

AOTEAROA

Our Whakapapa,
Our Stories



Religion

Religion

This NZ History booklet explores religion and how Māori have used, adapted and integrated aspects of the Christian faith to serve their material and spiritual needs.

The development of different religions has changed how New Zealanders live together in this country.

In this booklet we will cover:

- Te Ao Māori and the belief that all living things are connected through whakapapa. There is no single supreme being – everything combined creates a living, organic world.
- The 1830's when missionaries were striving to convert Māori to Christianity in the Bay of Islands. Eventually the missionaries created a place of connection between the Māori world and the Pakeha world.
- The way the monotheism (one God) of Christianity challenged and confronted the beliefs of Te Ao Māori. To convert to Christianity Māori had to let go of some of their cultural beliefs.
- How the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi by Henry Williams (an Anglican missionary) began a chain of events that led to Māori losing trust in the missionaries.

Missionaries of every faith had strongly recommended to rangatira that they signed the Treaty as protection against the negative threats of colonialism. When this protection did not eventuate Māori re-evaluated their beliefs and relationships; leading to the establishment of the Kīngitanga, and new religions like Pai Marire which merged Te Ao Māori with some Christian beliefs. Māori prophets became leaders, including on the battlefield e.g. Te Kooti.

- How legislation, (for example, the Tohunga Suppression Act (1907)) was devised to assimilate Māori into mainstream colonial NZ but in fact created a void in Te Ao Māori that continued to generate new religions e.g. The Ratana Church.
- How the increasing urbanisation of Māori separated them from their ancestral lands, but religions helped them re-group.
- Finally, this booklet explores the links between religion and political life in NZ; and how Māori sought through both to halt land loss and re-invigorate the Treaty of Waitangi.

Nga Karakia a te Māori

For Māori the world was thought of in a spiritual way; everything from creation to the way day-to-day life was lived had spiritual links. All living things are connected through whakapapa. There is no single supreme being – everything combined creates a living, organic world (Te Ao Māori).

Tapu, noa, mana, and mauri are key spiritual principles for Māori.

1814 Anglican missionaries

The first missionary, Samuel Marsden, was invited by Ruatara to Oihi in the Bay of Islands, through the Church Missionary Society (CMS). He celebrated the first Christian service there.

Missionaries needed to learn Te Reo Māori to be able to convert locals to Christianity. They began to write Te Reo down and eventually books were written. This opened a new world view and the printing of books in Māori was important for all missionaries.

Māori also saw the missions as a place of learning, opportunity, and trade, especially when the musket wars were beginning. They viewed the missions as a strategic asset to learn and engage with the newcomers and to access new technology e.g. muskets.

1823 Methodist missionaries

The first Methodist mission was in Kaeo, Northland. Samuel Leigh and William White were key in establishing the mission station there. One of their mistakes was in not converting the local rangitira to Christianity before trying to convert the rest of the iwi and the missionaries were pushed out of the mission at one point.

Another Methodist missionary, John Whitely, became increasingly concerned about Māori welfare with the influx of settlers in the area. He encouraged chiefs on the west coast of the North Island from Kawhia to Mokau to sign the treaty of Waitangi. Later, although originally upset that unoccupied land was taken by the Crown to sell to settlers, he went on to side with the colonials.

Because of his knowledge of Te Reo Māori his services as a translator and advisor were sought by government officials, and he also acted as an unsalaried commissioner for native lands from 1858.

1838 Catholic missionaries

Jean Baptiste Pompallier was the first Catholic bishop in NZ. He arrived in the Hokianga with other Catholic priests. In 1839 seven priests of the Marist order arrived to join Pompallier and the denomination relocated its headquarters to Kororāreka (later renamed Russell) in the Bay of Islands. From there the missions spread elsewhere in Northland, and to Waikato.

Māori related to the ritual of the Catholic religious ceremonies and Pompallier was sympathetic to the Māori world view; urging his priests to build Catholic belief around existing Māori tikanga (customs) and to avoid seeing Māori ideas as anti-Christian simply because they were non-European. Their aim was Catholic conversion, rather than empire building.

The priests and brothers who accompanied Pompallier were well suited to the demands of their new life. As celibates they had no family responsibilities and were able to travel lightly and live in the villages of their intended converts. Unlike their Protestant counterparts, they did not need to barter for land in order to support a large family.

Catholic missionaries had a printing press and produced many religious documents in Māori, including the Bible. In early 1840 Pompallier distributed the first printed books from the mission. A year later a printing press was imported from Europe along with a lay printer. It produced a large quantity of prayers, hymns and sections of the New Testament in Māori.

Pompallier spent 30 years in New Zealand, returning to France in 1869 and dying there in 1871. New Zealanders remembered him and visited and tidied his grave in Puteaux near Paris. Efforts to return Pompallier to New Zealand gained momentum in the 1990s. After obtaining permission from the Pompallier family and French bishops, his body was returned to New Zealand in 2002. After being taken on a hiko around New Zealand he was laid to rest beneath the altar of St Mary's Church in Motuti in the Hokianga.

1840 The Treaty Of Waitangi

In 1840, through the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by rangatira and representatives of the Crown, New Zealand became a British colony and not, as once seemed possible, a French one. Akaroa, the site of a hopeful handful of French immigrants, did not become the country's capital.

Pompallier was present when the Treaty of Waitangi was first signed. He extracted a promise from Lieutenant-Governor William Hobson that all religions would be given equal treatment and that the new administration would respect religious freedom. Unlike England, New Zealand was not to have an 'established' (official) church.

Conflict over Māori rights

The churches played significant and often controversial roles in politics. Between the mid-1830s and early 1860s Anglican missionaries, clergy and laymen led the humanitarian campaign to uphold Māori rights and welfare. An even larger number of Māori Christians, also often Anglican, defended their land and political rights.

Dissenters, secularists and anti-clerical Anglicans led the settler attack on what they saw as a reactionary clerical-Māori alliance determined to keep land and power away from ordinary settlers. As the NZ Wars began many other missionaries sided with the government.

Octavius Hadfield was a famed Anglican missionary who lived and worked in Otaki (Wellington) establishing 20 mission schools over his 30 years in the area. He was great friends with Te Rauparaha and was a Pākehā authority on Māori language and customs.

Hadfield supported Wiremu Kingi's claim to the Waitara land block and was described by the press of the time as 'a traitor and bigoted meddlesome missionary'. Hadfield's stinging comments about Grey made him the most hated Pākehā in the colony.

Trust is Broken

As the NZ Wars continued Māori witnessed the contradictions between the actions of the military and what they had been taught as Christian beliefs. For example, prisoners of war were being enslaved when the missionaries had preached against the taking of slaves during the Musket Wars. Additionally, the deaths of unprotected kaumatua, women, and children at the hands of the colonial soldiers turned many Māori against the missionaries.

Relationships continued to deteriorate and when the missionary C.S. Volkner was suspected of spying by Māori. The fact that he was a member of the Anglican clergy gave him no protection, and he was executed.

Religion and resistance - New Religions Emerge

Māori increasingly rejected the missions and in their place prophetic Māori religious movements developed with a strong focus on resisting the loss of Māori land. In return, the secular colonial state punished Māori religious movements that posed a practical or symbolic threat.

Supporting Link

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/religion-and-society/page-4>

1845 Tikanga Hōu

This religion emerged in Taranaki where, among others, Te Whiti-o-Rongomai was a prophet and leader. His teaching became influential throughout Taranaki and beyond. Te Whiti was identified early in his life as one who would carry a special spiritual authority in teaching and prophecy. His relative, Tohu Kākahi, was also identified. Accordingly, special care was taken to ensure their safety. He received from elders a vast measure of traditional knowledge, from which his later teaching, tempered by Christian Scripture and an astute world view, would flow.

Te Whiti developed an oratory which addressed Māori misgivings over the loss of their land. Many came to listen and to consider his advice, and a resistance movement developed around his settlement at Parihaka. Ploughmen from Parihaka disrupted government attempts to survey and occupy confiscated land on the Waimate plains. In 1881 the government sent more than 1500 troops into Parihaka. Te Whiti was among those seen as 'fanatics' who were arrested and imprisoned without trial for months.

1862 Pai Mārire and the Hauhau Faith

Te Ua Haumene (initially baptised by the Methodists) developed this religion. His goal was to create a peaceful and harmonious society underpinned by Pai Mārire (goodness and peace), but he was driven into political action against the unjust seizure of land.

Pai Mārire influence spread outwards from Taranaki to Whanganui and then the East Coast, but in time Te Ua Haumene's political aspirations regarding Māori military resistance changed and he signed a declaration of allegiance to the crown. He was taken into custody and died later that year, still urging non-violent resistance.

1866 Ringatū

A different faith, known as Ringatū (the upraised hand), was founded by Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Tūruki on Chatham Island (Wharekauri). During his captivity there between 1866 and 1868 Te Kooti studied the Bible very closely and compiled numerous prayers containing scriptural verses. He held religious services twice daily and his personal mana and Biblical interpretations converted Hauhau prisoners to the new faith.

On his return to NZ Te Kooti was pursued by government soldiers through the Urewera from 1869 to 1872 and Ringatū became strong religion in Bay of Plenty.

Christianity

Some iwi were committed to traditional Christianity and resisted these movements, reflected in an increase in the numbers of kūpapa (Māori fighting alongside the Crown). Kūpapa allied themselves with the Crown to safeguard their tribal resources. The British government began to resent the costs of the New Zealand wars, withdrawing its troops and the fighting on the government side was increasingly in the hands of colonial forces and kūpapa.

Sectarian Conflicts

Colonial Catholics from poor Irish backgrounds brought long memories of British Protestant oppression with them. Some were quick to see old injustices resurfacing. There was a minor skirmish between Catholics and Protestants at Ōkārito on the West Coast in 1865, but three years later in Hokitika when local Catholics expressed support for the Fenians (militant Irish nationalists), 800 special constables were sworn in. Catholics attacked Protestant Orange marchers in Christchurch and Timaru on Boxing Day 1879.

‘Applied Christianity’

In the 1880s, as political parties emerged dissenters - Catholics and secularists - supported the centre-left parties in New Zealand’s relatively narrow political spectrum. The Liberal government (1891–1912) of Richard ‘King Dick’ Seddon (Anglican) and Joseph Ward (Catholic) attracted significant support from all three groups. Members of the Protestant-dominated Reform party of ‘Farmer Bill’ Massey, a Presbyterian from an Ulster background, sometimes criticised Labour as overly influenced by Papists (Catholics) and godless Bolsheviks (socialists).

Political success eluded Labour until Michael Joseph Savage (Catholic) and Walter Nash (Anglican), moved the party closer to the ideological centre. A dozen ministers or ex-ministers of religion stood for Parliament in 1935. Labour won a landslide victory by presenting itself as the party of practical Christian compassion, which it contrasted with the heartless and anti-family depression-era coalition government. Labour also forged an alliance with the Rātana Church which endures to this day, although challenged by the rise of the Māori party.

Savage famously described Labour’s Social Security Act 1938, intended to provide security for all from cradle to grave, as ‘applied Christianity’. Much subsequent expansion of the welfare state occurred under National governments, testifying to the enduring significance of ‘applied Christianity’ in the middle ground of politics.

1885 Mother Aubert

Suzanne Aubert was a Catholic sister who devoted her life to helping others. Her work took her from France to Auckland, then to Hawke's Bay, to the Whanganui River, and finally to Wellington. Along the way, she founded a new Catholic congregation, cared for children and the sick, by skilfully combining Māori medicine and Pākehā science, and wrote books in Māori, English and French, adding significantly to a higher cultural understanding and literary heritage.

Tolerance and friendship became strategies for her mission.

In 1883, by invitation of the Māori from the Whanganui River area, Suzanne left Hawke's Bay for Hiruhārama/Jerusalem – to revive the Catholic mission.

It's here that the home-grown Catholic congregation – the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion – was born. She had become acutely aware of the challenges faced by poor and unmarried mothers and their babies and took 74 babies and children into their care.

“Never forget that we were first instituted for the Māori, that we began in the bush, that by our vows we are concentrated to their service. They have the first claim on our love, on our care. A Māori village was the cradle of our institute”.



Suzanne Aubert with children at Hiruhārama/Jerusalem in 1898.
(from Compassion Te Pūaroa site for Mother Aubert)

Supporting Link

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzanne_Aubert

1900 Te Hāhi o te Wairua Tapu

Mere Rikiriki, established a spiritual centre at Parewanui in Rangitīkei. Although Mere had some of the mana of a tohunga, the church was based on Christian scriptures and stressed the mediating role of the Holy Spirit and the unity of Māori under God and the Treaty of Waitangi.

Mere Rikiriki practised faith healing and the use of Māori herbal remedies. An enlightened and knowledgeable speaker, she was well versed in the Scriptures. Thousands from tribes throughout New Zealand visited Parewanui to listen to Mere Rikiriki's teachings and to receive and witness healings.

Supporting Link

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/ngati-apa/page-4>

Māramatanga

Mere Rikiriki inspired the Māramatanga movement. In comparison to Rātana's religious mission of putting aside the past and eliminating old tapu, including the powers of the tohunga, Māramatanga blended Māori custom and Catholic beliefs. The movement's founder, Hōri Ēnoka, known as Māreikura, was supported and guided by her. The movement remains vigorous today.

Rātana

The most famous spiritual leader to whom Mere Rikiriki gave guidance was her nephew, Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana. Mere Rikiriki was instrumental in laying the foundations for Rātana's teachings. He was strengthened by her counsel and he often consulted her. A series of signs and revelations, coupled with Mere Rikiriki's teachings, led him to develop his Christian-based beliefs and his stress on the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi.

1907 Rua Kēnana

Rua Kēnana, known as the Māori Mihāia (Messiah), developed a 'City of God' at Maungapōhatu in the Urewera from 1907. The community took its children out of government schools, and refused to fight alongside the British in the First World War. In 1916 armed police marched into the village to arrest Rua for selling liquor without a licence. In the gunfight that erupted, two Māori, including one of Rua's sons, were killed. Rua was convicted of 'morally' resisting arrest and sentenced to two-and-a-half years prison with hard labour.

1920 Te Haahi Rātana – the Rātana Church

Rātana's movement gave new hope and a trans-tribal unity to Māori, who had many grievances against the New Zealand government. By 1920 they had lost most of their lands and had been devastated by disease and the adverse moral and economic effects of World War I.

Rātana became well known beyond his tribal area as a prophet, healer, and leader. Thousands visited his farm, which became known as Rātana pā.

A subject of particular bitterness was the failure of the government to fulfil its promises in the Treaty of Waitangi. Combining political activism with its religious beliefs, the Rātana Church began to sponsor political candidates in 1922. Although it was not until 1931 that a Rātana candidate was elected, the church, allying itself with the Labour Party, eventually established a position in which it could exercise some political power. During the period 1943–63, its members held all four Māori parliamentary seats.

In 2018 the Rātana Church was the largest Māori denomination in NZ, with more than 40,000 members.

Māori Leadership in the Anglican Church

By the turn of the century a new generation of Māori leaders were pushing Māori and the Anglican Church in a new direction. They included Apirana Ngata, who was strongly shaped by the church as a student at Te Aute College; one of two colleges the church set up for Māori boys. Ngata led the call for a Māori bishop and, despite opposition from some non-Māori Anglicans, Frederick Augustus Bennett from Te Arawa was ordained as the first Pihopa o Aotearoa (Bishop of Aotearoa). This position was originally funded by iwi dairy schemes.

After World War 2 the Māori Anglican Church faced significant challenges as Māori moved to the cities in larger numbers. The struggle for Māori to assert themselves in society and the wider Anglican church ended in a new constitution - Te Pouhere - which came into effect in 1992. This set up three tikanga (cultural streams) for Pākehā, Māori and Pacific peoples. Under this new system Māori had full autonomy within the church to establish bishops and run the church as they saw fit, and there was power sharing at a provincial level. All Anglican ministers received training in the Māori language. By 2013 Māori made up 13% of Anglican Church members.

1980 Paul Reeves

As Primate and archbishop of New Zealand Sir Paul Reeves was a national figure. He was not afraid to say what he believed and his faith put him firmly on the side of the marginalised.

In 1985, the prime minister David Lange controversially invited Reeves, to accept the office of governor general, the ceremonial head of state as the Queen's representative. Was this compatible with being the head of a church? He partially solved that problem by resigning the archbishopric, but not his life's vocation as a bishop of the church. He and his wife, Beverley, brought fresh air to Government House in Wellington. They opened it to the people and as the first Māori incumbent, Reeves felt free to turn the ballroom into a place where a hundred of his tribe could bed down for the night. His role, he declared, was still like that of a bishop: "To travel, to stand alongside people and to search for common ground."

When the government turned to the neo-conservative orthodoxy of the market Reeves broke ranks and criticised what he saw as "an increasingly stratified society" in which "the spirit of the market steals life from the vulnerable but the spirit of God gives life to all". The prime minister who had appointed him was not amused.

When his term was over in 1990, he began a 21-year period as a roving ambassador and Commonwealth trouble-shooter. For three years he represented the Anglican Communion at the UN, and served as assistant bishop of New York.

In New Zealand, he was influential in giving his church a new bicultural constitution, chaired the Bioethics Council (2002-04) and worked to help secure the land rights of his Taranaki tribe. In 2007 he was made a member of the Order of New Zealand. Finally, he turned the role of chancellor of Auckland's University of Technology into something like a full-time job, travelling and putting the university on the world stage.

Supporting Link

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/30/the-right-rev-sir-paul-reeves-obituary>

Today

Since the 1970's the Māori renaissance, along with the activity of the Waitangi Tribunal has begun a return to Te Ao Māori. This continues to gather strength as NZ struggles to become a more bi-cultural nation.

One example of how ancient knowledge is returning and being upheld is the introduction of traditional medicine into hospitals. Another are the tikānga rehabilitation programmes in prisons.

The spheres of religion and politics continue to overlap and evolve to address the challenges of equity and Tiriti rights for Māori.