

TOPIC: MAAORI CHRISTIANS AND TE TIRITI O WAITANGI
TE TIRITI AS COVENANT, AS A SACRED TREASURE.

He Kawanata Hou: Te Tiriti as Covenant

The word covenant simply means a legally binding agreement reached between two groups of peoples, groups or persons. The concept of covenant permeates the Bible. The earliest covenant is recorded in Genesis and was made with Noah and is often referred to as 'creation covenant'. It was a binding together of Noah and his descendents and every living creature with the Creator. It established some rules for living in the world.

There are other covenants involving Abraham and Sarah, Moses and David. These covenants involved the life of people committing them to Israel and God. They were intended to establish a set of binding relationships between the people concerned.

Then in Exodus we find an important covenant involving Sinai. This covenant has to do with the call of Israel to be a holy nation owing exclusive allegiance to the Lord, and was in fact the decisive step in the creation of Israel as a nation.

In the New Testament we find Jesus making explicit statements about living in community, about establishing a 'new covenant'. In such a covenant community we are bound to each other in order to give life [Adams & Salmon 1988].

I mention these things because they give us some idea of Maori Christian expectations and understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi. They give us a certain perspective in looking at the Treaty. Christians do not need the Appeal Court or the Waitangi Tribunal to tell us how to honour the Treaty. We have a higher law to obey and guide us, we have Sacred Scripture.

Among Maaori, the Treaty is often referred to as **He Kawenata**, a covenant, and as, **He Taonga Tapu**, a sacred treasure. What influenced them in this thinking were both traditional cultural concepts and biblical teachings. Today there is no difficulty ecumenically speaking of accepting this understanding of covenant. However this was not true in the 1830s-1840s, when fierce denominationalism was the order of the times and important biblical and theological differences were apparent.

Anglican and Methodist Mission Policy

The early organised missionary endeavour was begun with the coming of the Church Missionary Society [CMS] in 1814. The Wesleyan Missionary Society followed in 1822, then the Catholic missionaries in 1838. Both CMS and WMS expanded their activities in the 1830s [Orange 1987:6]. The three Churches began their missions in Taitokerau then moved south. In 1839 for instance the CMS had 10 stations spread throughout the North Island. These were run by 34 Paakeeha and significantly, 23 Maori missionaries and teachers [Adams 1977:30]. Maaori missionaries were already preaching the Gospel among their own hapuu and among other hapuu.

Many of CMS and WMS [Anglican and Methodist] missionaries were belonged to an evangelical, reform school of thought which was dominated by Calvinist theology. For instance in the Biblical, Methodist tradition a covenant occupies a fundamental all-determining place [Kia Neke Ake 1989].

These same missionaries were products of their cultures, histories, region of the world and Churches. The early part of the 19th century was the age of European evangelical Christianity with its attitude of moral superiority over the 'poor benighted savage'. They had come to save these savages from sin and shame. This coupled with the age, which stressed the utter superiority of European civilisation and desirability of all to become like Europeans [Simpson 1979:33].

The Paakeeha missionaries saw Maaori through Eurocentric spectacles and regarded their own values as Universal Truths, as part of the Divine plan of providence for the Progress of Civilisation and Christianity [Ballara 1986:8-9]. Many were influenced by monogenist theories of human origins. According to this theory all human races were descended from Adam and Eve but after the destruction of the Tower of Babel some races degenerated into savagery [Ballara 1986:170]. Maaori represented one of the 'fallen' from the state of perfect civilisation as represented by the Garden of Eden into barbarism, and this accounted for the 'depraved' state of Maaori. Some concluded that Maaori were part of the dispersed people, Samuel Marsden and Richard Taylor were of this school of thought, and their mission policies were aimed at civilising Maaori in order to Christianise them [Ballara 1986:8-10,12].

This mindset was not confined to missionaries. The degeneration theories were followed by many Paakeeha politicians like

William Pember Reeves who believed that Maaori degeneration was taking place because of defects inherent in their primitive nature [Ballara 1986:86]. From 1865 to 1900 settler politicians had convinced themselves that Maaori were a conquered and dying race and that the provident course was to 'smooth his dying pillow', because nothing could save them. Sir Robert Stout spoke along these lines [Williams 1984:318].

Some Maaori Christian politicians like Sir Apirana Ngata, Sir Maui Pomare, and Sir Te Rangihiroa were influenced by some of the degeneration theories in that they worked to improve the conditions of a people so defined. They believed that Maaori could uplift themselves so long as Maaori dropped those elements of culture repugnant to civilised man.

This background is helpful in order to understand something of the theological and biblical bases of missionary promotion of Te Tiriti. They explained to a great number of the Rangatira that te Tiriti was a covenant between the British Queen and Maaori, and which was witnessed by God. It was said to be similar to the covenants of the Bible.

At the signing on February 6, two Anglican Rangatira, Hone Heke and Eruera Maihi Patuone of Ngaapuhi spoke of the benefits the governor would bring. Heke said it would be like that of the New Testament, Te Kawanata Hou <the new covenant>. Patuone spoke strongly of the relationship with Britain and he associated Hobson with the benefits brought by the missionaries, and with Te Kawanata Hou [Orange 1987:49-50].

Many Rangatira who sought advice from the CMS and WMS missionaries seem to have understood the evangelical notions used, and, as time went by this understanding developed. The CMS and WMS influenced Rangatira recognised the mana [authority] of the Queen because she who was both head of the Church and head of State ie the head of the British Crown. They were generally encouraged to trust the British Crown.

Catholic Mission Policy

The teaching and interpretation of covenant espoused by the CMS and WMS missionary biblical theology would not have been used by the Catholic missionaries of the 19th Century. Evidence suggests that Rangatira who had sought and received advice from Catholic missionaries asked different questions at the time of the signings. These questions were based on other theological considerations than those related to covenant.

A much smaller number of Rangatira received advice from the Catholic French Bishop, Jean Baptiste Pompallier. They received a different notion of what was intended as a result of signing of te Tiriti. Pompallier came from Lyon, France and belonged to a royalist orientated Catholic group rather than the French revolution school [Turner 1986].

The French Catholic Church suffered during the French Revolution and was deeply divided between those who supported the royalist and were opposed to the revolution, and those who supported the revolution and the peasants. The trauma of the recriminations affected the French Catholic understanding of the relationship between the Church and the State.

This experience was reinforced by the instructions issued from Propaganda Fides the Catholic Church organisation responsible for missionary endeavours. In 1659 Propaganda issued the following instructions:

mission work aims not at providing earthly gifts, but at the imparting of supernatural gifts...Implant the Faith; seek nothing beyond the spiritual interests and the salvation of souls...

Keep entirely away from politics and affairs of state. Decline acceptance of any civil or administrative charges, even if you are urged to accept any such charge... Take care therefore, and see to it that all those under your jurisdiction be equally minded to have nothing to do with politics under whatsoever a plea or pretext. [Goyan 1932:120-122].

The thrust of Pompallier's public utterances were in terms of the French Catholic experience in the revolution and the instructions of Propaganda. His advice to Rangatira was, that his primary interest was in the salvation of souls and therefore the Rangatira must decide whether to sign te Tiriti or not. Later after te Tiriti was in place, he was to urge Maaori to respect the legitimate law and authority established by the British Crown. He consistently explained that there must be a clear separation of the church and the state [Turner 1987].

Rewa of Ngaapuhi and Papahia of Te Rarawa in Taitokerau, both sought advice from Pompallier. Both expressed serious concerns at Waitangi about what kind of relationship was intended with the British. Rewa gave a clear enunciation of the Rangatira's wish to retain Maaori authority and with others argued that Rangatira should be equal to the Governor. He said New Zealand should not suffer the same fate as other areas, namely New

south Wales which was taken by the British. Rewa travelled extensively and had been to Sydney. While he eventually signed te Tiriti he initially spoke against the proposals and seemed to grasp the difference between sovereign power and territorial possession [Orange 1987:48,57].

So the contribution of the the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic church leaders to the making of the Treaty are well recorded and should not be minimised. What is often ignored is that some of the strongest advocates for and against a treaty with the British Queen were Maaori Christian leaders of the day - Tamati Waka Nene, Eruera Maihi Patuone, Hone Heke, Rawiri Taiwhanga, Papahia and Rewa - many of them were later to continue to defend the te Tiriti when it was broken.

The differences in perspective can be seen in the following incident which occurred on February 6 1840 at Waitangi. This little known event involved two Pakeha Church leaders - Bishop Pompallier, the Catholic, and William Colenso, the Anglican Layman. They asked Governor Hobson questions about:

- 1] religious freedom - the right of Maaori to choose their religion;
- 2] the protection of Maaori customs and practices [Frame 1981:106].

Hobson replied that both would be protected by the Treaty [Henare 1985:10-11; Colenso 1890]. Here Pompallier is seeking from the emerging new lawful authority an agreement that Maaori who chose to be Catholic will be allowed to do so, and that this right to choose will be guaranteed and protected.

There are two key elements to Christian Church involvement. First, there is the making of a covenant between peoples which is witnessed by God. This entailed both Church and State sanction. Second, there is the making of a social contract between two sovereign peoples in which certain rights are guaranteed and are to be protected by lawful authority.

That the Rangatira, on behalf of their hapu, were seeking governance [Orange 1987], not domination, can be attested to from Catholic evidence. In 1840 Pompallier wrote the following Maori understanding :

Their idea is that New Zealand is like a ship, the ownership of which should remain with the New Zealanders [Maori], and the helm in the hands of the Colonial authorities.
[McKeefry, P (Ed), Fishers of Men 1938, p 115]

A further clarification is given by Fr Servant, who attended the Waitangi meeting with Pompallier:

The governor proposes to the tribal chiefs that they recognise his authority: he gives them to understand that this authority is to maintain good order, and protect their respective interests; that all chiefs will preserve their powers and their possessions. A great number of the

latter speak, and display in turn all their Maori eloquence. **Most of the orators do not want the governor to extend his authority over the natives, but only over the Europeans.** Others do not even want the governor to remain in New Zealand.

[translation of letter to Fr Colin, 5 March 1840, in Turner 1986:88. Our emphasis.]

Writing in 1845, Pompallier expresses his own view and that of Maaori on the significance of the Treaty. He wrote that the Maaori...

were made English subjects, and their country an English possession, although they did not understand the whole tenor of the treaty, and **they had not the slightest intention of ceding their territory and their sovereignty.**

[translation of letter to Cardinal Fransoni in Rome, 3 March 1845, in Turner 1986:100. Our emphasis.]

These accounts affirm Maaori contention that the Rangatira who signed te Tiriti on their behalf, were not giving away the tino rangatiratanga [ownership and absolute authority] of their culture, lands, seas and resources [Motunui Report 1983:10.3; Blank et al 1985:2; Orange 1987:235; Ooraakei Report 1987:11.5.6]. However they were allowing the British Crown to exercise kawanatanga [governorship] [Ooraakei Report 1987:11.5.22]. They more than likely understood governorship in much the same way as Pontius Pilate exercised his governorship over Israel, and on the basis of what many Rangatira had observed in Australia and elsewhere, e.g. the Governor of New South Wales.

Maaori are a covenant people because we are Christians. We honour the social contract because our mana [status and integrity] is involved. We respect and honour the actions of the tupuna because as the late Sir James Henare said they put their signatures or moko to te Tiriti and made it he taonga tapu [a sacred treasure] [Blank et al 1985:113], and under duress they took up arms to protect its and their mana.

Our tasks are to honour our covenant with God and make this nation a holy nation, at the same time we are called to honour te Tiriti o Waitangi, the covenant and social contract which was intended to allow for the peaceful settlement of immigrants on these shores. In conclusion it seems to me that when Maaori Christians honour the Te Tiriti o Waitangi we also honour our social contract with tauwi [settlers] who have arrived since 1840 and in doing this we honour te kawanata [covenant] with God.