly useful, as private reading matter and as convenient pedagogical resources. In turn they reflected a concerted effort to provide and engage children with religious literature. Sunday school libraries became important community resources for colonial youngsters and families, with sizeable collections that were 'voraciously' and 'extensively' read by the 1880s.³⁹ Juvenile periodicals and books thus provided literary resources to meet the Church's concern that 'the wants of children are not all earthly'.⁴⁰

Second, at the same time locally produced material appeared in a limited form. There were no dedicated children's missionary magazines until after 1900, except for the Presbyterian *New Zealand Missionary Record* [NZMR], 1882–1885. Children and young people were catered for mostly through specific children's or missionary columns in existing denominational literature. The Salvation Army's broadsheet-sized *The Young Soldier Official Gazette of the Junior Soldiers in Australasia* (1892) may have been one of the earliest general children's religious periodicals, which also carried more specific missionary-focused articles and illustrations for local readers. The fragility of the NZMR, overdependent on an individual editor's enthusiasm and with a shaky subscription base, was perhaps indicative of why locally produced magazines did not readily appear before 1900. For some denominations in New Zealand and other colonial settings like Canada, for whom missionary involvement was often still linked to metropole priorities, there were well-established British children's magazines incorporating colonial church news, which made replication financially redundant. Colonial Anglicans, for example, readily subscribed to the *Church Missionary Gleaner*, the *Juvenile Instructor* and *The Children's World*.⁴¹

Third, it was equally obvious that editors considered it strategic to capture children's interest and that the appearance of children's missionary material was linked to particular moments of denominational missionary energy. Missionary strategists were acutely aware that they needed to advertise their cause regularly and prominently and that periodical literature was the best investment for a good economic and spiritual return. In promoting the new bimonthly *Missionary Messenger* broadsheet supplement of the

monthly *New Zealand Baptist* (NZB) in June 1886, the Rev. Harry Driver enthusiastically argued '[i]t will be our aim to supply fuel for the heart flames by the agency of our Messenger, so that the fires of our missionary zeal may burn briskly and brightly'.⁴² Following the establishment of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society (1886),⁴³ children's articles in the NZB very quickly focused on missionary topics to start fostering longer-term interest and support. The same was true of the Presbyterian *Evangelist* broadsheet newspaper from 1869, coinciding with the initiation of national Presbyterian missions in the New Hebrides, and of the smaller A5-sized Auckland Anglican diocese magazine *The Southern Cross Log* from 1895, when greater colonial support was sought for the Melanesian Mission's work in the Solomon Islands. Mission boat visits from the south-west Pacific helped to make these textual appeals more real, with children visiting boats in port or taking an exciting short ride out to sea.⁴⁴

While this locally produced material differed in format from its British progenitors, it readily adopted the responsive-activist mentality first indicated in the LMS magazine of 1844. Melanesian Bishop Cecil Wilson represented many when he optimistically prompted Anglican children in 1900 to see their potential as fundraisers for a new missionary boat to ply the waters between New Zealand, Norfolk Island and the Solomons. He wrote that a new *Southern Cross* would 'cost nearly £15,000', which 'sounds a great deal, but it is not really very much if it comes from a very great many people. This is what I should like to be done: – Let the children buy the ship with hundreds and thousands of sixpences, and then let the ship be theirs.'⁴⁵ This type of message was replicated in other colonial religious periodical literature of that era.

The short-lived NZMR (1882–1885) reflected the international genre and signalled the way ahead for locally produced magazines.⁴⁶ It was probably the only locally produced juvenile missionary periodical prior to 1900. It was produced primarily for a southern readership of Sunday school children and teachers. The *Otago Daily Times* remarked on its content 'written in plain, homely language', noted that at '12 pages, no one can grumble at the price of one penny', and wished it 'a long life of usefulness'.⁴⁷ It was A5 in size, 14 pages in length, and dominated by large chunks of print text as well as black-and-white engravings. It adopted the familiar form of the missionary magazine and through its content linked Otago and Southland children into a triangular relationship with the Anglo-British heartland of missionary endeavour, with the South Pacific in particular and with their own unique setting in the colony itself. The editor, the Rev. C. Stuart Ross, was an Australian Presbyterian minister in Dunedin, who also had links with LMS

missionaries in Melanesia. The magazine sought both to bolster Presbyterian missionary interests and to foster broader juvenile interest. Primarily it transmitted information rather than seeking juvenile interaction, but the latter was not entirely absent. It communicated missionary interest through letters from missionaries and indigenous Christians; serialized stories of exemplary Christian characters from mission contexts (both indigenous and European); and essays on the geography, history and cultures of the south-west Pacific in particular. A quarter of its content comprised material of a more general didactic or moral nature.⁴⁸

Ross wanted to foster practical juvenile support for particular projects, but this did not dominate. He also directed juvenile attention to the domestic scene, where Presbyterian missionary work amongst Māori had been episodic at best.⁴⁹ Ross sought to rouse Presbyterian interest in further missionary work amongst southern Māori – to little avail at that stage. At the same time, the material roamed more widely than just things ‘Presbyterian’: children learnt about colonial geography and about the early missionary work of other Protestant denominations in New Zealand, and were presented with a wide range of exemplary Western and non-Western Christians. Thus the NZMR was significant in that through its adoption of the familiar missionary magazine format it focused children’s attention on their own corner of the world – the south-west Pacific – to promote to them the virtues of being educated about and actively involved in both their local and wider colonial settings.

b) Early Twentieth-Century Local Adaptations

More significant adaptations occurred from 1900 onwards with the emergence of dedicated children’s magazines. This coincided with an upsurge in locally produced reading materials aimed at New Zealand primary school pupils, most notably the Whitcombe and Tombs *Imperial Readers* (1897) and *Pacific Readers* (1911) series and, in 1907, the first issues of the highly influential *School Journal*,⁵⁰ a development replicated in the same decades across many Australian states.⁵¹ Its magazine format may have prompted Church authorities to initiate similar material of their own. In this respect the simultaneous emergence of local school and religious reading materials was not clearly linked, but it did indicate the changing educational and cultural milieu of colonial society and it accentuated the profile of children and young people as a niche market for locally produced reading materials.

This development was linked more explicitly to an increase in denominational missionary initiatives seeking to engage the support of all ages of churchgoers. Equally it reflected the expansion of Protestant educational and social programmes for children and adolescents⁵² and

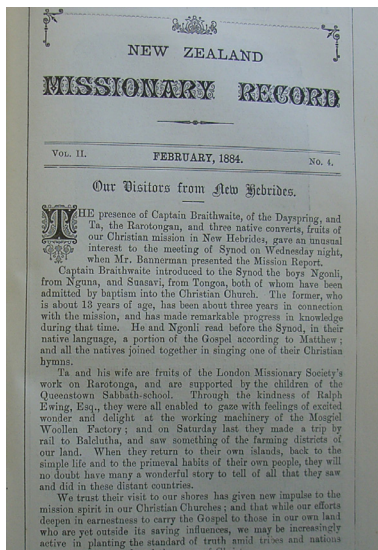


Figure 1: Representative New Zealand Children's Missionary Magazine Covers, 1884–1922

Source: *New Zealand Missionary Record* and *Break of Day*, Presbyterian Research Centre, Dunedin; *Young Soldier*, New Zealand Salvation Army Heritage Centre and Archives, Upper Hutt; *Lotu*, Methodist Church of New Zealand Archives Collection, Christchurch. Used with permission.

indicated the ways in which juvenile and missionary ventures were intrinsic to the consolidation of denominational identity within colonial society. The rate of progress, however, was slow and uneven. Baptists introduced *The Young Folks Missionary Messenger* as a broadsheet insert in 1904, Presbyterians inaugurated *The Break of Day* in 1909 and Methodists began their own similar juvenile magazine *The Lotu* in 1922 to coincide with taking on responsibility for the Solomon Islands.⁵³ Presbyterian teenage girls also had dedicated pages in the newly initiated *PWMU Harvest Field* (1906), a magazine that lay at the heart of Presbyterian women's missionary support and energies.⁵⁴ Anglicans continued to cater for young readers through various diocesan newspapers and British-sourced magazines. Even after the formation of the national Anglican Board of Missions in 1922, Anglican children never had their own distinctive or locally produced magazine.

Subscription statistics are notoriously haphazard but they do indicate that these magazines reached sizeable audiences. The Baptist *Young Folks Missionary Messenger* increased modestly from an initial printing of just under 2000 copies in 1904 to 3088 by 1911.⁵⁵ Within three months of its inauguration, 6000 copies of the *The Lotu* were being printed and more were on order from Sunday schools.⁵⁶ While figures for *The Break of Day* distribution are sporadic, monthly subscriptions increased from just over 5000 in 1909 to 9000 by 1921.⁵⁷ As the Baptist example indicates, progress was variable and the product still fragile. While Baptist reports after 1911 lack statistics, they indicate that magazine uptake was a constant concern and struggle. Wartime exigencies forced the bimonthly alternation of adult and junior *Missionary Messengers*, and constrained the number of pages per issue. By 1924 both had been reintegrated back into the NZB for financial efficiency.⁵⁸

Comprehensive and regular coverage was the overall aim, but in reality this fell short of the mark. In this regard the Presbyterian Church was willing, in 1922, to print and distribute *The Break of Day* in order to maintain a high profile for missions, but did so 'at a considerable loss'.⁵⁹ That it was striking the right note with its readers was reflected in its popularity with adults and children alike, and by one boy's enthusiastic comment that the editor 'knows how to write to boys'.⁶⁰ On Aitken's retirement in 1935, the General Assembly noted the longer-term impact of the magazine, noting that it 'paved the way for not a few of our girls and boys into the direct service of the Church'.⁶¹ However, profile and consumption were two very different things. In 1919 children and young people at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church were still exhorted to subscribe to 'this splendid little missionary Magazine'.⁶² This concern was repeated ad nauseam in other denominations over many years. Sustained engaged readership could never be assumed.

The Break of Day is a representative example of how these new magazines historically evolved. It was a 14-page A5 booklet, with a distinctive coloured cover, often incorporating a photograph from one of the Church's mission fields, and complementing text and photographs. It was consistently priced at one penny an issue from 1909 until at least the 1930s, and almost without exception was produced monthly and distributed through individual and institutional subscriptions. In these respects, as well as in its content, *The Break of Day* was most like its later Methodist counterpart *The Lotu* and very similar to contemporary magazines produced for children by both the United Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland. While readership details are lacking, *The Break of Day* went where there were Sunday schools. This included the mission communities amongst North Island Māori, where Presbyterian deaconesses ran Sunday schools and Busy Bee groups.

It was a much more 'Presbyterian' magazine than the earlier NZMR. Its broad two-fold purpose was summed up well in the welcoming words of the Presbyterian Moderator in 1909:

Now, in this paper we shall write not only about the good and great men and women of the olden time. We shall try to tell you about God's work in the world to-day. ... Then there is our own beautiful New Zealand, one of the most favoured countries in the world. We want to tell you about the Maoris [sic], and show you how you may help them. ...

This is what we are going to do for you through this little paper. Now, will you do your part? Unless you do we shall fail utterly. Will you read carefully what we write? Will you think about our missionaries and the boys and girls at home and abroad who know nothing of the love of Jesus? Above all, will you choose Christ to be your Master, and resolve by His grace to work and pray for the extension of His kingdom in NZ and in the far lands across the sea [?]⁶³

Its prime directive focused on fostering children's support for the various Presbyterian Church projects, which were now growing in both scale and diversity. To these purposes each issue often focused on one or more of the Church's mission 'fields': home mission, Māori Mission, New Hebrides, southern China or northern India. This emphasis was one of many ways by which the Church sought to build juvenile denominational support and identity through creating a sense of familial belonging or of shared emotional community.⁶⁴ One feature that became commonplace, for example, was the regular inclusion of stories and photographs of other children, especially those of the Presbyterian missionaries abroad or of mission children in New Zealand or overseas, all of whom readers might be expected to relate to, given their similar age or stage in life. In a similar fashion children were introduced regularly to the Church's missionaries. While their lives were written in ways that would resonate for children, they were presented as normal people working in somewhat exotic or abnormal circumstances. Rather than creating

missionary celebrities, this cemented their names and faces in children’s memories and offered a possible future vocational pathway.

Overall, the editor drew children to the missionary cause through a convivial, thoughtful and engaging approach. Perhaps anticipating the advice of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, James Aitken wrote to children like a kindly uncle having a warm fireside chat with them.⁶⁵ His writing style and choice of content were direct and inclusive, creating a sense that each reader was his primary focus. Style and content together encouraged readers to feel strategically involved, not just in supporting missions but in the very act of missions. Hence they were intellectually, emotionally and practically involved, as well as supported in their own ongoing spiritual and moral development. This set of sentiments and expectations was neatly captured in the conclusion of an essay by ten-year-old Isabella Munro, ‘Why I should like to be a Missionary’. She wrote confidently and yet circumspectly that ‘I may not be able to go as a missionary to foreign lands, but I can do missionary work wherever I am. Every boy and girl can love God and try at all times to do right. If we do so, then a knowledge of God and His goodness shall “spread from pole to pole”.’⁶⁶ We might legitimately question how far Isabella’s view was simply the one that Aitken chose, from amongst many, because it iterated his own view or editorial position. However, while the content of the physical magazine changed over time – in response to Church priorities, new print technologies or economic stringencies – Isabella’s summation spoke well for several generations of *The Break of Day* and other magazine readers.

Contextual Readings of Juvenile Missionary Magazines

It is perhaps a simple task to read and interpret the content of these magazines at an impressionistic level; or to dismiss them as being anachronistic with respect to the worlds of modern children and young people; or equally to dismiss them for being racially paternalistic and reductionist in terms of indigenous cultures. They are undeniably all of these things. Yet these magazines also constitute a historically embedded literary genre and exist as highly complex historical sources, with implications for their interpretation. On the one hand they need to be contextually approached ‘as artifacts encapsulating historical and political moments’ and read as ‘documents that were contingent upon common historical bases as well as shared imagined futures which are bound up in the “cultural semantics of a political moment”’. As such they are ‘infused with the religious semantics of a political moment’ and ‘need to be taken as seriously’ on their own terms.⁶⁷ On the other hand, they are not passive ‘artifacts’; they potentially gave children agency and

voice, if we accept Elleray's argument that they represented a significant 'cultural shift' in conceiving children's public religious life.⁶⁸ A meaningful reading of children's missionary magazines thus becomes potentially complex and complicated, but by no means impossible.

The notion of 'cultural and religious semantics' is important to consider because the two were intricately related. The plain purpose or function of these magazines was religious. As such, they tapped into a wider set of global networks that increasingly linked and defined the worlds of Protestant adults and juveniles by the late nineteenth century.⁶⁹ While shaped by colonial religious priorities and produced for local consumption, these magazines mirrored international literature and therefore imbricated settler juveniles within a religious discourse that was both transnational and Eurocentric. There were other ways, however, in which they could function for both adults and juvenile readers.⁷⁰

First, the religious function was the primary motive for their production. The emphasis was on Christianity in action. As Salvation Army children read in 1892, '[o]ur first and foremost aim is neither to amuse or instruct ... but to help in making every boy and girl who reads our pages a true fighting soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ'.⁷¹ There was a long thread of continuity, for example, between the English Baptist sentiment in 1845 that Christian children would read about missions and 'listen to it' (that is, act upon it), and the hope expressed in *The Break of Day* that young Presbyterians would 'choose Christ to be [their] Master, and resolve by His grace to work and pray for the extension of His kingdom in NZ [sic] and in the far lands across the sea'.⁷²

Second, these magazines also played an important role in helping to shape denominational identity around particular missionary sites, projects and personnel. This was truer from the early 1900s onwards and differentiates these publications from their British or American equivalents. That missionaries became household names in their respective denominations or churches was due partly to the repeated coverage of their lives and work via photographs, stories and letters in juvenile magazines. The same was true for the places in which they lived, and for the indigenous Christians who were associated with their work. Magazines drew religiously embedded children into a complex mental web of space, place and people. In so doing they reinforced a sense of both localness (New Zealand and the south-west Pacific) and globalness in terms of juvenile religious identity and responsibility.

Third, there was also a strongly educative element. For example, the NZMR's focus in the 1880s – on accounts of geography, history and culture – potentially helped to fill a general educational gap in the late nineteenth

century, when national compulsory schooling was still the ideal rather than the reality,⁷³ and when comprehensive resourcing of primary schools was still incomplete.⁷⁴ This was a less obvious component of later magazines after 1900. At the same time there were other pedagogical priorities. The NZMR deliberately doubled as both a children's magazine and a resource for Sunday school teachers. Later magazines carried material that could readily be used by Sunday school and Bible class teachers to teach missionary elements of religious curricula. As such they complemented the increasingly comprehensive, graded and locally produced pedagogical materials produced for Protestant Sunday schools by the 1920s. They also served to broaden the horizons of settler children beyond the confines of their colonial contexts. This stretched from a speech by the Rev. Rutherford Waddell, reported verbatim in the NZMR in 1884, on the necessity for colonial settler children to be broad-minded citizens with 'wide sympathies', to the post-World War I observation by James Aitken that 'the people of every race have some special gift of their own to bring into God's Kingdom, and we can all of us learn something from one another'.⁷⁵ By the interwar years New Zealand magazines and other pedagogical materials often carried internationalist messages, as well as those that were more culturally embedded in the British Empire.⁷⁶ This reflected trends in their post-war overseas counterparts that sought to foster world understanding and friendship.

Set against these more explicitly obvious purposes, juvenile missionary magazines also functioned in ways not so clearly intended. In the first instance, places and peoples otherwise thought of as exotic were potentially normalized through a process of familiarization, amplified by the visual materials that children often encountered. At the same time, these places and peoples tended to be viewed as extensions of the New Zealand or British homelands. In these respects New Zealand Protestant children often betrayed their own culture-bounded view of life through magazine pages. The extent to which this may have been so was amply demonstrated in letters from Methodist children to their Solomon Island counterparts, printed in *The Lotu* in 1928. Here genuine inquisitiveness and naivety were entwined: Norah Budd from the Hokianga cheerfully wrote about a 'very pretty dress' she was going to wear to a concert; Douglas Milligan of Christchurch shared photos of motor cars and talked about the cold weather; and Jean Drew in Masterton assumed that Solomon Island children 'must love singing' and talked somewhat glibly of the 'lovely little brown boy' supported by her Bible class.⁷⁷ Perhaps these children simply could not imagine what life might be like for others outside of their physical ambit, and so focused on those elements that they assumed to be common to all children. Yet it was culturally framed, as was the editorial

decision to print these letters and thus potentially compound stereotypes of how children were globally both the same yet different.

Furthermore, these magazines conveyed culturally ambiguous messages, through a conflation of religious and imperial or Eurocentric rhetoric. Missionary magazines, alongside the increasing deployment of school texts and periodicals, helped to socialize children ‘through the rhetoric of British Protestant superiority’ which itself was ‘predicated on the idea that the colonies were British societies *par excellence*’.⁷⁸ The *School Journal*, in particular, was stridently imperial in tone until the late 1920s.⁷⁹ In this respect these magazines discursively reinforced a brand of cultural colonization, although any such themes were often tempered by messages that framed Christian identity and allegiances in specifically religious terms, with Christianity taking priority over nation or empire.

The more I work with these magazines the less confident I am to categorically evaluate this cultural ambiguity, and the more questions I have. There were discernible changes over time. Late nineteenth-century material clearly accentuated this mix of British imperial or national confidence and Christian beliefs. Although in theory settler and indigenous Christians were all equal, there remained a sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’ that was unavoidably defined by race and location. Yet in the early material exemplars of juvenile faith were drawn equally from ‘them’ and ‘us’. In the NZMR such exemplars included a young Australian boy, Herbert Kingsley, and a New Guinean convert named Piri.⁸⁰ This duality remained in later magazines, but was tempered after 1918 by more sober statements. Aitken, for example, cautioned children that: ‘[n]ot many years ago we thought of the white races as Christian, and the coloured peoples as heathen, or at least non-Christian. But we know to-day that the old ways of thinking need much correction. All our white people are not Christians, and most of us who are called Christians need to grow much more like Christ our Master to be worthy of His name.’⁸¹ Likewise, there was a strong seam of differentiation in the rhetoric around Māori in the pages of *The Break of Day*, which was also reflected in other magazines like *The Lotu*. In particular, tropes of difference, disadvantage and Christian progress were dominant in depictions of Māori life or in accounts of the work of the Presbyterian Māori Mission amongst Tūhoe and in the central North Island. Again, however, Māori Christians were also presented as exemplars for children, and the notion of ‘them’ and ‘us’ in the New Zealand context also extended to so-called benighted urban and far-flung rural fringe Pākehā.⁸² Therefore the ‘religious semantics’ of these magazines act as a kind of refracting lens through which to read the ‘cultural semantics’. Both are historically embedded, in ways that accentuate the importance of

acknowledging the religious elements and the ways in which any religious expression is inevitably culture-bound.

Finally we return to the notion of interactivity, agency and sources. There are as yet many unanswered questions with respect to how these magazines were perceived, read, used and regarded by children and young people. Children as readers are not the primary focus of this article and indeed cannot easily be, given that the only evidence of their reading is through the printed fragments of their letters, which in turn were selectively edited. Typically, 'historical readers of all ages are notoriously difficult to study because evidence of their interactions with texts is ephemeral and often absent from the historical record'. Therefore 'studying child readers' is 'difficult for both practical and theoretical reasons'.⁸³ While this has been addressed, for example, for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, it remains to be done properly for New Zealand, where even the primary evidence on literacy levels amongst colonial school children is ambiguous at best.⁸⁴ Therefore I continue to assume that prolonged distribution, reading and exposure must have had an impact in terms of shaping values and understanding; but the nature of that impact is still unclear. Jeffrey Richard's notion that nineteenth-century juvenile popular fiction left a 'sediment in the mind' of its consumers, which would have required a 'conscious intellectual effort to erase', continues to serve as a good common-sense working hypothesis.⁸⁵

However, these magazines do offer their own internal evidence by way of the interaction between editors and children through letters, essays, poems, reports and annual participation in fundraising ventures. By way of conclusion, this evidence suggests at least two useful lines of further enquiry. First, these magazines potentially act as intrinsically important and valuable written and visual sources for better understanding the religious lives of colonial Protestant children and the prevailing discourses or institutions that shaped them. Furthermore, they are often the only place in which many of these details are still to be found, and we are grateful to archivists who have recognized their value and sought to deliberately curate them. In *The Break of Day* and *The Lotu*, for example, the originals of the many and varied photographs no longer exist, thus doubling the value of the extant magazine copies in archival storage. While not unique, these sources also complement others that are important for excavating the lives of colonial children and young people, paralleling such sources as 'children's letters to newspapers; personal family correspondence; sketches and photographs; schoolwork-related poems, essays and other exercises' as well as 'oral traditions, music and games'.⁸⁶ As the recent compilation of letters to Dot in the *Otago Witness*⁸⁷ indicates, there is a wealth of possibilities to be mined in such sources.⁸⁸

Second, they help us to advance what Jeanine Graham rightly notes as ‘the more difficult goal of discerning the subjective experience of children, the child’s voice’.⁸⁹ Letters to the editor and accounts of fundraising in *The Break of Day*, for example, provide opportunities to read against the grain in order to reconstruct impressions of family life, children’s emotions and recreation, and how children lived in early twentieth-century rural and urban New Zealand. In these pages we find continued and sustained evidence of the agency and interactivity noted by Michelle Elleray in the LMS magazines of the 1840s, editorial policy or redaction notwithstanding.

Nowhere is this better identified than in the annual Christmas Gift fund projects run by *The Break of Day*. This was not a unique type of activity. Money-raising ventures run by magazines to engage children’s support of missionary ships were commonplace, as was the New Zealand Baptist practice of focusing children’s energies through specific projects like missionary pence associations and houseboat share certificates for Indian missions.⁹⁰ What was unique was the way in which this project became an enduring institution sustained largely through the life of the magazine itself. Beginning in 1909, a specific project was identified each year and then presented to readers as a challenge to raise money by saving up their threepenny bits and by ever-inventive moneymaking ventures (Table 1). *The Break of Day* gives ample annual evidence of children typically digging gardens, doing housework, collecting bottles, baking, child-minding or going without things that they liked. It was not always straightforward: Gordon earned his money by sitting still for an hour, and Jane ended up with nothing due to finding other causes to support, losing her money or giving it to her mother to buy groceries for the family.⁹¹ Over the years the editors needed to continually explain or remind their readers of the idea and the particular project at hand. But as the figures indicate, the amount given annually increased or was sustained, despite times of difficulty. Between 1909 and 1940 a total of £8457 was collected for church projects, with the median annual amount increasing from £83 in the 1910s to £353 in the 1930s.⁹² This was not huge, considering national Presbyterian Sunday school giving for missions varied between £2000 and £3000 per annum by the 1920s.⁹³ It was still a large sum of money and represented a significant transgenerational grouping of Presbyterian children committed to missionary support through sustained effort, energy and ingenuity extra to regular commitments.

Here, in conclusion, was a gathered community of children and young people who identified with the cause, enjoyed the involvement and, significantly, saw and trusted the magazine as a public forum. This extended well beyond the annual fundraising to include letters and reports from the

myriad Busy Bee groups and Sunday schools around the country, and the individuals who simply wanted to contribute something that they had written or an idea that they wanted to air. Attenuated geography, physical isolation and potentially slow communication were all transcended or eclipsed by magazines like this, which were as effective a form of juvenile social media (in their times) as Facebook is today. It was a social medium ostensibly controlled by adults and which was directed along lines that specifically emphasized denominational priorities. Just as M.O. Grenby notes for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, however, such literature might be produced by adults but it 'was being purchased and read' avidly by juvenile readers.⁹⁴ We cannot categorically divine how children used this medium beyond the terms of the text itself. What we do find is that children were accepted, heard and responded to by adults largely on their own terms, and we have evidence of how children responded to what they read as historical agents. As a colonially situated version of a genre, then, New Zealand juvenile missionary magazines simultaneously evoked a sense of 'emotional attachment', activated a sense of 'identity and community building' and acted as a source of 'authoritative knowledge'.⁹⁵ This is significant for our understanding of children's experience of and interaction with institutional or public religion. In turn these functionally religious sources provide us with another lens by which to perceive and appreciate the experiences and lives of colonial children more broadly, irrespective of the questions that remain yet to be explored or answered.

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Year / Project	Location	Amount	Year / Project	Location	Amount
1909 Ko T'ong hospital	South China	£32 2s	1925 Kharar High School	North India	£303 13 4
1910 Shahabad hospital bed	North India	£45	1926 Presbyterian orphanages	New Zealand	£283 14 8
1911 Ambrym hospital buildings	New Hebrides	£64 10s	1927 Indian children in Jagadhri and Kharar	North India	£290 0 0
1912 NZ Presbyterian orphanages	New Zealand	£79	1928 Dispensary/hospital at Te Teko	Māori Mission	£278 17 9
1913 Sister Alison & Māori Mission	Māori Mission	£60	1929 Building mission station on Ambrym	New Hebrides	£310 1 2
1914 Dr Bowie microscope	New Hebrides	£82 12 6	1930 Kong Chuen hospital infrastructure and maintenance	South China	£428 15 5
1915 Indian wells	North India	£105 13 6	1931 School for India mission	North India	£313 18 8
1916 China school room	South China	£106	1932 Reporoa church building	Māori Mission	£327 10 5
1917 Alice Henderson boys' work	North India	£155 18 7	1933 Kong Chuen hospital	South China	£318 4 4
1918 NZ Presbyterian orphanages	New Zealand	£165 12 7	1934 Jagadhri hospital	North India	£266 15 9
1919 Ruatahuna Dispensary	Māori Mission	£264 10 7	1935 Home mission church at Okaihau	New Zealand	£288 5 10
1920 X ray machine for the new Kong Chuen hospital	South China	£336 15 1	1936 X ray, Kong Chuen hospital	South China	£408 6 5
1921 Missionaries in India	North India	£350 14 10	1937 Support for Rev. Crump	New Hebrides	£378 15 2
1922 Tongoa – hurricane repairs	New Hebrides	£303 1 6	1938 Car for India missionaries	North India	£411 16 6
1923 Home mission work	New Zealand	£319 12 8	1939 Waikaremoana church building	Māori Mission	£455 7 9
1924 Kong Chuen boys' school	South China	£296 0 9	1940 New Hebrides	New Hebrides	£640 1 0

Table 1: *The Break of Day* Christmas Fund Projects 1909–1940
Source: *The Break of Day*, 1909–1940.

NOTES

1 An earlier version of this article was presented to the 'Colonial Objects Conference' hosted by the Centre for Research on Colonial Culture in Dunedin, February 2013. I am grateful to the following institutions for providing access to a range of missionary and religious periodicals: Presbyterian Research Centre (Dunedin), New Zealand Methodist Church Archives Collection (Christchurch), Anglican Diocesan Archives (Nelson and Auckland), New Zealand Salvation Army Heritage Centre and Archives (Upper Hutt), Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington), Kinder Memorial Library (Auckland), Ayson Clifford Library (Auckland), and the Deane Memorial Library (Auckland). Research was facilitated by a University of Otago Research Grant and a University of Otago Humanities Research Grant. I also appreciate the helpful comments of colleagues Trish Brooking, Claire Fletcher-Flinn and Helen May; the constructive critique offered by the two anonymous readers; and the guidance of the journal's editors.

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