

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Remembering Christian Beginnings in Aotearoa New Zealand 1814-2014

Author: Allan K. Davidson

(AHS Newsletter 47, July 2011)

The church is a remembering community. 'Do this in remembrance of me' is the injunction which we observe as we break bread and share wine regularly through the year. Remembering is tied into the fabric of the Christian Church with the liturgical seasons and the calendar of saints. Advent, Easter, and Pentecost tie us into a rhythm of observances that come from our past and mould and shape us in the present. In the regular cycle of remembering we have special anniversaries which give us an opportunity to reflect on who we are, where we have come from, and maybe, if we are adventurous enough, where we might be going. William Johnston in his book, 'Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today' comments that 'Humans impart meaning to the forward surge of time by living within weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms ... historical anniversaries ... furnish rhythms across not months or years, but centuries.'¹

What are we going to commemorate in 2014?

Beginning points are often much more complex than chronologies indicate. While the beginnings of institutional Christianity in New Zealand have been dated from the arrival of Marsden and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) party in December 1814, Christian beginnings in this land can be variously dated. Catholics have claimed that they conducted the first Christian service in New Zealand in 1769.² London Missionary Society missionaries on their way to Tahiti were in New Zealand waters in 1805. Knowledge of Christianity was brought back to New Zealand from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries by Māori such as the chiefs from the Bay of Islands, Te Pahi and Ruatara, who travelled to Australia and further afield. Thomas Kendall and William Hall, two of the first CMS missionaries, made a preliminary advance visit to New Zealand in 1814 to re-establish contact with Ruatara. They arrived in Marsden's ship, the *Active*, in the Bay of Islands on 10 June. Kendall recorded that they had prayers on deck the first Sunday they were in New Zealand. One week later, on 18 June, Kendall read 'the prayers of the Church' on board ship and commented that 'Two or three chiefs were also with us, and the behaviour of the natives during Divine Service was very decent and commendable. It was a new thing with them to see our way of worship and to hear of a day of rest from labour, and they seemed to enjoy the idea very much. The Union Jack was hoisted on board the *Active* ...'³

This was reinforced six months later when Marsden and his missionary group, led by Ruatara, the local chief, and accompanied by Hongi Hika and other Māori, arrived at Rangihoua Pa, Oihi, in the Bay of Islands in December 1814. Marsden, reflecting on the Christmas Day service, which has come to be regarded as the beginning point for institutional Christianity in this land, wrote how: 'On Sunday morning, when I was upon deck, I saw the English flag flying, which was a pleasing sight in New Zealand. I considered it as the signal and the dawn of civilization, liberty, and religion, in that dark and benighted land. I never viewed the British Colours with more gratification; and flattered myself they would never be removed,

till the Natives of that island enjoyed all the happiness of British Subjects.’

The combination of church (worship) and national identity (flag) were there from the very beginning of missionary contact.

How did they observe Christian beginnings in New Zealand in the past?

In 1864, when the fiftieth jubilee of missionary beginnings was reached, New Zealand was at war in the Waikato. Notices appeared in some papers giving a brief mention of the anniversary of Marsden’s arrival but there seems to have been no major national events. There is a record of Wesleyans in Auckland gathering in their High Street Chapel for a service on 27 December 1864 to commemorate the jubilee. The Revd. Thomas Buddle gave an account of the voyage of Marsden and the missionaries to New Zealand in 1814. He also included reference to Ruatara’s concerns expressed soon after leaving Sydney about the encouragement he had given to Marsden and his party to sail to New Zealand and the warning he had been given ‘that the consequence of granting protection to your settlers will be that others will be introduced, who will take our lands and kill our people.’ After Marsden’s reassurances, and Ruatara’s promise that protection would be given to the missionaries, the voyage continued.⁴ Buddle went on to give an account of Wesleyan beginnings in New Zealand. He concluded with an evaluation representing a very British missionary perspective against the unacknowledged background of war between Māori and the government and the great loss of Māori from active participation in the missionary churches: ‘... no one could say the missionary enterprise in New Zealand had been a failure. Old systems had been banished and cannibalism was no more. A fine country had been opened up to form a dependency of the British Crown, and a home for hundreds of the Anglo-Saxon race. The extension of British enterprise along these shores was the

result of missionary labours.’⁵

This colonial-settler perspective of missionary beginnings was reinforced in the Wellington Independent where Marsden was celebrated: ‘... to no one ... do we colonists owe a deeper debt of gratitude than to this truly good and great man, who was the instrument under divine providence of bringing civilization, the arts of peace, and the knowledge of salvation to this benighted land.’⁶

There was little or no reflection about either the complex impact of Christianity on Māori, or the problematical interactions between European settlers and Māori.

In 1914, New Zealand was again at war. This resulted in the scaling back of the planned centenary observances. In Auckland there was a public meeting in the Town Hall, presided over by the Mayor. Addresses were given by the Bishop of Auckland, A. W. Averill on Marsden, Canon MacMurray on the pioneer missionaries, the Reverend Frederick Bennett on ‘the present position of the Māori race’, and a speech by Te Kiwi Amohau in Māori. Bishop Averill, reflecting a very Eurocentric perspective noted: ‘Augustine ... was revered for introducing Christianity to Britain, and they were present to honour Marsden for introducing Christianity and civilisation to New Zealand.’ Frederick Bennett referred to the way one century after Marsden’s arrival, ‘Māori were taking up arms against the enemies of the British Dominions’ and preparing to fight in Europe.

Te Kiwi Amohau is reported as saying, ‘It would have been excellent ... had the celebration been a joint one between Māoris and Pakehas.’⁷ There are hints there that the organisation of the anniversary was very much in Pakeha hands. Averill’s emphasis on Marsden also raised him to the status of the patriarch of the New Zealand Mission with emphasis on his heroic qualities and the difficulties he had to overcome. In contrast, Marsden is often depicted as an anti-hero in

Australia where he gained a reputation as a harsh magistrate and aggressive combatant with governors.

There is a question as to how far, when we commemorate anniversaries, we are doing so for our own needs in the present? Questions can be raised as to who is doing the remembering and how the remembering being done is. Carolyn Kitch writes that: 'An anniversary is a ritual celebration of the community who observes it, serving to strengthen its identity and values through the remembrance of the event.'⁸ There is a reshaping of the past in the present.

In 1914, the Primate, S. T. Nevill, Bishop of Dunedin, issued a pastoral letter in which he urged 'that the anniversary should be commemorated by the raising of a fund to foster religious education in the Dominion.' The aim was to raise £20,000 'for educational purposes, and a further fund of not less than £30,000 for augmenting the stipends of clergy.'⁹ In 1914 the Bible in Schools League was trying to gain support for the Religious Instruction Referendum Bill and the Anglican Bishops came out strongly in its favour.¹⁰ The increasing impact of the First World War, however, meant that attention was soon diverted elsewhere and the bold plans to support religious instruction and clergy were put to one side.

A centenary thanksgiving service was held at Oihi in the presence of some 500 Māori and Pakeha on the 25 December 1914 around the Celtic cross, now known as Marsden's Cross, which had been erected in 1907. The hymns were sung simultaneously in Māori and English. Just before the service, Rawiri Te Ruru on behalf of northern tribes, Ngatiwhatua, Rarawa, Aupouri and Ngapuhi, presented Bishop Averill with a carved pastoral staff made in four pieces representing the different tribes.¹¹

In 1964, the sesqui-centennial of the missionaries' arrival was observed over four days. This included a pageant held at Waitangi re-

enacting the events of Christmas Day 1814. The commemorative service was held at Oihi in the presence of the Governor-General, Sir Bernard Fergusson, who brought a message from the Queen. There were 1500 present at this service where again the hymns were sung simultaneously in Māori and English. In his sermon, the Rev R. E. Marsden, a descendant of Samuel Marsden, acknowledged the role of Ruatara, noting that 'Without him ... it might have been many years before the Gospel reached this country.' In the afternoon an official welcome to the Governor-General was held at the Waitangi Treaty House grounds. In the evening a communion service was held presided over by Bishop Panapa at which Archbishop Lesser was the preacher.¹²

Ian Jack, has written that 'Anniversaries are our way of drilling into history's groundwater and sending it up to splash briefly on the surface of the present.' This is what would seem to have happened in 1914 and 1964. The anniversary, largely under Pakeha leadership, was marked with celebratory rhetoric with a focus particularly, but not exclusively on Marsden. There is little indication of activities taking place outside of Auckland and Northland. Jack, whose article is entitled, 'Historical anniversaries obliterate the kingdom of individuals' also writes that 'anniversaries can be an enlightening force as well as a patriotic indulgence. They can uncover history and revise it.'¹³ There is little indication that there was much enlightening or revision of history in 1914 or 1964.

Thoughts on the 2014 Bicentenary Commemoration

The marking of the bicentenary confronts us with the complexity of history. There is a real sense in which anniversaries are not just about the past - they are very much about the present. It is the people in the present who shape these events for their own needs in their own day for their own context. Anniversaries can sometimes be

indulgent exercises in self-congratulation. There is no harm in having a good party, but apart from the hangover and the lingering memory little remains. But anniversaries can also be subversive opportunities when the variety of voices from the past can challenge us in ways that have an impact not only in the now but also into the future. Johnston writes about how 'The bicentennial of the French Revolution affirmed French national identity'¹⁴ while the bicentenary in Australia stimulated discussion on national identity.¹⁵ White Australia began to confront and was confronted with its 'black past' (the use of the word 'black' here has a double sense - referring both to as the shadow side of history, and the Aboriginal dimension of that story). The five hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage in 1492 similarly raised huge questions about 'What happened when Columbus and Christianity collided with the Americas?'¹⁶ Contrasting viewpoints are seen in these quotations: George Bush Sr. stated that '[This is] the 500th anniversary of one of the great achievements of human endeavor.' Peter Winn concluded, that '[Based] on statistical analyses of Indian deaths, [the Spanish conquest was] the greatest demographic catastrophe in recorded history.'¹⁷

As we approach the bicentenary of the arrival of Ruatara with Marsden, the first missionaries, and their families, we are confronted by some questions:

- how is the bicentenary in 2014 going to be commemorated?
- whose voices will be heard?

For some people who reflect critically on the arrival of the missionaries with their gospel in 1814, this advent was not all glad tidings of great joy for Māori. What the missionaries saw as good news contributed to the beginning of the end of Māori independence as it was then known, the undermining of Māori culture and religious beliefs, the introduction of European diseases and muskets with their devastating impact on

Māori. The missionaries were only a part, although a significant part, of the encounter of the 'Two Worlds' which Anne Salmond has so helpfully described in her books, 'Two Worlds: First Meetings between Māori and European 1642-1772' and 'Between Worlds: Early Exchanges between Māori and Europeans 1773-1815.'¹⁸

For others who reflect on the arrival of the missionaries and their gospel, this is seen as inaugurating a process of evangelisation in which Māori from the very beginning were active participants. There has been a growing recognition that missionary work is not one-way but involved the dynamic interaction of Māori, missionaries, and the Christian message often with consequences the missionary did not expect. We see this Māori participation from the very beginning with Ruatara, who not only led Marsden and his missionary party on the Active to Oihi, but on the 25 December 1814 he organised the venue for the church service; and he translated Marsden's first sermon, 'Behold I bring you tidings of great joy' into Māori. The good news was heard from the beginning in Māori through the words of a Māori. The interaction of Māori and missionary from 1814 involved two parties and begins the stream out of which Te Hahi Mihinare emerged.

While the beginnings of missionary Christianity in New Zealand were particularly concerned with events in the Bay of Islands, they had implications for the whole country. From these beginnings Christianity spread, often through Māori agency, throughout New Zealand. For Anglicans these beginnings mark the inauguration of institutional Christianity in this land. The arrival of Bishop Selwyn in 1842, the beginnings of the Melanesian Mission in 1849, the 1857 constitution, the division into dioceses, the joining of Polynesia with the Church of the Province of New Zealand in 1925, the creation of the Bishop of Aotearoa in 1928, the 1992 Revised Constitution and restructuring into three Tikanga - these and

much more have their starting point in what happened in 1814. This anniversary belongs to the whole church.

I have written elsewhere about the way in which 'the beginning of the work of the missionaries is inextricably connected with national identity and the possibility of future incorporation of Māori as British subjects.'¹⁹ That is seen in the significant connection Marsden made between the events on Christmas Day 1814 and the British colours which he saw flying. There is a strong link here with the missionary involvement in the events leading up to and including the signing of the Te Tiriti of Waitangi in 1840. Henry Williams who played such a critical part in the events surrounding the Treaty, later wrote that in encouraging Māori to sign the Treaty he showed them 'the advantage to them of being taken under the fostering care of the British Government, by which act they would become one people with the English, in the suppression of wars, and of every lawless act; under one Sovereign, one law, human and divine.'²⁰

Six weeks after commemorating Christian beginnings in New Zealand we will be remembering the 175th anniversary of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi - The Treaty of Waitangi. What we commemorate in 1814 has implications for our birth as a nation; our national identity and the bicultural partnership which we have been seeking to give expression to in recent years. The missionary beginnings in 1814 have implications not just for the north, not just for the church, but also for our country

Preparing for 2014

Preparations for commemorating Christian beginnings in 2014 are already well underway. An ecumenical 2014 Bicentenary Planning Group, with Bishops Te Kitohi Pikaahu and Ross Bay as its co-chairs, is overseeing the preparations. This involves coordinating events in 2014, the commemorations around the bicentenary anniversary at Oihi on Christmas Day, and

historical work.

A 2014 Bicentenary History Group, convened by the author of this paper, is organising a conference on the theme 'Māori and Missionaries: Re-evaluating the Beginnings of New Zealand Society c.1800 - c.1860' to be held at Waitangi, Bay of Islands, 27-29 November 2012. Among the areas suggested for possible consideration are the following:

- the interaction of Māori, missionaries, and Christianity in the first sixty years of the nineteenth century; the early engagement of Māori with Christianity outside New Zealand; the impact of Māori and missionaries on one another in areas such as: theology; agriculture; literacy; muskets; peacemaking
- the voices and participation of both Māori, missionaries (and their families) and other Pakeha in establishing early bicultural relationships; the beginnings of Pakeha settlement; Māori as protectors and patrons; the roles of Māori and missionary women
- the different denominational and missionary influences which were active in this period (Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, etc.); missionary methods; indigenous agency and response
- the social, political and economic dimensions of Māori and missionary interaction
- missionaries as agents of empire; missionaries and land; changing patterns of settlement; the imperial influences at work; Australian and Pacific dimensions; British-French rivalry; the Declaration of Independence; the Treaty of Waitangi; tensions between missionary and colonial Christianity

The 2014 bicentenary offers a significant anniversary when we can reflect on the early interaction of Māori and missionaries, the beginnings of Pakeha settlement in New Zealand, and the development and influence of Christianity in shaping New Zealand society. It remains to be seen whether the 2014

commemoration will be more than a brief splash,

an enlightening force, or an indulgence.

Te Rongopai 1814 'Takoto te pai!'

Bicentenary reflections on Christian beginnings and developments in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Published: 2014

Publisher: Anglican General Synod Office

ISBN: 978-0-473-28009-3

Te Rongopai 1814 'Takoto te pai!', is a collection of essays exploring the Revd Samuel Marsden's initiative and Māori involvement in missionary beginnings in Aotearoa New Zealand. These early missionary beginnings and their implications have been subjects of intense historical debates. This book gives insights into relations between missionaries and local iwi, how Māori viewed this new culture and religion and some of the developments that followed.

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Endnotes

¹ William M Johnston, *Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today*, New Brunswick / London: Transaction Publications, 1991, p.31.

² Michael King, *God's Farthest Outpost – a History of Catholics in New Zealand*. Auckland Penguin Books, 1997, pp.34-36. Father Leonard de Villefeix was a Dominican priest and ship's chaplain on board Surville's *Saint Jean-Baptiste*.

³ J.R. Elder, *Marsden's Lieutenants*, Dunedin: Coulls, Somerville, Wilkie & A.H. Reed, 1934, p.63.

⁴ For a more detailed account of this see the accounts by Marsden, Thomas Kendall and J.L. Nicholas: J.R. Elder, ed., *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden 1765-1838*, Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie, 1932, pp. 141-42; Elder, *Marsden's Lieutenants*, pp.78-79; J.L. Nicholas, *Narrative of a Voyage to New Zealand, Performed in the years 1814 and 1815 in the Company of the Rev. Samuel Marsden, Principal Chaplain of New South Wales*, 2 vols., London: James Black, 1817, vol. I, pp.39- 41.

⁵ 'Wesleyan Jubilee Services', *Taranaki Herald*, 1 January 1865, p.4 — abridged from the *New Zealander*, Dec. 28, 1864.

⁶ Omega, 'Thoughts on the Past and Present', *Wellington Independent*, 31 December 1864, p.3.

⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 December 1914.

⁸ Carolyn Kitch, 'Anniversary Journalism, Collective Memory, and the Cultural Authority to Tell the Story of the American Past', *Journal of Popular Culture*, p.48, extract found at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/IQ.1111/1540-5931.00030>

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¹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 December 1914.

¹² *New Zealand Herald*, 26 December 1914.

¹³ Ian Jack, 'Historical anniversaries obliterate the kingdom of individuals: In India in 1947 or in Britain after Diana's death, the truth is there was no united response', *The Guardian*, Saturday August 11, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/storv/Q.,2146565,00.html>

¹⁴ Johnston, *Celebrations*, p.8.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Celebrations*, p.12.

¹⁶ 'What Happened When Columbus & Christianity Collided with the Americas?' *Christian History*, Issue 35, XI.3.

¹⁷ 'Voices in the Controversy', In 'What Happened When Columbus & Christianity Collided with the Americas?' *Christian History*, Issue 35, XI.3, p. 19.

¹⁸ Ann Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings between Māori and European 1642-1772*, Auckland: Viking, 1991; *Between Worlds: Early Exchanges Between Māori and Europeans 1773-1814*, Auckland: Viking, 1997.

¹⁹ Allan K Davidson, 'Christianity and National Identity: The Role of the Churches in 'the Construction of Nationhood.''' In *The Future of Christianity: Historical, Sociological, Political and Theological Perspectives from New Zealand*, edited by John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles, 16-35. Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004, pp.16-17.

²⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 19.