

The Gospel and the Treaty of Waitangi.

New Zealand is in the midst of a healthy conversation over our identity. This has led many New Zealand Christians to ask 'what is our identity as Christ followers in these Islands?' I believe we can turn to two sources, one primary and one secondary, one ancient, one historical, but both incredibly important for our life and mission in NZ.

The Gospel and the Treaty of Waitangi.

Paul describes the gospel in Romans 1:1-5. The Gospel is God's word speaking through the scriptures about Jesus. Just as all roads in New Zealand ultimately lead us to State Highway One all parts of scripture point us ultimately to the person and work on the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Timothy Keller summaries the gospel as: *through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever.*

It is this gospel that is arguably the largest single influence on the content, shape and reception of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Why have we not heard this?

In a 1991 Survey Dr Peter Lineham observed that New Zealand historians continue to 'downplay the significance of religious belief' which continues to be poorly integrated into the writing of NZ history.¹

In 2001 Dr Allan Davidson "wrote with the partial exception of James Belich's Making Peoples, general histories of NZ have mostly written out, marginalised or trivialised religion."²

We'll explore 5 ways this gospel has influenced the Treaty.

1. The gospel contributes to the motivation for the treaty in New Zealand

In the late 1830s the Christian Missionary Society missionaries and Wesleyan Missionary Society missionaries are genuinely concerned about the imminent threat of unrestrained immigration on Māori communities. They believe, a formal relationship via a Treaty with the British Crown is needed as a protection for Māori. It is also likely, they are also wanting to retain their own influence and position in the country and can see that that would be diminished if commercial colonization takes off.³

2. The gospel contributes to the motivation for treaty in the UK

In the years leading up to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi most of the 25 staff of British Colonial Office are members of William Wilberforce's, Clapham Sect.

¹ Stenhouse, J., 'God's Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History'. *New Zealand Journal of History*, 38:1 (2004), pp. 52-71.

² Stenhouse, J., 'God's Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History'. *New Zealand Journal of History*, 38:1 (2004), pp. 52-71.

³ Healy, S., Missionary Involvement in the Treaty of Waitangi
<http://www.socialjustice.org.nz/?sid=115>

This wide-ranging group of influential evangelical Christian friends include the Colonial Secretary himself, Lord Glenelg.⁴ The gospel's vision of humanities equality and God's justice inspire these parliamentarians and civil servants to passionately campaign against slavery and for the rights of indigenous people. This leads them to campaign for the protection and preservation of Maori society.

At the time they form only one voice amongst many competing ones on the issue of colonization. The overall effect of the debate in Britain is the realization that the Government needs to enter into a formal treaty with Maori that would protect indigenous Maori rights over land, bush, river and seas in exchange for British protection and sovereignty. Lieut-Governor William Hobson is therefore dispatched from Sydney in January 1840 to achieve that end.⁵

3. This gospel has shaped the content of the treaty

James Stephen is the permanent under secretary in the Colonial Office.

He is possibly the most influential civil servant of his time. He is profoundly influenced by the gospel. His gospel convictions express themselves in a deep commitment to the abolition of slavery championed by his brother in law William Wilberforce and others.⁶ He later becomes concerned about the negative impacts of colonization on indigenous peoples.⁷

Stephen, wanting to avoid a similar pattern in New Zealand drafts the instructions for Lord Normandy which are given to William Hobson when he is sent to New Zealand in 1840. Parts of the instruction are as follows:

All dealings with Maori must be conducted with sincerity, justice, and good faith.

They must not be permitted to enter into any Contracts in which they might be ignorant and unintentional authors of injuries to themselves.

You will not, purchase from them any Territory that would be essential, or highly conducive, to their own comfort, safety or subsistence.⁸

The content of the treaty is shaped by these instructions. The instructions themselves are shaped by the biblical gospel.

4. The gospel shaped the nature of the treaty to Maori

Missionaries cultivated an image of the Queen as personally loving towards Maori. Henry Williams would affirm to Maori at Waitangi that the Treaty was an act of love towards them on the part of the Queen.⁹

This thinking led many chiefs, who were by then, either Christian or associated with Christianity, to see the treaty in terms of a spiritual bond. A covenant.¹⁰

⁴ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 26

⁵ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 27

⁶ Moon, P & Biggs, P 'The Treaty and it's Times' Resource Books (2004) pg 129

⁷ Moon, P., 'Te Ara Ki Te Tiriti The Path to the Treaty' David Ling Publishing (2002) pg 16

⁸ Moon, P & Biggs, P 'The Treaty and it's Times' Resource Books (2004) pg 161-173

⁹ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 45

¹⁰ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 90

For these chiefs the Treaty was a covenant between the Maori people and the Queen as head of the English Church and state. The Maori name for the Treaty is *He Kawenata o Waitangi* ('The Covenant of Waitangi')¹¹

Many Maori at the time perceived the treaty enabled Pakeha and Maori to be one people in both a spiritual and societal sense.¹²

Affirming this was Hobson's words to each Chief as they completed their signing of the Treaty at Waitangi were "He iwi tahi tatou"- now we are all one people. His words selected by Henry Williams were loosely based on Ephesians 2:13.¹³

The northern tribe Ngapuhi, in particular, understood the treaty as a special kind of covenant with the Queen, a bond with all the spiritual connotations of the biblical covenants; there would be many tribes, including the British, but all would be equal under God.¹⁴

Claudia Orange argues "For British officials it's fair to say the perception of covenant, and the missionaries emphasising the humanitarian protection of the British were simply part of securing sovereignty..."¹⁵

5. This gospel influences the reception of the treaty

On February 6th 43 Chiefs signed the treaty, in all over 500 would sign the treaty over the next 8 months.¹⁶

The majority of Treaty negotiators were either missionaries or closely associated with them. Missionaries with considerable mana with Maori particularly Henry Williams took the treaty throughout the country to be signed.¹⁷ On many occasions it is the credibility of the missionary themselves and their endorsement which gives the treaty its credibility.

In the years before the signing of the Treaty 74,000 copies of Biblical books, New Testaments had been printed and distributed throughout New Zealand.¹⁸ Coupled with the focus on literacy the gospel had spread rapidly.¹⁹

Almost half the Maori population would be influenced by the gospel.²⁰ Chiefs who had come to faith in Christ or who had been influenced by the gospel were far more likely to be well disposed to the treaty although where the gospel was not strong amongst Senior Chiefs it was a far more difficult process in obtaining signatures.²¹

What are the implications for us today?

1. I want to reclaim the treaty as part of our Christian story

As gospel people the Treaty is part of our history, it's part our legacy and it's expression today is apart of our responsibility.

¹¹ Message preached by Rob Yule. <http://www.greyfriars.org.nz/waitangi.php>

¹² Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 90

¹³ Lineham, P., 'Bible and Society' The Bible Society of NZ (1996) pg 6

¹⁴ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 150

¹⁵ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 91

¹⁶ Belich, J., 'Making Peoples' Penguin Books (1996) pg 193

¹⁷ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 60-91

¹⁸ Dictionary of New Zealand Biography

http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/DNZB/alt_essayBody.asp?essayID=1C23

¹⁹ Davidson, A., 'Christianity in Aotearoa' The NZ Education for Ministry Board (2004) pg 14-16

²⁰ Belich, J., 'Making Peoples' Penguin Books (1996) pg 217-219

²¹ Orange, J., 'The Treaty of Waitangi' Bridget Williams Books (2003) pg 70

2. I want to understand the nature of the Crowns historical breaches, and the churches complicity in this.

The gospel calls us to be a reconciling people. As we've learnt from South Africa, truth comes before reconciliation. Wanting to know the truth compels me to understand the Crowns historical breaches and the church's complicity in these.²²

3. I want us to discover how we can apply the Waitangi covenant to our life together as a church.

When we seek to explore what it means to uphold and express the values of the Waitangi Covenant as the people of God I believe it leads us towards a deeper experience of what it means to Christian and a richer experience of what it means to be kiwi. Why, because the Treaty affirms our place on the land together.

As Chief Judge Eddie Durie expressed it in his Waitangi Day address in 1989:

'We [Maori] must not forget that the Treaty is not just a Bill of Rights for Maori. It is a Bill of Rights for Pakeha too. It is the Treaty that gives Pakeha the right to be here. Without the Treaty there would be no lawful authority for the Pakeha presence in this part of the South Pacific. The Pakeha here are not like the Indians of Fiji, or the French in New Caledonia. Our Prime Minister can stand proud in Pacific forums, and in international forums too, not in spite of the Treaty but because of it. We must remember that if we are the *Tangata Whenua*, the original people, then the Pakeha are the Tangata Tiriti, those who belong to the land by right of that Treaty.'²³

I believe as we seek to embody the gospel and express the Waitangi covenant bi culturally and multi-culturally over the next 30 years our frail and faltering attempts will show the credibility and authenticity of the gospel to Maori and the rest of New Zealand. It is my prayer Maori would again respond to the gospel. In turn due to the growing prominence and preference given to Maori spirituality in New Zealand society Maori will have the opportunity to take the gospel back to the entire society.

The gospel has had a significant impact on all aspects of the Treaty. As a result, we the people of God in Aotearoa New Zealand need to reclaim it as part of our story. We need to understand the historical injustices of the past and we need to find ways of expressing with grace and truth the values of the Treaty in our life together into the future.

²² 'The Church was certainly complicit in land alienation in the nineteenth century both actively and passively. Where was the church voice when the legislation was passed in the 1860s that resulted in confiscations? Where was the church voice when the Native Land Court was used to wrest land from Maori hands? Where was the church voice when the Maori King and Te Kotahitanga protested against the loss of land? Where was the church voice when Te Whiti and Tohu and their followers were trying to defend their land'? Reece, A., ' Truth, Repentance and Naboth's Vineyard: Towards reconciliation in Aotearoa New Zealand' pg 53

²³ New Zealand Church Leaders Statement 1990 Page 10



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