THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN PACIFISM AND PEACE TRADITIONS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Introduction

This paper examines the roots of Christian pacifism and peace traditions in New Zealand. It is based upon work I have been engaged with over the past couple of years.

One of my main recent areas of research has concerned the peace dimension in early missionary Christianity in New Zealand. When I began examining this topic, I imagined follow-on projects that might explore later legacies, and consider the story of Christian engagements with peace and peacemaking in New Zealand more generally. As it happens, for a variety of reasons, I've found myself drawn into these larger projects rather earlier than anticipated.

Most of that work has revolved around two edited volumes: these are the first broad-ranging book-length examinations of the role of peacemaking in New Zealand Christianity. The first, *Saints and Stirrers: Christianity, Conflict and Peacemaking in New Zealand, 1814-1945*, has just been published, and contains a series of outstanding essays on peace and war in the period up to the end of the Second World War (see http://vup.victoria.ac.nz/saints-and-stirrers-christianity-conflict-and-peacemaking-in-new-zealand-1814-1945/).

The second volume, *Pursuing Peace in Godzone*, will be published by Victoria University Press in March 2018. This volume contains shorter, narrative-driven accounts, focusing on more recent dynamics and a more expansive conception of peace. Many of the chapters are first-person accounts, narrated by participants in the diverse communities and activities they describe. For example, there are accounts of the Peace Squadron and of the ploughshares action at Waihopai; there are reflections on working among disenfranchised Māori youth, and on ecological activism; and narratives drawn from within Anglican, Catholic, Quaker and Pentecostal traditions, among others. In addition to the book itself, my colleague Philip Fountain and I have been working creatively with some outstanding partners to help make this material available to teachers and high school students – and usable in the context of NCEA unit standards – through a series of associated resources.

I'll resist elaborating at length about the aims, origins and contents of both of these books. But it's worth stating here that taken together they establish a number of points that are salient for our present discussion: first, the books demonstrate that we have many remarkable, compelling, complex and distinctively Kiwi stories of peacemaking in our history; second, that many of these have been grossly overshadowed in the literature, and in the public imagination, but deserve to be better known; and third, that Christianity has played a much more interesting and pivotal role in the nation's peace history – and in the framing of peace traditions – than our existing accounts suggest.

Crucially, in relation to the theme for this study day, I want to argue that a sustained and dynamic peace tradition has been evident within New Zealand Christianity – or at least within particular sections of it; and that this tradition has been highly committed, challenging and disruptive – though it has waxed and waned somewhat and has more often been grounded in a rigorous Just War orientation than in outright opposition to war.

Missionary peacemaking

As I mentioned above, much of my own research has focused on the peace dimension within early missionary Christianity in New Zealand. It's this aspect that I will focus on today. One of my key claims is that "peace" loomed large in the way that early Protestant missionaries conceptualised and narrated the mission among Māori. This emphasis stood at the base of a mission-influenced peace tradition that conforms in many respects to the broad characterisation just offered.

I expect that many of us will be aware that early Christian missionaries to New Zealand frequently cast themselves as bearers of a "gospel of peace", and emphasised their role as peacemakers – and that this reputation became entrenched in many of the earliest accounts of the missions. That way of thinking about the missions largely disappeared in the post-colonial era as attitudes towards the missionary project soured.

Insofar as it has been remembered, Church Missionary Society (CMS) campaigning against war has sometimes been treated as a development of the late 1820s and 30s. It is certainly true that opportunities to inhabit the traditional "peacemaker" role in Māori society strengthened from the late-1820s. This occurred especially after the death of Hongi Hika, and led to some notable instances of mediation – for example, when with the mission boat *Herald* accompanied taua heading south from the Bay of Islands with the avowed intention of acting as peacemakers; and occasions such as the so-called Girls' War in 1830, where Samuel Marsden and others put themselves in harm's way, running between opposing parties in the midst of hostilities that had broken out at Kororareka.

Rather than seeing this kind of activity as a novel later development, my contention is that such actions elaborated a peace emphasis that was evident from the outset of the CMS mission – symbolically, and for strategic reasons, but also as a principled priority.

To begin with the symbolic dimension, it is notable and quite remarkable that the earliest symbol of Christianity in New Zealand actually pre-dated the launch of the mission and was in fact a peace symbol. It arrived courtesy of Ruatara – the Ngāpuhi rangatira who became the CMS's first sponsor and protector. Samuel Marsden tended to Ruatara when he discovered him sick and distressed on board the *Ann* as they both returned from England in 1809, and subsequently hosted him in New South Wales.

During his stay with Marsden, Ruatara apparently became convinced about the benefits of European agriculture and technology. He also came, in Marsden's view, to revere the Christian religion and pay "the greatest Respect to the Sabbath Day". On leaving Parramatta, Ruatara declared his intent to institute a Sabbath in New Zealand upon his return. To promote this, he requested "a Colour" that could be hoisted to advertise the Sabbath and ensure that his people desisted from their labour. Marsden's response was to offer some white muslin, for as he explained to Ruatara, the "white flag was the Signal for Peace".

Sabbath-keeping was rigorously promoted within evangelical Christianity, and became part of the rhythm of weekly life once the mission was established. Significantly, white flags continued to act as a signal for Sunday observance throughout the following decades. As a key emblem of Christianity, the flag was intended to symbolise the peace of the gospel: this

connoted spiritual peace, but also temporal peace, enacted through the cessation of labour and worship – and also the ending of strife.

Peace was not merely a prominent element symbolically. We also have early examples of attempts to broker peace, both as a matter of intrinsic concern and out of strategic necessity.

Before the famous Christmas Day sermon which launched the mission at Rangihoua Bay in 1814, Marsden and his charges put in further north at Matauri Bay with the express intention of brokering peace between Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Uru. The aim was to end conflicts that had escalated in the years following the *Boyd* incident in 1809, and which had put paid to the initial plan to establish the mission.

At one level Marsden's remonstrations on this occasion simply reflected that it was important to ensure (and be assured) of stability in the region if the mission was to survive and flourish. This had been one of the lessons drawn from the London Missionary Society mission in Tahiti – which initially faltered in the face of local conflicts – and it became salient at other times in New Zealand, too. No-one really wanted to establish a mission in the middle of a war-zone.

This consideration probably also influenced the CMS Committee's instructions forbidding Hall and King from becoming involved in any local wars. There was a similarly pragmatic element in Marsden's opposition to the trade in muskets (notwithstanding the famous controversies that erupted over this trade, especially in connection with Thomas Kendall's dealings with Hongi Hika).

In the face of these considerations, it would be possible to regard missionary peace rhetoric as simply that: rhetoric. Essentially symbolic, spiritualised language; or admonitions focused largely on self-preservation.

On the other hand, it is important to recognise that missionary teaching also emphasised peace because it was intrinsically good, and that the methods the CMS mission employed were often cast as ones that would reduce the incidence of violence and war.

Thus, schooling – in the Bay of Islands but also at Marsden's seminary at Parramatta – was explicitly described as a means to promote amity between young rangitira, thereby reducing the prospects for conflict between them, and more generally for "counteracting … ferocity".

Marsden's advocacy of trade and agriculture was justified in similar terms. He promoted these as the "peaceful arts", contrasting them with the evils of idleness and warfare. The logic of this contrast formed the basis of Marsden's message at the Matauri Bay reconciliation, where he sought to persuade local chiefs "how much more it would be for their interest and happiness to turn their attention to agriculture and the improvement of their country than continue to fight and murder one another"; "if they would only attend to the cultivation of their lands and lay aside all wars and murder, they would soon become a great and happy people".

Similar comments were made on many further occasions. In 1823, Marsden lamented that warfare flourished because Māori presently lacked alternatives to "exercise their active minds", adding: "Should the arts of peace in time open to them the field of commerce to find them employment, they will then have less inclination for war." Soon after, he reflected: "If they would turn their attention to agriculture and commerce, these would furnish a field

sufficient to occupy their minds…. Until something of this kind is adopted, I cannot conceive how their wars are to be prevented".

Conversion and the ethics of war

My suggestion, therefore, is that a peace ethic was advocated within the CMS mission, and that this ethic was promoted from very early in the piece – effectively from the outset.

More prominent and effective missionary mediation in the late-1820s took on particular significance because it coincided with a period of rapidly growing Māori interest in Christianity. This in turn coincided with a period of declining support for the Musket Wars. Missionaries saw a causal link, and claimed peace as one of the gifts of Christianity to Māori, though this explanation is now commonly discounted.

The role of Christianity in the declining warfare of the late-1830s has been much debated, as have the meanings, causes and processes involved in Māori conversion to Christianity. There is clearly more to explore about these issues. But whatever else it meant, turning to Christianity and to peace were connected. The CMS demanded peace as a precondition for establishing its new mission stations; it also required renunciation of violence and retribution as a necessity for would-be converts. And Māori clearly understood the connection between embrace of Christianity and a serious restructuring of the ethics of violence and war.

Missionaries like A.N. Brown sometimes attributed Māori resistance to Christianity as being based in their desire to continue fighting, and a number of incidents seemingly confirmed this. One of my favourite stories of this nature relates to Te Heuheu of Tūwharetoa, who reputedly told Thomas Chapman that "he would have one more fight with the tribe at Whanganui to settle old grievances, then make a durable peace, and settle down and 'believe'."

Converts evidently understood the Christian ethic to involve two key principles. The first was the principle of non-retaliation: this entailed repudiating violent expressions of utu (the cultural principle of reciprocity or payback), which was held to foster revenge and hence perpetuate conflict and war. A second principle was that of active reconciliation between previously hostile parties. These two principles were not unrelated.

Perhaps the most famous example of non-retaliation is connected with arguably New Zealand Christianity's most famous story: that of Tārore. Malcolm Falloon has rightly noted that this could be more accurately described as the Ngākuku story, for the most compelling aspect was not Tārore's piety but the refusal of her father (Ngākuku) to exact utu for her death – as was his right under customary law. This instance of non-retaliation was considered by missionary observers to be unimpeachable evidence of true conversion.

What is striking here is not only that Ngākuku's actions conformed with missionary expectations of converts, but also the basis on which he rationalised them. For Ngākuku explained his actions in terms that drew upon biblical teaching (for example, from Romans 12, which we know was widely used in missionary teaching and in the construction of Māori Christian ethics); he also drew upon distinctively Christian eschatology – notably invoking a final judgment of God:

> "There lies my child", Ngākuku said at Tārore's funeral: "she has been murdered, as a payment for your bad conduct, but do not you rise to seek a payment for her. God will do that. Let this be the finishing of the war with Rotorua. Now, let peace be made."

The principle of active reconciliation with enemies was also evident in Ngākuku's story. In this case, it was Tārore's murderer, Uita, who sought forgiveness from Ngākuku as part of his own embrace of Christianity. Tāmihana Te Rauparaha's travels to Kai Tahu may also be seen in this light, as part of the fuller Tārore narrative.

Another example of these dynamics can be found in interactions between Ngāti Ruanui and Tūwharetoa in the 1840s, in which recently Christianised Ngāti Ruanui committed themselves to non-retaliation, and subsequently to preaching and peacemaking tours among Tūwharetoa that ultimately led to the deaths of Mānihera and Kereopa – often referred to as the first Māori Christian martyrs. Their story is told in *Saints and Stirrers*.

A Christian peace tradition?

What then shall we say about the origins of a Christian peace tradition in New Zealand? Quite a lot, potentially, but I'll attempt to state a few things briefly.

My first point is that if we want to find the origins a New Zealand Christian peace tradition, we need to look seriously at the very earliest period of Christian presence in New Zealand. This is important for a number of reasons – not the least being that this tradition is often strangely overlooked, which is regrettable since failure to recognise it denies us a richer understanding of our peace tradition and some of its resources.

Another point is that this early Christian peace tradition arguably became most thoroughly embedded within Māori Christianity. I have alluded to a number cases where Māori Christians exhibited extraordinary commitment to non-violence, non-retaliation, and opposition to war. This remained a significant and enduring thread within Māori Christianity, though it was by no means uniform or comprehensive. There were often sharp disjunctions between the ethics of war and violence that were acceptable within Māori Christianity (and mission-influenced spiritual traditions) and the assumptions of the settler State and settler Christianity.

Wiremu Parata is particularly well known to many in association with the *Wi Parata v Bishop of Wellington* case which led to the famous Prendergast ruling in 1877 that the Treaty of Waitangi was a "legal nullity". That case arose on account of dispute over land in Porirua that had been gifted to the Church of England to establish a collegiate-style institution that never materialised. At a 1905 Royal Commission into the land dispute, Parata objected to the idea of Ngāti Toa children being required to participate in military drill as part of state education, testifying that their lands had been given for a school "with the object of teaching the new religion, with a view to cause intertribal wars and the killing of men to cease". Lands were not given "for teaching children how to fight and how to kill each other", he said. "It was religion that civilised us, and I think the teaching of religion is a good thing."

Thorough-going pacificist communities like Parihaka were perhaps exceptional in their absolutism and tenacity. I think it is a mistake to see these communities simply as exemplars of "political resistance" (as often happens). Historians have tended to downplay the religious dimensions of Te Whiti's ministry, and also the significance of missionary influences on him, partly from a sense that these seem inimical to Māori agency. Yet this was a distinctly religious

community, and it is hard to imagine it taking the shape it did without Te Whiti's biblical knowledge and the input of Wesleyan and Lutheran teachers who emphasised peace. A similar point could be made with respect to Te Maiharoa, the Waitaha prophet who identified as Anglican before embracing Kaingarara teachings.

Christian peace traditions and just war

It is notable that peace ideologies were prominent in many of the new movements of the nineteenth century that were forged in interaction with Christianity – Pai Marire and the King movement being among these. Both of these movements struggled to maintain opposition to the use of force in the face of settler encroachments on their lands, and with the outbreak of war prosecuted by the colonial government.

Wiremu Tāmihana provides an example of the difficulty of maintaining strict opposition to war. A notable advocate of the peace gospel he also became a key protagonist in the King Movement – a movement which actually elaborated aspects of missionary political theology, though it also worried the missionaries. Yet he was also drawn into conflict with the Crown in response to aggressive wars of conquest in Taranaki and the Waikato; he ultimately chose to lay down his weapons again – though this was controversial, and came at some personal cost.

In his responses, Tāmihana was not entirely repudiating the principles of earlier missionary teaching, as propounded by Marsden, Henry Williams and others. The peace gospel that they had promoted was pacificist rather than pacifist in the strict modern sense. It fitted broadly within a Just War framework, since it accepted a protective role for the armed forces, the permissibility of lethal force by the State in the form of capital punishment, and the legitimacy of warfare prosecuted by civilised nations where just causes could be attributed.

It is telling, for example, that humanitarian opponents of the war in Taranaki, such as Octavius Hadfield, couched their strident opposition in precisely these terms. They complained bitterly that the Taranaki War was a failure of justice, civilisation and the rule of law, but not that war was on principle wrong.

In conclusion, then, the missionary peace gospel may reasonably be understood to represent the beginnings of a Christian peace tradition in New Zealand, and more broadly of a peace tradition in New Zealand. It was not uncomplicated or beyond critique (some of these complications and criticisms have already been well explored). In many respects, it was a rigorously-applied Just War peace tradition rather than a strictly pacifist one, but it was nevertheless significant and remarkably influential.

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Available on the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship web site,

www.converge.org.nz/pma/apf