

Worship on Waitangi Day 2022

Watch video from the Bible Society:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WINGhC2x7e0>

Today, 6 February, we in Aotearoa New Zealand commemorate the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

Generally, in this land, religion is underrated. Knowledge about religion (be it Christianity or any other significant world religion) is abysmal. The early history of New Zealand's formation as a recognised country is equally not well known. Just how much the early church and in particular several missionaries of British descent in New Zealand influenced the creation of the Treaty of Waitangi, and hence forth our country.

The story of the arrival of Christian faith to these islands is born out of the preaching of the first Christian sermon by Samuel Marsden at Oihi Bay on Christmas Day 1814. The service was read from the Church of England book of common prayer.

The arrival of Christian mission came about as it was seen that a small community of Europeans had formed in the Bay of Islands, made up of explorers, flax traders, timber merchants, seamen, and ex-convicts who had served their sentences in Australia (as well as some who had escaped the Australian penal system). And Marsden was concerned that they were corrupting the Māori way of life and lobbied the Church Missionary Society to send a mission to New Zealand.

Thomas Kendall of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), one of the first three missionaries to settle in New Zealand, published the first book in Māori in 1815: being an attempt to compose some lessons for the instruction of the natives. In 1820 he and the chiefs Hongi Hika and Waikato visited England to work with Cambridge University linguist Samuel Lee to produce the first Grammar and vocabulary of the language of New Zealand.

Thousands of biblical texts were printed and distributed.

In the 1830s there were more and more Pakeha European immigrants arriving in Aotearoa, and there was no real "European/British" legal or justice system here under which these immigrants were clearly bound. Missionaries here were increasingly concerned about the effect of these immigrants on Māori. They believed a formal relationship via a treaty with the British Crown was needed to protect Māori.

In Britain, there were networks of strong Christian parliamentarians and public servants. The 1830s was when Christians pressured the British parliament to abolish slavery in the British empire. Most of the people in the British Colonial Office were also part of these strongly influential Christian groups. The office oversaw what was happening in the colonies. They also had knowledge of how damaging colonialism had been to other native people as the British Empire and other empires expanded.

So, in Britain also, these influential British Christians campaigned for the protection of Māori.

James Stephen, the brother-in-law of William Wilberforce (William was the leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade), was the permanent undersecretary in the Colonial Office. He was profoundly influenced by the life and teachings of Christ, and a big part of the British side of the Treaty's story.

James Stephen drafted the instructions which were given to William Hobson when he was sent to New Zealand in 1840. These instructions included:

All dealings with the Aborigines for their Lands must be conducted on the same principles of sincerity, justice, and good faith as must govern your transactions with them for the recognition of Her Majesty's Sovereignty in the Islands. Nor is this all. 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, for example, purchase from them any Territory the retention of which by them would be essential, or highly conducive, to their own comfort, safety or subsistence. The acquisition of Land by the Crown for the future Settlement of British Subjects must be confined to such Districts

as the Natives can alienate without distress or serious inconvenience to themselves. To secure the observance of this rule will be one of the first duties of their official protector.

This concern for justice is a deeply Christian based one. It was to flow into the signing and creation of the Treaty of Waitangi itself.

Māori saw and see the Treaty in spiritual and Christian terms. The Te Reo name for the Treaty is 'Te Kawenata o Waitangi' ('the Covenant of Waitangi'). Here building on the concept of god's covenant as found in the Old Testament.

Hobson said to each signing chief "He iwi tahi tatou" ("we are one people"). The missionary, Henry Williams, had come up with those words based on the letter to the Ephesians.

Missionaries with considerable mana with Māori – particularly Henry Williams – took the Treaty throughout the country to be signed. Māori often signed because of the trust they had in the missionaries.

In 1839, we see William getting news of shonky land "purchases" by the New Zealand Company, and lamenting "How can British justice permit this?" Then, in 1840, we see him rejoicing with Henry that the treaty has been signed in Waitangi, the two men confidently expecting that Māori lands and interests are now protected.

As Grey and later governors work to subvert the Treaty, though, we see Williams' dismay (one shared by all the CMS missionaries), and once again hear the lament "How can British justice permit this?"

The part played by Rev. Octavius Hadfield (later Bishop of Wellington) is mentioned, too. Hadfield was from an aristocratic family and would not recommend to Māori that they sign the Treaty—because it is suspected, his aristocratic background meant he had a less rosy view of "British justice" than the middle-class Williams brothers. However, he used his high connections to press the British Parliament about the injustices that were occurring, though ultimately unsuccessfully.

In short, these missionaries (and not just those I've mentioned, but many more) were doing their utmost to protect the rights of Māori, and their influence and actions should not be downplayed or written out of the history books. European-descended Christians can be rightly proud of them, and, learning of their concerns, hopefully join in with the moves to make right what went so badly wrong.

As we know the history from the writing of the treaty onwards is not a great one. Wars and death an alienation of people became normative in New Zealand, and the loss of much land was suffered by Māori. But not only land but also wealth, health, and identity. And the effects and inequalities that have arisen since then are still being felt today.

But in 1975 significant change started to occur to allow for the righting of wrongs. In 1975 Dame Whina Cooper marched to parliament and in that year also the New Zealand government allowed for claims of injustice to be investigated from that year onwards. It wasn't until 1985 that claims of injustice could be brought from 1840. From the signing of the treaty.

Our law system is still strongly built around Christian values. It is still fundamentally having a basis in the 10 commandments. Injustice is not something to ignore, nor to forget about. But it is something to stand against. That is a Godly principal.

And the treaty was signed by the head of the church of England, Queen Victoria. It can be considered that the treaty was a godly one. One that was to be broken.

But is it right to bring up the past? To go all the way back to 1840 and bring up injustice?

We have a biblical precedent which leads us to a faith-based response. Where in 2 Samuel 21 an agreement made generations earlier with the Gibeonite people was not being honoured – This is recorded in the book of Joshua, that the Gibeonites would be 'Let to live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly. But Saul comes along and attacked them and so God's favour was removed from the land, a great famine was experienced. Later King David seeks the Lord, God responds: "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; [specifically] it is because he put the Gibeonites to death" and things were put right. And the putting things right is what our government started to do back in 1975.

Now this process of addressing injustice is perhaps not that popular by a vocal minority. Talk back radio and letters to the editors' pages usually has many upset when a new treaty settlement has been reached. We have seen from the likes of Don Brash the Hobsons pledge. We have also seen a greater use of Te Reo Maori spoken in everyday life, it got to such a point that the Broadcast Standards Authority needed to make a blanket ruling, that just speaking one of New Zealand's official languages on air is not in its self-grounds for a complaint.

And it would be fair to also recognise that our government is doing a great job! (How many of you have lost your house and land as a part of our governments efforts? Did you know Māori probably receive back hardly 1/1000th of what they lost? People may think the cost involved is too much for our country, but just in comparison about \$2 Billion in treaty settlements have occurred in total. DO you know how much we spend on Welfare in a year? About 26 billion. Did you know the treaty minister – at every treaty settlement – thanks the Māori people for their grace in accepting the government's offer, because we all know it's nothing but a token of apology in comparison to what was lost. In other words, our nation is indebted to Māori for their grace in accepting the apology they receive when a Treaty claim is resolved with the inclusion of a pitifully small gift of land and money in comparison to the amount that was unjustly taken. Aka – negative attitudes toward Māori because of land and money they are 'given' in Treaty settlements are very unjust. And to make the point – the land is not being 'given' to them anyway! Instead, a small token of land is being returned – while vast, vast, vast, vast amounts are not! And this is being achieved without any additional injustices being created by taking land off the people who currently own it.

The bible contains the story of the greatest treaty or covenant. Humanity was led into an agreement of sorts with God at the Garden of Eden. A relational contract was put in place between God the Creator and we humans.

God created everything for our pleasure and use– and then gave us the right and responsibility to care for this planet. It was an incredible gift – and a perfect planet – but it came with one condition We were to trust God – as reflected in the instruction from God to Adam and Eve, to eat from any tree in the Garden he had made for them except for one specific tree. And just like with the Treaty with the Gibeonites and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we have broken from that agreement or contract.

We have taken God's planet as our own, under our own authority – and have then pushed God away

We've then damaged not only the planet, but all our relationships within it as well

We've created nations – that argue and fight

Families – that feud

And even with those we love the most we are sometimes dishonest, impatient, and unkind. And because of it all we have become 'lost'

But because of God's love both eternal and nonremovable, instead of condemning us (John 3:17) God decided to create another Treaty "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".

Its purpose was to enable our reconciliation with him However, more than being merely signed in the highest name possible – his own name

This Treaty was signed with the costliest ink possible – his own blood.

God came in Christ to bear sin on his body on the cross (2 Peter 2:24)

This protected the laws of justice – which even God constrains himself to, because a good God cannot sin.

Why does God do all this? So, we can know him, and the life he intends us to have again.

With Christ we always have hope despite the ways in which we break the covenant we have with our creator.

Inspired by: <https://alltogether.co.nz/a-reason-to-celebrate-waitangi/>

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2A8MzzT8Qc>

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