



STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH IN AOTEAROA

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Editor
Mark Nichols

Strengthening the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand

New Vision New Zealand Vol. 5, 2024

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New Zealand Christian Network

NEW ZEALAND

EDITOR

Mark Nichols

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH
IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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Disclaimer

This book makes no claim to represent Christians of all denominations and opinions, or to be the sole voice of the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand. The New Zealand Christian Leaders' Congress attracts delegates from a variety of Christian traditions, and so there may be views in this book that are not necessarily those of the New Zealand Christian Network, of most attendees at the Congress, or even the churches or movements of each author. That's fine, as long as all views sit broadly within the bounds of evangelical Christianity.

In his Foreword to Gavin Ortlund's excellent *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*, D.A. Carson writes of Ortlund's four tiers of theological triage which are:

- (1) doctrines that are *essential* to the gospel;
- (2) doctrines that are *urgent* for the health and practice of the church, such that Christians commonly divide denominationally over them;
- (3) doctrines that are *important* for one branch of theology or another, but not such that they should lead to separation;
- (4) doctrines that are *unimportant* to gospel witness and ministry collaboration.¹

Carson adds that 'Paul (to go no further) can designate certain doctrines as matters "of first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3), while other beliefs allow for difference of opinion (Rom. 14:5).²

There is room for dispute and disagreement across the breadth of God's grace and the central, and essential, message of the Gospel that unites us.

.

¹ D. A. Carson, "Foreword," in *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*, The Gospel Coalition Booklet Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 12–13.

² Carson, 13.

Foreword by Stuart Lange

Tēnā koutou katoa, i runga i te ingoa o tou tātou Ariki, o Īhu Karaiti.

This book, which directly reflects the inspiration and hard work of Dr Mark Nichols, arose as a follow-up to the New Zealand Christian Leaders' Congress in September 2023. The Congress was a gathering of over two hundred Christian leaders, from both churches and Christian organisations. People were present from many different denominations and cultures, bringing together in one place a wonderful huge depth of Christian faith, commitment, ministry, wisdom, and experience. Those who have written contributions for this book were some of the many speakers or panel members at the Congress.

The Congress was convened by the New Zealand Christian Network, a very widely inter-denominational network whose *whakapapa* (lineage) goes back to the 1846 Evangelical Alliance in Britain, with its emphases on Gospel, Bible, new birth, evangelism, mission, the spiritual unity of believers in Christ, and the renewal of church and society. In our own era, the New Zealand Christian Network is the New Zealand affiliate of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The calling of the New Zealand Christian Network is to 'gather, build, speak:' to help gather Christians and churches in unity, to help build and strengthen the Church in New Zealand, and to speak with biblical grace and truth into both church and society.

The New Zealand Christian Network called the Congress because it felt it was time for Christian leaders from across the nation to come together and take stock of where Christianity is at in our very rapidly changing New Zealand society; to listen to the Spirit of God; to listen to one another; and to discern together. The theme of the Congress was 'Strengthening the Church in Aotearoa.' That theme is also the theme of this book, but the contributors were not restricted to just what they were able to say at the Congress itself.

It is our prayer that this book may indeed make a useful contribution towards strengthening the Christian church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rev Dr Stuart Lange (National Director, New Zealand Christian Network).

Foreword by Bruce Patrick

By Bruce Patrick

It is a privilege to contribute the Foreword for this latest volume of *New Vision New Zealand* (2024).

Mark Nichols impressed me when we met, obviously by the will of God, at the New Zealand Christian Network Congress in September 2023. After the inspiration of that event, he suggested he might be able to pull together a fifth volume of NVNZ: *Strengthening the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand: New Vision New Zealand Vol. 5, 2024*. This publication would preserve and make widely available the contributions to the Congress of insightful Christian leaders and academics. This, at a time when, post-COVID, we need factual information. There are significant negative developments affecting the Church in New Zealand. There is a parallel in the book of Nehemiah.

[When Nehemiah had heard of the state of the city, he records that] I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.³

[I] went up by night and inspected [thoroughly the broken state of the city]. Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision”. And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build”. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.⁴

The equivalent of Nehemiah’s survey is here for us, in chapter after chapter. In the brilliant second chapter, Geoffrey Troughton and Joseph Bulbulia interpret the demographic facts and figures for us. Do we respond as did Nehemiah in his day?⁵ Do we believe the hand of our God is upon us for good? Have we heard the words which the King has spoken to us? This post-COVID publication is sobering reading for Christians and Christian leaders with a burden for the extension of the kingdom of God and the upbuilding of the body of Christ. Here, chapter after chapter offers biblical and prophetic insights in regard to the multi-faceted way forward.

Every chapter is helpful. Though it is invidious to single out any, please forgive my personal enthusiasm for Malcolm Falloon’s researched account of the amazing impact of the Gospel among Māori throughout Aotearoa between 1830 and 1850. Prominent

³ Nehemiah 1:4.

⁴ Nehemiah 2:17-18.

⁵ The timing of this book’s release is such that the 2023 Census data is now available. The question here remains.

historians have downplayed, reinterpreted, rationalised, ignored or deleted this from the record.

Knowing something about the extent of the work involved, I was encouraged to learn a little about Mark Nichols's academic background and his ability to achieve. Mark is deputy chair for the Scripture Union New Zealand Board. He has a PhD from the University of Otago, his thesis focused on the spiritual formation experiences of online theological distance education students. He is a lay preacher and an enthusiastic student of the Bible. His expertise is in open and distance education, in which field he has acquired a considerable international reputation and multiple distinctives.

The work involved planning the content of this volume, then recruiting writers, mainly from among the outstanding speakers at the 2023 Congress, who were very willing as volunteers to submit chapters written in their area of expertise and passion. Editorial briefing and encouragement are usually needed, more for some than for others. Thank you to every writer for your excellent contributions. These submissions needed various editorial adjustments to co-exist consistently in the planned volume. Design, formatting and the design of a cover preceded publishing. The challenge now is promotion and distribution. Mark Nichols has done all of this in his own time as a volunteer. He deserves our very grateful thanks.

Bruce Patrick is a retired Baptist Home Mission Director and Baptist Pastor, currently a PhD candidate with Otago University working towards publishing several books about CMS missionary and bishop Octavius Hadfield and his wife Kate (Williams). In 1993, motivated by the Great Commission and led by the Holy Spirit, with vision and energy he launched what became New Zealand Christian Network, with the first national Leaders' Congress informed by Vol. 1 of New Vision New Zealand. For almost two decades he led and chaired the Board and a series of national Congresses, and produced NVNZ Vols. 2, 3, and 4.

Preface and acknowledgements

By *Mark Nichols*

I attended my very first New Zealand Christian Congress in September 2023, taking a bout of annual leave. These events have been going for some time, and I cannot say why this one caught my attention. It was great to catch up with some Laidlaw College contacts and Christian leaders I have known over the years.

On the opening night, to my surprise, I met Bruce Patrick for the first time. Bruce's was a name familiar to me; I remember being given—and devouring—the first *New Vision New Zealand* book published in 1993. I was a new Christian and appreciated the glance of a faith that went well beyond my locality to across the nation. We got talking and, well, long story short, this book happened.

So, on to the acknowledgements. I owe much to the endorsement and encouragement of Stuart Lange, National Director of the New Zealand Christian Network, who agreed to my suggestion of taking this forward. I knew Stuart from my time as a colleague at Laidlaw College and fondly remember the runs we used to go on in the Waitakere Ranges (he would kindly wait for me). Stuart gave me the validation I needed and fine-tuned the direction for this work. He was also responsible for encouraging many of the authors and has engaged with the work to the extent of being able to provide an insightful concluding chapter.

Each author made this volume. Despite busyness, nagging reminders, and manuscript constraints, each delivered a piece that is both highly readable and very engaging. I know that the request for a chapter took some beyond their comfort zones. All have my grateful thanks for taking the time to contribute and encourage the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

A disclaimer... or few.

- Any errors in this book are likely mine.
- Stylistic errors are *doubly* mine. I wrestle with edited books whose editors look to have done little more than sew together chapters of different shapes, styles, and substance in a patchwork jarring for the reader as they go from one chapter to the next. Much of my work in editing this book has been to ease the differences across each chapter such that the overall format and flow are at the least similar.
- Also, motivated by a respect for both, I have capitalised both Church and Gospel when the nouns appear to represent the universal body of Christ and the all-important Christian message, respectively. That may jar with some

readers, but I make capitalisation of these terms as proper nouns one small claim as a mark of self-expression across this work.

- As an editorial call, I have also favoured Aotearoa New Zealand over simply New Zealand. I trust readers will resonate with that decision. I have occasionally not included ‘Aotearoa’ where it seemed to me to become tedious, and the author initially referred to ‘New Zealand.’ ‘Aotearoa’ is never removed where originally submitted by an author.
- Finally, though I went so far as to interloan and partly read the Chicago Manual of Style, I claim neither omniscience of nor strict adherence to the same. To anyone put out, let me know; perhaps Volume VI will be yours to perfect!

The English Standard Version (ESV) is the translation used across all Bible quotations.

What we have here is a record of Christian leaders’ messages for the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, given in September 2023. These messages are at once prophetic, timely, and interesting.

I hope this work inspires you as much as Volume I did me, and see in it that rich mix of thought, practice, and faithfulness showing Christianity at work in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a privilege to present this work to you.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with every reader.

Ngā mihi,

Mark Nichols

31 October, 2024.

Engaging with this book

This book is designed to be engaged with in various ways. As a sole reader, you are welcome to go cover-to-cover, or dip into any chapter. All are designed to stand alone. If you are a member of a home group or home church, you may want to focus on a single chapter per gathering and discuss the questions included at the end of each chapter. If you're a student, you will find plenty of helpful and citable insights from multiple experts across Aotearoa New Zealand.

There are five sections to the book:

1. *The Gospel and our Context*. Five chapters presenting the state of the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the imperative, challenges, and experiences of sharing the Gospel.
2. *Gospel and Treaty*. Two insightful chapters concerned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, focusing on the initial Māori response to the Gospel and our contemporary interpretation of the Treaty.
3. *“Re” the Church*. Eight reflections and exhortations to the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to be regared, renewed, and revived, the section ending with a view of the global Church.
4. *Contemporary Issues*. Four chapters on the theme of social and political discourse and Christianity, with a focus on recent legislation and its implications.
5. *Christian Ministry*. Three chapters on the subjects of governance, prayer, and worship leading by prominent national authorities, each of whom will inform, inspire, and link to further ideas.

The final chapter is a message to the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand penned in October 2024, in the final section *To the Saints of Aotearoa New Zealand*.

Many of the chapters in this book are based on presentations given at the 2023 New Zealand Christian Congress. You can freely review these clips from the New Zealand Christian Network website at <https://nzchristiannetwork.org.nz/congress/>.

There is no index. In lieu of an index, you are invited to access the PDF of this book and use the text search feature of your PDF reader.

Section One:

THE GOSPEL AND OUR CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

1. Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand: some reflections

Stuart Lange

“Compared to what it once was, the Christian voice in society is now less welcome, less listened to, and less prominent. Non-Christian voices and narratives predominate. What Christians say is not usually seen as of great interest.”

Christian beginnings in this land

Te Rongopai, the Gospel of Jesus, was first proclaimed in this land on 25 December 1814. A couple of decades later, there began among Māori a strong move of God. Māori took the Gospel to other Māori, in some cases to former enemies. By mid-century, one historian estimated at least 60% of Māori had adopted Christian faith; a recent study shows the actual figure was over 90%.⁶

The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, although inspired in part by evangelical Christian humanitarian concern to protect Māori from exploitation, in effect helped open the door to British colonisation of New Zealand. As settler numbers built up, the Treaty's promises became disregarded, and the colonialists' desire for Māori land prevailed. War, confiscations, dispossession and injustices followed. This helped dampen the enthusiasm of many Māori for Christianity and left an enduring legacy of bitterness.

Most Europeans who came to settle in New Zealand, or were born here, were at least nominally Christian, and some strongly Christian. As in Britain, biblical principles were a significant influence on personal values and public policy. However, Aotearoa New Zealand was never a pervasively Christian country. It is not true that once almost everyone in New Zealand went to church. Church attendance in New Zealand was

⁶ Malcolm Falloon, “The Māori Conversion and Four Early Converts” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2021), 91–97. Available online: <https://hdl.handle.net/10523/12099>.

never as high as in some other countries. The all-time peak of weekly church attendance in New Zealand, in 1896, was just under 30%.⁷

God is still at work, but there are big challenges

Two centuries on from the first proclamation of the Gospel in Aotearoa, God is unquestionably still at work in this land. Many people of all cultures continue to find God and come to faith in Christ. Very large numbers of Christians in this country continue to believe, worship, pray, honour and serve God, and to lovingly reach out to others in the name of Christ. Some churches are flourishing and have many young people. Some of those churches are largely mono-cultural, while others are highly multi-cultural.

It is no secret, though, that the New Zealand church is not doing nearly as well as we might hope for. The percentage of New Zealanders who identify in each successive census as 'Christian' is steadily diminishing. That percentage was over 80% in the 1950s, but down to 37% by 2018. It appears that Christianity has been losing ground, primarily to the ever-growing percentage of New Zealanders (48% by 2018) who identify as having 'no religion.' Adherence to non-Christian religions is also growing, because of the religious background of many new migrants. Census figures aside, the numbers of actual church members and attenders is also shrinking, both in real numbers and in relation to population. Overall, church congregations have an older demographic than society at large.

Clearly, multiple ideological and behavioural shifts within Western culture have contributed to the decline of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Different people are influenced by different things, but major trends in Western cultures have included individualism (an emphasis on self and personal choices), scepticism, 'scientism' (the belief that science invalidates and supersedes religion, and is itself the answer to all human problems), relativism (the belief that there is no absolute truth in moral and spiritual matters), hedonism (a preoccupation with personal pleasure and happiness), materialism, consumerism, and secularism (the exclusion of religion from the public sphere).

Some of those intellectual and cultural tendencies have been around a very long time. But, for several reasons, they have had an accelerating and compounding effect in recent decades. Secular worldviews have become more thoroughly entrenched in education, government, and media, and so Christianity and the Church have become increasingly marginalised. Compared to what it once was, the Christian voice in society is now less welcome, less listened to, and less prominent. Non-Christian voices and narratives predominate. What Christians say is not usually seen as of great interest.

⁷ NZ Department of Statistics, *Census of Population and Dwellings* 1896: xlvi–xlviii; 1926, vol. xv.

Those Christian voices which do sometimes get some publicity may hold views which reflect the polarities of Christianity rather than its norms.

Some trends in the New Zealand church

The overall struggle of the New Zealand church to reach and retain enough people in the face of current societal moods and pressures has contributed to the overall ageing and numerical decline of the Church. Especially among younger people, the Church is neither gaining enough new believers through evangelism, nor keeping through discipleship many it does have.

There is arguably a crisis in New Zealand churches in relation to evangelism. Many Christians seem unmotivated to share their faith or find it too difficult to do so in today's context. By the grace of God, lots of people still come to faith. But lots of churches, including those who believe in evangelism, appear in practise not to do much of it. Even those churches that are active in evangelism can struggle to evangelise in ways that connect well with unbelievers. Some churches do well in proclaiming and sharing the Gospel, and lovingly engage with their wider community. Other churches only do one or other of those, some churches, neither. Some church-run community programmes result in people coming to faith, but many do not.

Similarly, there appears to be a dearth of effective discipleship, which is robust enough to withstand the constant messaging and enticements of contemporary culture. Is there enough teaching in churches that is clear, solidly biblical, hermeneutically sound, and applied to all aspects of faith and life? Is there sufficient depth of Christian community? Is there enough mentoring, training, and close pastoral oversight?

In New Zealand churches, probably driven in part by the same cultural and societal pressures, there seems to be some weakening of confidence in the uniqueness of Christ, the power of the Gospel, the truth and authority of the Scriptures, and a waning of spiritual zeal. This can be observed in some churches which have previously appeared theologically conservative. Churches and Christians that lose their confidence in the word of God and the power of the Gospel are surely likely to fade. However, in human history many opposite things are always happening at the same time. Some Christians appear to have become more doctrinally and morally conservative than ever. There is also a discernible new wave of younger adults and teenagers who seem very solid and committed in their faith.

In recent years many Christians in New Zealand have become uneasy about openly identifying with the term 'evangelical,' which has been compromised in public perception by the much-publicised involvement of some 'evangelicals' on one side of

American politics.⁸ This is unfortunate, because the spiritual and theological heart of the historic evangelical Christian tradition is not about politics. It is about an emphasis on the apostolic Gospel, the *euangelion*. Evangelical faith is above all about reconciliation with God by grace, through faith in Jesus, and new life in the Spirit. Evangelical Christianity has deep roots in the New Testament and, later, across the Reformation, the Puritans, the Pietists, and the 18th and 19th century evangelical awakenings in Britain and America. It was Gospel-minded evangelical Christianity that was at the primary catalyst for the spectacular modern global expansion of the Church. In all its many forms, evangelical Christian faith continues to strengthen and refresh the world-wide Church. The word ‘evangelical’ is essentially a doctrinal identifier, referring to all those across the world and across countless different denominations whose faith and practice are strongly grounded in the New Testament Gospel of salvation. Neither the Spirit of God nor the Gospel of Christ are constrained by our choice of words. Regardless of whether we retain the word ‘evangelical’ in our vocabulary, the Gospel remains the power of God for salvation to all who have faith, and one we should never be ashamed of.⁹ Because of the current misperceptions of the word ‘evangelical’ it can be good, at least in public contexts, to now use the term ‘evangelical’ only in conjunction with some other words or explanation.

In many parts of the New Zealand church, there seems some uncertainty about biblical values and morality. Some accommodate their views and practices to secular thinking and believe that is the right and loving thing to do. Many do not, and some are not sure. Some denominations, or sections of denominations, have embraced liberal or progressive theologies, changed their biblical hermeneutic, and endorsed lifestyles and identities that until recently were either prohibited or unimaginable. This has resulted in some schism.

The COVID period was difficult, with months of isolation, anger over vaccination mandates, and the controversial occupation of Parliament grounds. These things affected not only society, but also took a toll on some churches. Debates within society seemed to become more polarised and toxic, and some extent that flowed over into the Christian community.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a constant proliferation of new churches and ecclesiastical brands. The New Zealand church is quite fragmented, in part because of different theologies, structures, and styles, but most often just by churches being busy in their own corner. Greater unity would be excellent.

⁸ See, for example, Stuart Lange, ‘Maintaining Connectivity with Evangelical Faith, History and Identity: A New Zealand Perspective.’ *Stimulus – The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 25, no. 2 (2018).

⁹ Romans 1:16.

Many New Zealand churches are becoming more multi-ethnic (and sometimes more inter-cultural in the way they do things). There is an increasing openness in many churches to having better familiarity with Māori Christians, language, and culture. For Christians, spiritual unity in Christ should always transcend differences of culture and ethnicity. At the same time, we all need spiritual discernment, as every culture (Pākehā, Māori, or whatever) contains spiritual views and practices that are inconsistent with worship of the true and living God as revealed in Christ and Scripture.

There is a growing need for an ongoing stream of new Christian leaders in both church and society. We need leaders with a profound faith in Christ, strong confidence in the Gospel and the Bible, and with great heart, clarity and integrity.

Christianity and society

Many people in New Zealand society now have very little knowledge or understanding of Christianity, and many are indifferent or hostile to the Christian faith. Biblical values around the sanctity of life and of marriage are no longer seen as relevant, compared to individual freedom of choice. Public discourses around sexuality, gender, and abortion have increasingly framed Christian views as ignorant, outdated, and 'harmful.' In our post-colonial context, some have also seen Christianity as just another aspect of colonialism, destroying indigenous culture and identity. In many peoples' eyes, reports of sexual abuse in church-related contexts continue to diminish trust in the Church and Christian faith.

With the decline of Christian adherence and influence, recent Parliaments have felt unconstrained by Christian values, motivated instead by the imperatives of individual choice and identity politics. Notwithstanding well-argued critique from Christians and others through Select Committees, successive Parliaments have passed laws that amount to a major reshaping of societal ethics in such areas as same-sex marriage, euthanasia, abortion, and gender.

In the face of New Zealand's liberal new laws and steady de-Christianising, many Christians have felt dismayed, disenfranchised, and unsure how to respond. Many regret the loss of a substantially more Christian society. Some, reading the times, hope that the Lord may return soon. Some feel that above all the Church needs to concentrate on loving God, loving others, prayer, evangelism, and discipleship. Some Christians pray and long for revival in the Church, and a spiritual reawakening across society, confident such revival would bring much good. Some continue to advocate publicly for Christian values, to bear witness to God's truth, and to help protect New Zealand people from changes harmful to wellbeing.

Many Christians hope and pray for a stronger Christian presence in Parliament. What happens in Parliament can make a significant difference, and it is our Christian responsibility to pray for all those in authority. Through existing parties, some Christians do enter Parliament and speak up with courage and integrity. They face many pressures, and it is intrinsically difficult for them to persuade non-Christian parliamentarians to uphold Christian values. At recent elections, there have been a plethora of small Christian or Christian-friendly parties seeking election. They have often lacked sufficiently wide appeal and have faced almost insurmountable electoral hurdles.

Some Christians see our circumstances as analogous to those in the Old Covenant, where the nation became idolatrous, but God chastened, raised up prophets and reformers, and there was a spiritual rebuilding. Other Christians see our current situation in post-Christendom Western societies as more akin to living in exile in pagan Babylon. Others see our situation as more like that of the New Testament and early Church, where Christians were an oppressed minority within the polytheistic and morally corrupt Roman Empire but were nevertheless anointed by God as bearers of the life-transforming, world-transforming Gospel of Jesus.

All this is food for thought. However, whatever else the New Zealand church must do, and however it must adapt, we are called to remain faithful to Christ and the Gospel. Colossians 1:23 reminds us: ‘continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel’.¹⁰

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What do you see as the key challenges facing the New Zealand church?
2. What do Christians in New Zealand need to do better, in their own lives?
3. What are the ways in which New Zealand churches should change?

Author Profile:

Rev Dr Stuart Lange has, since 2017, been the National Director of the New Zealand Christian Network. He has for many years taught the history of Christianity, mostly at Laidlaw College where he is a Senior Research Fellow. His PhD is from the University of Otago. A key publication is *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand, 1930-1965* (Otago University Press). He is the writer and presenter of the historical documentary *Te Rongopai: 200 years of the Gospel in Aotearoa, 1814-2014*. Also, he is the senior pastor of Massey Presbyterian Church (and Norwest Presbyterian Churches) in West Auckland. He lives with his wife on a small rural block and has four sons.

¹⁰ For context, see Colossians 1:15-23.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Christianity in New Zealand: key statistics and trends

Geoffrey Troughton and Joseph Bulbulia

“Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand is now largely post-denominational and increasingly congregational. The traditional denominations have not disappeared, but few Christians now instinctively identify themselves by their denomination even if they have one...”

This chapter draws upon two main sources, the New Zealand Census¹¹ and the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS), together with other recent studies to highlight key contemporary trends. These datasets contain extraordinarily rich information about the nation and its people. Such data cannot tell us everything about Christianity’s current situation, of course, but they do provide insights that provoke and invite reflection.

The New Zealand Census

For over 150 years national censuses have asked New Zealanders to state their religion. Although responses tell us little about the inner experiences, habits, and commitments of the faithful, the shape and direction of changes over time tell us about stability and change and permit informed predictions about the future. In 2018, 37% of New Zealanders claimed to be some kind of Christian.¹² This is much lower than in any previous census. Up until 2013, those stating that they were Christian made up the majority.

¹¹ 2023 Census data was not available at the time this chapter was finalised.

¹² 38.2% if we include Ratana and Ringatū in the broader Christian category, which Stats NZ do not. For the 2018 census see “2018 Census,” Stats NZ, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/2018-census/>. The following analysis also makes use of the NZ.Stat tool available from “NZ.Stat,” Stats NZ, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/index.aspx>.

Despite the lowest ever proportion of Christianity in 2018, Christianity across all its expressions remains the largest religion by some way. The largest single Christian tradition is Catholicism, which first attained front-runner status in 2013. In 2018, Catholicism accounted for 10% of all Census responses.

Although Christianity remains the country's largest religion, in New Zealand's 2018 Census the most common response to religious affiliation was 'no religion' at 48.2%. No Religion grew by over six points, from 42%, in 2013. If we add even a portion of the 6.6% who indicated that they 'object to answering' the religion question (some previous analysis suggests that these are mainly responses indicating kinds of Non-Religion), a clear majority did not claim any religious affiliation in 2018. Figure 2.1 presents the breakdown of responses to the 2018 Census 'religious affiliation' question by cluster category.

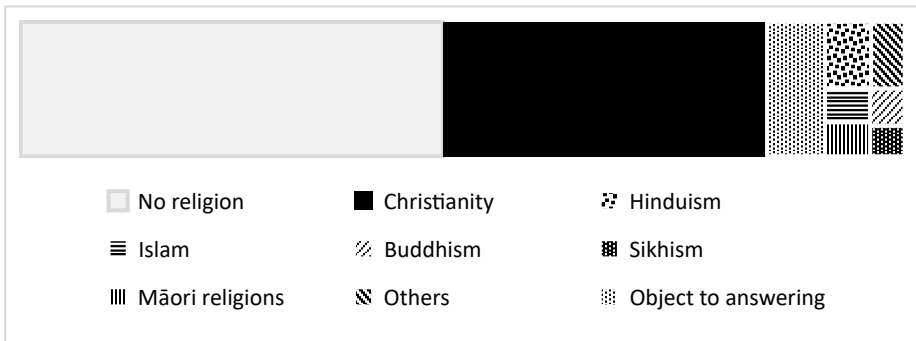


Figure 2.1: Religions in New Zealand, Census 2018

About 8% of the population stated identification with a religion other than Christianity, a proportion that has grown steadily in recent decades. This growth is almost entirely due to immigration. Of these other religions, the largest were Hinduism (2.6%), Islam (1.3%), Buddhism (1.1%), and Sikhism (0.9%). The remaining groups are extensive and diverse, including a very small Jewish community (0.1%), a proliferation of 'New Age' movements (0.4%), and a large set of others not further defined (0.9%).

We see, then, that over 85% of census responses indicated an identification with either Christianity or No Religion. Census data illustrate that ethnic-related patterns are very important in understanding both these groups. Figure 2.2 over the page presents a breakdown of Christian/No Religion by ethnic category.

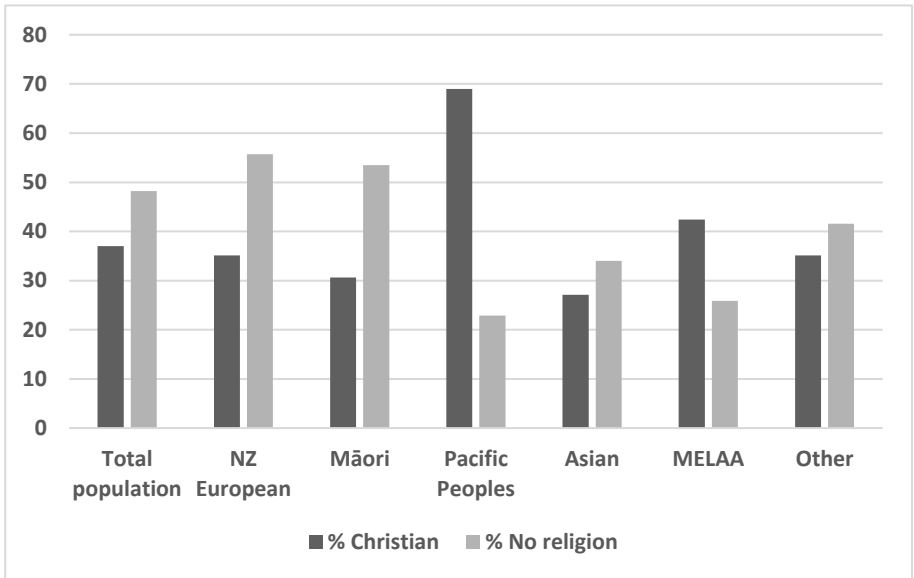


Figure 2.2: New Zealand Christianity and No Religion by Ethnicity, Census 2018

Across the major ethnic categories employed by Stats NZ we see that census identification with Christianity was higher than No Religion in just two: Pacific Peoples, and those grouped as MELAA (that is, those from the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa). Notably, 67.9% of Pacific Peoples identified as Christian. Although significantly lower than in 2006 (80.2%), this rate of religious affiliation among Pacific Peoples was nevertheless roughly double the rate of religious affiliation in almost every other ethnic group, including New Zealand Europeans (35.1%). Also notable is the close similarity in Māori and New Zealand European responses, in that a clear majority of each claimed that they had no religion.

Overall proportions of Christian affiliation mask considerable diversity within ethnic clusters. For example, Samoans account for nearly half of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand and have higher levels of Christian affiliation (72.7%). In contrast, nearly 40% of Cook Island Māori (about 20% of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand) claimed No Religion in 2018, up from 24.1% in 2006. Rates of No Religion have grown markedly among younger Pacific Peoples generally and explain much of the decline in Pasifika identification with Christianity since 2006.

In 2018 around 27% of Asian New Zealanders identified as Christian, a rate barely changed since 2006. Korean immigration lifted the proportion of Christians among Asian New Zealanders from the 1990s, but Korean Christian identification has shrunk from 73% in 2006 to 57% in 2018. This change has been offset by tenfold growth since 2006 in the Filipino population, 91.3% of whom identified as Christian in the 2018

census. Christian identification among those identifying as Chinese (17.6%) and Indian (15.1%) in New Zealand is relatively low but is much higher than in China and India.

Ethnic patterns can also be seen to shape geographical variations in New Zealand, based on different patterns of ethnic settlement. Auckland can be considered ‘super-diverse.’ It is different from the rest of the country in that it is considerably more religious, and slightly more Christian. Most regions and cities elsewhere are closer to the national average, although fewer people identify as Christians in some South Island regions including Nelson (31.8%), Tasman (30.2%), and Otago (33.4%). Among the main centres, Wellington City stands out for its relatively low levels of Christianity (31.4%), yet even this pattern is largely a function of ethnicity. Wellington City is more Pākehā than the national average, while Porirua City (43.5%) has more Pacific Peoples. Within Porirua, Pālagi Paekakariki (28% Christian) and Pasifika Waitangirua (62.2% Christian) have starkly different religious profiles.

Census trends into the future

Census 2023 data on religion will be released in late 2024, around the same time as this book’s release. Based on current knowledge, three key recent trends are likely to continue:

1. Fewer people (and a lower proportion of the population) will state that they are Christians.
2. A clear majority of people will claim to have no religion.
3. Other religions will have grown, accounting for closer to 10% of the population.

The main reasons these trends will continue are based on anticipated developments across age profiles, birth rates, and immigration. Over the past 60 years, identification with Christianity has declined at a steady rate of around 1% per year. No Religion has increased at about the same rate. There is no evidence suggesting this pattern will quickly change. The mean age of Christians is also higher than the national average and distributes towards those over 45 years old; the opposite is true for No Religion. Yet these patterns are not predetermined. Many people change religions, and conversion to Christianity does occur. On average, however, for every individual who becomes a Christian, NZAVS data shows that many others *disaffiliate*. This is also demonstrated in the relatively upbeat *Faith and Belief 2023* survey,¹³ which nevertheless found that

¹³ See McCrindle, “Faith and Belief Te Patapātai Whakapono: Exploring the Spiritual Landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand” (Wilberforce Foundation, 2023), accessed July 6, 2024, <https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org/2452-2/>.

conversion to non-religion occurs at five times the rate as conversion from non-religion. It is far more likely people will become non-religious than religious.

Between 2013 and 2018, some religions grew vigorously. Growth of Sikhism (113%), Hinduism (38%), and Islam (33%) across this period was almost entirely driven by immigration, with limited evidence of conversion. Ongoing migration and birth rates will determine future growth for these religions in Aotearoa New Zealand. These communities are also much younger than the national average, so further immigration of young Sikhs and Hindus is likely to ensure this pattern continues as their families grow. Considering all these trends we expect Christianity to remain the largest religion for some time, but it will increasingly be seen as ‘one among many others’ in a more diverse New Zealand.

Identification and practice at the population level

As mentioned at the outset, Census data do not tell us much about what people’s religion means to them, how actively religious they are, or how they express or practice it. Fortunately, we have other tools that enable insights into these aspects of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand at a national scale. The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS) is one of these. The NZAVS is a massive, nationally representative, 20-year longitudinal probability study, which began in 2009. It includes questionnaire responses from more than 70,000 New Zealand residents. Here we will consider the data captured in this study during the previous decade.¹⁴

NZAVS data aligns with the Census picture of declining religious affiliation across 2010 to 2020. In response to a simple yes/no question ‘Do you identify with a religion and/or spiritual group?’ those stating ‘yes’ dropped from 44.2% (2010) to 33.7% (2019). These are lower levels of religious affiliation than the Census data indicates, however there is no ‘object to the question’ option in NZAVS. Another NZAVS question enquires into the importance of religion for personal identity: ‘How important is your religion to how you see yourself?’ Responses to this are rated on a scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important). Unsurprisingly the overall population level of self-reported religiosity on this scale also declined across the decade, from an average of 2.7 (2010) to 2.3 (2020), as you can see in Figure 2.3 over the page.

Church attendance has long been regarded as a firm indicator of committed Christian practice. Many churches keep records, but solid national data is impossible to establish

¹⁴ NZAVS data presented here is previously unpublished. For details of the NZAVS, including links to publications, see “The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study,” University of Auckland, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/new-zealand-attitudes-and-values-study.html>. Note that the NZAVS data collection year begins in December, hence the 2019 wave includes data gathered until late 2020.

from these sources (what is available from the Baptist movement is addressed in the next chapter). According to NZAVS data, in 2020 about 14.5% of the population indicated that they had attended ‘a church or place of worship in the last month.’ The most recent data, to November 2023, showed a rate of 13.9%. This was down from about 20% in 2010. These numbers broadly support data from various smaller surveys conducted over the past 20 years, which indicated 20-25% monthly attendance in the decade from 2000-2009, and 16-18% in the decade that followed. NZAVS data suggests that the frequency of attendance also declined during this period. In 2010, 12.8% of the population indicated that they attended at least four times per month (roughly weekly); in 2019 the result was 8.2%, and in 2023 it was 7.3%.

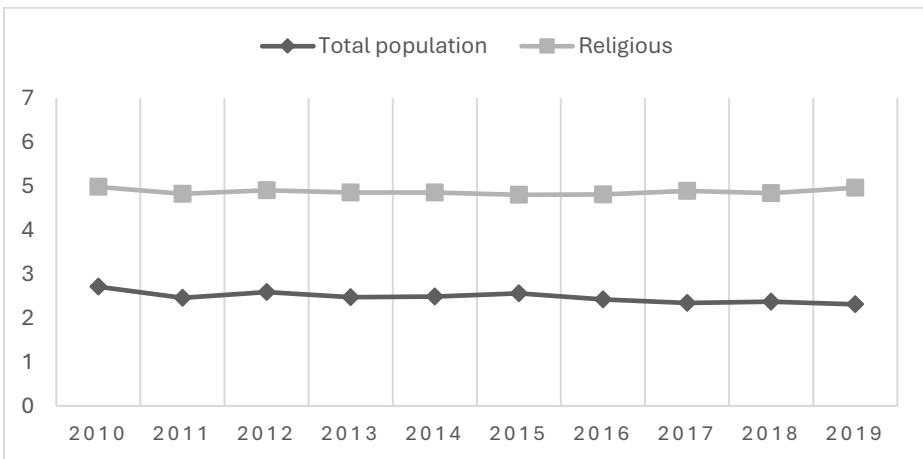


Figure 2.3: ‘How important is your religion to how you see yourself?’ by Population and Religious Responders, NZAVS, 2010-2020

So much for the nation generally. What about the responses of those who state that they are religious? In terms of church attendance, NZAVS data show that on a simple yes/no basis, most ‘religious’ people said they did not attend a church in the last month. In 2019, just 43% said they did, down from 50% a decade earlier. The average frequency of attendance also declined. In 2010, the average frequency of attendance was 2.45 times per month; since 2014, it has hovered around 2.0 times. Weekly attendance or more (4+ times per month) among Christians has dropped from 28.6% in 2010 to 24.3% in 2020.

The key point: non-attendance has become more common among those who state that they are religious, and even attenders attend less often. Importantly, this data pre-dates the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that monthly attendance drop-

ped during that time as COVID Alert levels rose.¹⁵ At Alert Level 4, 62% of Christians stated that they did not attend services.

In this context, Figure 2.3 on the previous page is even more significant. Despite church attendance becoming less frequent, Christians have maintained the strength of their identification as Christians. While population-level religious identification fell, Christian identification remained remarkably stable throughout the decade from 2010-2020. For many Christians, church attendance has become a less important marker of their faith commitment or locus for faith expression. This obviously has significant implications, including for individuals, churches, and communities.

A range of emerging NZAVS data suggest that regular church attendance is connected to numerous positive personal and societal outcomes, from more sleep and greater self-esteem to greater security about the future, sense of meaning in life, and feelings of gratitude. It may also be causally related to greater charitable giving and acceptance of minority groups. These benefits should be remembered alongside peoples' mixed experiences of 'church.'

Among other trends and characteristics, various current features of church life in Aotearoa New Zealand reflect patterns that are well known across other Western settings. For example, our churches generally have greater attendance by females and the Christian population is older (and ageing). Data from the United States demonstrate a strong correlation between higher educational attainment and greater attendance, and there are some signs that this is also true in Aotearoa New Zealand (especially among Pākehā). Further, our larger church congregations mainly tilt toward conservative values socially and politically (and, in some respects, theologically).

Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand is now largely post-denominational and increasingly congregational. The traditional denominations have not disappeared, but few Christians now instinctively identify themselves by their denomination even if they have one and know what it is. This is demonstrated in the growth of the 'Christian not further defined' in the Census, even more emphatically in survey data, and especially among younger generations. Such Christians are particularly active churchgoers and are typically also wealthier, more educated, European, and conservative. Despite this, numerous churches face uncertain futures and, for many Christians, the ties between Christian faith and Christian institutions appear precarious.

¹⁵ The COVID-19 Alert levels that applied in Aotearoa New Zealand can be seen at "COVID-19 Alert Levels in New Zealand," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, last modified June 30, 2024, accessed July 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_alert_levels_in_New_Zealand.

Conclusion

From all this we can see ongoing fragmentation and realignment of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand, driven by a range of economic, sociological, and theological factors. COVID exacerbated some of the trends visible in earlier data. The ethnic profile of Christianity in New Zealand is increasingly diverse, yet few individual churches or church networks resemble the national demographic profile, and connections between ethnic communities are frequently limited.

Post-COVID Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand faces new challenges. Although some churches are 'bouncing back' from pandemic disruptions, and others are experiencing growth, there are clear signs that such recovery is uneven. Smaller churches have been particularly vulnerable in recent years, and the interruptions to youth work across the COVID period present new challenges in a context of already low youth affiliation.

Within the wider culture, Christians are increasingly expressing the perception that prejudice against them is rising. There is a sense of embattlement. The *Faith and Belief 2023* survey mentioned earlier indicated that 'spirituality' is widely affirmed among New Zealanders, with many regarding religion to be a source of hope and healing. Yet such sentiments do not translate into great overall warmth towards religion. Trust in Christianity is particularly low, even compared to other religions; 'Evangelicals' are the least trusted by some margin. Perhaps this trust gap is among the greatest challenges confronting Christianity in Aotearoa today.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What is at stake in changing patterns of church attendance?
2. What does it mean to affirm 'spirituality' or claim 'no religion' in today's post-Christian, post-colonial, ethnically diverse context?
3. What are the main challenges facing post-COVID Christianity in New Zealand? How might Christians respond constructively?

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Joseph Bulbulia is Professor of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. His research focuses on what makes life good, which he examines using systematic quantitative methods. He

is co-editor of the journal *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, and a senior manager for the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study.

Resources

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CHAPTER THREE

3. Attendance of Baptist churches in New Zealand: a case study

Lynne Taylor

“COVID hastened the decline that could already be discerned from attendance data. Following the easing and then removal of gathering restrictions, many church-goers found that their priorities had changed along with their habits. Today, fewer people attend church.”

The Baptist Union of New Zealand (BUNZ) has been gathering and reporting data on Baptist churches each year for over 100 years, and data on church service attendance over the past 35 years. New Zealand Baptists provide an insightful case study for the Church of Aotearoa. They gather good data; they occupy a theological and ecclesial middle ground between mainline churches and Pentecostal churches; and they continued to grow when mainline churches began to decline. However, the decline in Baptist church attendance started in the early 2000s, while many Pentecostal churches were still growing.

There are 235 BUNZ churches and fellowships, located from Kaitaia to Invercargill. Average weekly attendances range from nine to 1,340, with an overall average (mean) of 100 per church and a median of 76. While some are very large, 32% of Baptist churches have 50 or fewer attenders; 66% have 100 or fewer weekly attenders on average.

Attendance of Baptist churches is declining

As Figure 3.1 on the next page shows, Baptist church attendance peaked at around 43,000 people in the early 2000s. Since then, the denomination has experienced an overall decline although, as expected, there was some recovery from the 2022 low in 2023.¹⁶ Currently, just over 25,000 people attend each week: around 19,000 adults, 2,400 teenagers, and 3,800 children.

¹⁶ Each statistical year runs from 1 September to 31 August.

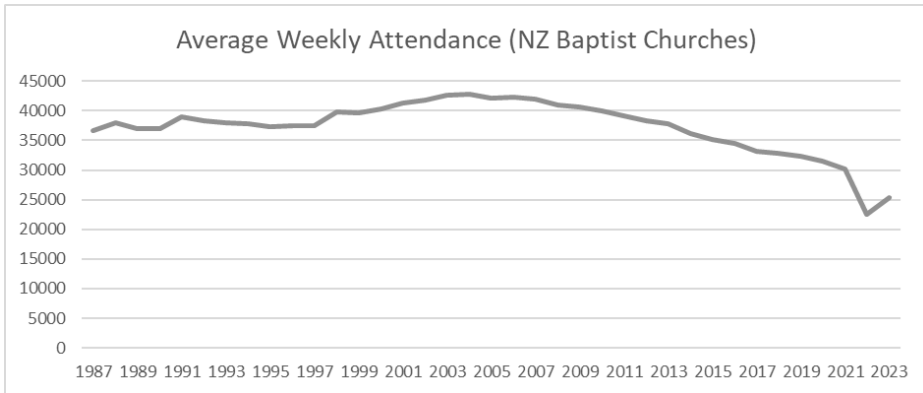


Figure 3.1: Average weekly attendance, Baptist churches 1997-2023

Baptist churches also report their total worshipping adults (TWA), which is how many unique adults they would expect to see in church at least once a month. Currently, for every 100 adults who attend at least once a month, 85 are there on any given week (thus 85%). This represents an increase in the proportion of at-least-monthly attenders who attend each week, up from 74% in 2016. This seems counter to anecdotal evidence suggesting people attend less frequently since COVID-19, although it would be explained if less frequent attenders are now attending *less than once a month* and therefore are not counted in the TWA estimates.

The overall decline in attendance has been evident since 2003. However, for several years prior, a decline in monocultural Pākehā churches was masked by growth in ethnic and multicultural churches. This growth was largely due to immigration and the higher religiosity of migrants, for instance among Pasifika peoples. Today less buffering occurs, largely due to the lower religious affiliation of subsequent migrant generations.

Numbers of baptisms are also in decline. Baptist churches celebrated 513 baptisms in 2023. While this number is considerably higher than the 358 celebrated in 2022, it represents a marked decline from any other year; in the decade 2010-2019, the average number of baptisms per year was 913. Of those baptised in 2023, 40% were aged 18 years or younger, with 17% being young adults (19-25 years old). One third were the children of people who attended the church, and 28% had not previously attended church before becoming part of the church they were baptised in.

By comparison, a decade earlier, 38% of those baptised were aged 18 years or younger, and 22% were young adults (19-25 years old). Just over 30% were the children of people who attended that church, and 36% were previously unchurched. These changes suggest that the decline across the Baptist movement will be ongoing and may well be cumulative. The threefold reductions of number of baptisms, the proportion of those

baptisms that are of younger people, and the proportion of people who were not raised in the Church are cause for concern.

Finally, Baptist churches are ageing. The number of teenagers and children attending Baptist churches has declined markedly in the past ten years, down 40% (teenagers) and 43% (children). This rate of decline is higher than for adults, with a 30% reduction. In 2023, 25% of all attenders were children and teenagers, compared with 28% in 2013. The number of Baptist churches with an average of less than ten children in attendance each week more than doubled from 45 in 2005, to 103 in 2023.

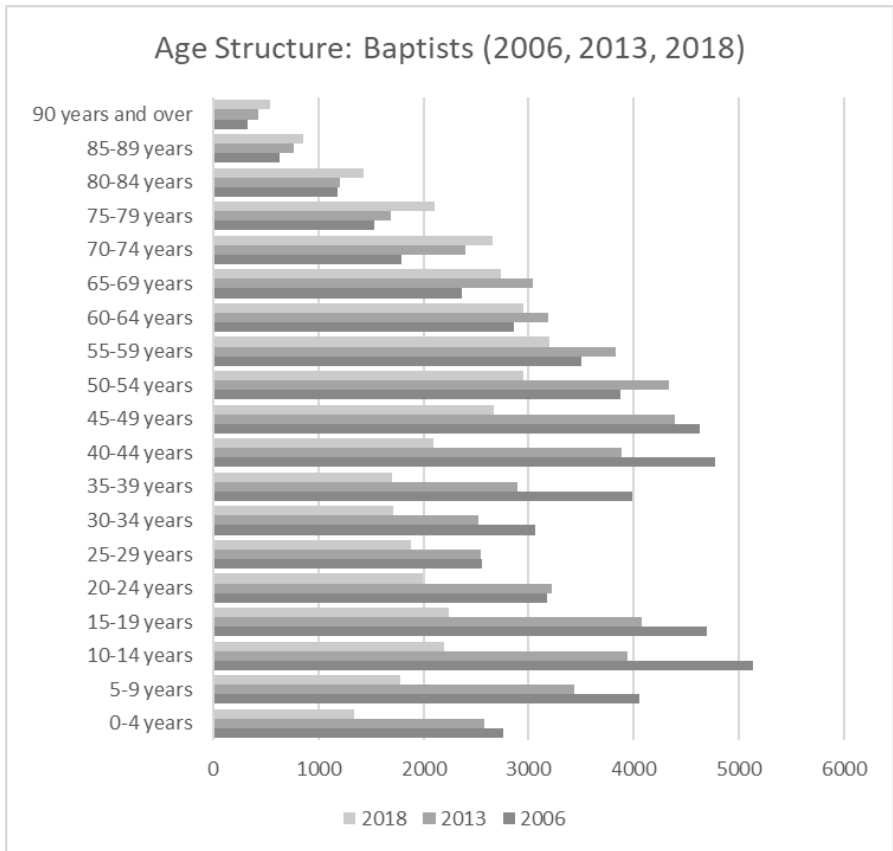


Figure 3.2: Changing age structure, Census Baptists 2006 – 2018

This points to an ageing church, a fact supported by the census data to 2018. Figure 3.2 above shows a sobering pattern of both overall decline in numbers of Baptists, and the

ageing of those who state a Baptist religious affiliation. This ageing is not unique to Baptist churches, as Figure 3.3 below shows.¹⁷

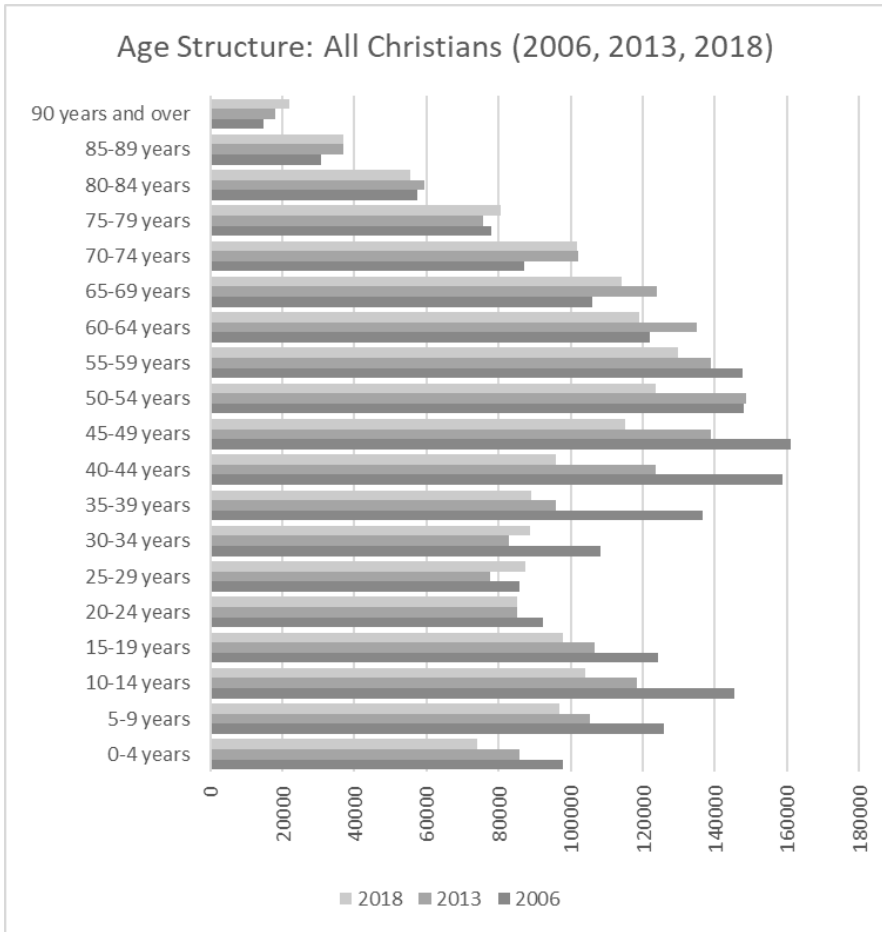


Figure 3.3: Changing age structure, Census Christians 2006 – 2018

¹⁷ While many people who attend Baptist churches would state their religion for the Census as ‘Christian’ and not further define it, recent research points to the strong correlation between Baptist church attendance and Baptist religious affiliation in the Census. Andrew Reyngoud, “New Zealand Baptist Churches in a Time of Change (1989-2019): An analysis of the changes and variations in demographics and their implications.” (MApplTheol dissertation, Carey Baptist College, 2023).

The COVID effect

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly contributed to the recent decline in attendance of Baptist churches. The low attendance visible in 2022 (Figure 3.1) was certainly caused by gathering restrictions and reluctance from many people to return to onsite worship, due to age, illness, or other vulnerabilities.

However, COVID also contributed to significant innovation. Post-COVID, close to half of all Baptist churches offer an online worship option, usually in the form of a recording of an onsite service or a livestream (sometimes both). While most of these congregations have very small numbers of online attenders (over half have less than 10 online attenders each week), some report substantial numbers, especially those congregations intentionally seeking to build an online worshipping community.

The pandemic acted as both an x-ray and an accelerant, in that it revealed and fanned into flame the best and the worst of attitudes and actions latent across all areas of society. COVID hastened the decline that could already be discerned from attendance data. Following the easing and then removal of gathering restrictions, many churchgoers found that their priorities had changed along with their habits. Today, fewer people attend church. Positively, COVID sped up the development of many initiatives, including online worship services. These are a significant innovation, vital for many, especially those unable to attend face to face due to illness, vulnerability, work responsibilities, or other reasons.

Discerning God at work

While taking the decline seriously, we're also invited to consider what new things God might be doing in our churches and communities. Most participants in the recent *Faith and Belief* study indicated that they could imagine themselves exploring faith or spirituality.¹⁸ Younger people are more likely than older people to be warm towards Christianity; it seems that growing up in secular times does not directly equate to a lack of openness to faith.¹⁹

Mark 2:18-22 invites the Church and Christians to a renewal of practices. In this text, Jesus is asked why his disciples weren't fasting, like John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees were? In response, Jesus pointed to the new and different season that they were in. Their context and reality invited different actions and perceptions.

¹⁸ McCrindle, "Faith and Belief Te Patapātai Whakapono: Exploring the Spiritual Landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand (Short Report)" (Wilberforce Foundation, 2023), 19, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://faithandbeliefstudynz.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/wilberforce-report-2023-digital-2.pdf>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Our context and reality have also changed, and we are also invited into changed practices appropriate to this present time. While old wineskins did their job nicely, new wineskins are now required. In the Mark 2 passage, new wineskins were needed because of the presence of the Bridegroom. Today, we're in a context of decline. However, we dare to believe that God is in our midst! Our challenge is to discern how God is at work, and to participate in what God is doing both inside and outside the Church.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What do the attendance trends captured here reveal about the Church of Aotearoa? How does your own local church compare?
2. What new life, freshness and growth are emerging in our churches and beyond? What new wine is this?
3. What new wineskins might be needed? What old wineskins might need to be set aside?

Pray:

- For discernment and 'noticing' of the good that God is up to in the world, even if it looks different to the experiences of the past.
- For courage to change and adopt new wineskins.
- For confidence in the good news that God continues to SO love the world, sending Jesus not to condemn but to save.

Author Profile:

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CHAPTER FOUR

4. Confidence in the Gospel

Mark Keown

“We are in a context in which it is difficult to share the Gospel... Our response must not be withdrawal from engagement through retreatism or quietism, but to continue to share the Gospel with whom we engage.”

As in most of the Western world Christianity is declining in Aotearoa New Zealand at a rapid rate, as evidenced by a range of statistics. Decline is evident across church attendance,²⁰ Christian affiliation,²¹ and alignment with aspects of the Judeo-Christian ethic. In academic, media, and popular discourse, Christianity is marginalised and often maligned. The reasons for this situation are complex, but among other things include the Enlightenment project to deconstruct Western religiosity; the history of Christian participation in imperialism and colonisation; and well-publicised examples of church leaders in sexual and other forms of abuse. Christianity has found itself pushed to the margins, while other ideas have gained momentum providing alternative varying philosophical perspectives that people adopt to explain life. Notable examples include capitalism, science, pluralism, socialism, and consumerism. Whereas Western culture once intuitively accepted the existence of God and Christianity, Christianity now appears to be a receding phenomenon.

Sharing the Gospel in such an environment is challenging. Many Christians find the task too difficult and have tended to retreat from engaging evangelistically for fear of offense and rejection. They have adopted a ‘friendship evangelism’ approach that is largely

²⁰ ‘From the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (a longitudinal survey-based study begin in 2009), Dr Troughton reported that in 2019 about 14.4% of New Zealanders attended church at least monthly (down from 20-25% in 2009), but the largest proportion of those attended weekly.’ In Stuart Lange, “Some Challenging Data About Christianity in New Zealand,” *NZ Christian Network*, 17 November 2023, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://nzchristiannetwork.org.nz/some-challenging-data-about-christianity-in-new-zealand/#:~:text=From%20the%20New%20Zealand%20Attitudes,proportion%20of%20those%20attended%20weekly>.

²¹ Stats NZ, “Losing Our Religion,” StatsNZ, 3 October, 2029, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/losing-our-religion/>.

‘friendship,’ while the actual ‘evangelism’ is rare. While there are always exceptions, many churches focus now on an attraction-model of evangelism. Church resources are mainly directed to pastoral and administrative leadership, worship (with large costs involved in musical gear and time to prepare), church buildings, youth and children’s ministry, and fellowship. Only a small number of churches have staff dedicated to outreach. Where there is active evangelisation, it is often found in the children’s and youth ministries of the Church (although a good number of churches do not have many from these age groups). However, often these ministries are focused as much on socialisation as evangelism and discipleship.

There are still many Kiwi Christians eager to share their faith. However, many of them are involved in parachurch organisations focused on specialist ministries. Their activities tend to be on university campuses, in ministries engaging unbelievers on the street, or in other contexts well removed from the life of the local church. Is this situation acceptable? Can anything be done about it?

In this chapter I will explain why evangelism is central to our mission and encourage us to make a renewed effort to be faithful to God’s call to us to persevere in preaching the Gospel, despite the challenge.

The missional centrality of evangelism

The Great Commission passages²² do not mention the Church.²³ In fact, Jesus only mentioned the Church twice: first, stating that Peter’s confession of his messiahship is the rock on which the Church is founded,²⁴ and that this Church will never succumb to Satan’s attempts to destroy it;²⁵ second, in relation to Church discipline.²⁶ Each version of the Commission stresses different aspects of the same command. Space prevents a discussion of each command from the various gospels and Acts but, put

²² Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8.

²³ There is no one ‘Great Commission’ in Scripture but at least four, and all are expressed differently. The longer ending of Mark (Mark 16:9–20) is likely a second-century addition to the text. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 102–107. However, this passage confirms that in the second century, many believers believed God told the disciples to ‘go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation’; to baptize believers; that God would perform signs through them including tongues, exorcism, and enduring snake bites; and healing. Verse 20 indicates they obeyed Jesus.

²⁴ While the ‘rock’ can be Peter, it can equally be Peter’s confession. See C. C. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

²⁵ Matthew 16:18.

²⁶ Matthew 18:17.

together with one or two other texts that stress mission, we have a clear picture of our task.

By God's command and with his authority,²⁷ all Christians (male and female), empowered and led by the Spirit,²⁸ have been sent by God to go 'and make disciples of all nations'.²⁹ They do this through sharing the Gospel of the kingdom³⁰ that calls for repentance and promises the forgiveness of sins.³¹ They share the Gospel such that all people can hear it³² and yield in faith before God and his Son.³³ Those who believe are to be baptized into God's three-fold name and taught to obey everything Jesus taught.³⁴ These disciples are then sent to themselves make disciples. Jesus promises to be with them as they go.³⁵

The timing of these commands, just prior to Jesus' ascension to heaven as Lord, indicates their importance to Jesus. Our core task is evangelistic mission, the making of disciples. Indeed, the return of Jesus comes when this task is complete to God's satisfaction.³⁶

Making disciples requires two main tasks: sharing the Gospel verbally, so that people can hear it, understand it, and yield to Jesus as Lord by faith; then, when a person makes that commitment to Christ, they are to be discipled, that is, taught what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Core to that training is training in evangelism, so that they can themselves become disciple makers. Here the Church 'kicks in' as that community in which Christians are nurtured as disciples, with the goal that they will take their place in the mission of God to make disciples of all nations.

It seems to me that the New Zealand church has, in the main, forgotten its core task. It is not that Christians are not zealous and working hard in New Zealand for Jesus. The problem is how we are applying our resources. We are devoting our best efforts to Sunday services with all that these now entail, and building, renovating, and maintaining church buildings. We gather money for intra-church things. We hear great theologies of mission articulated across the Church, calling us to enter the world and join God in redemption of the world. Yet rarely do we hear that our primary command is to make

²⁷ Matthew 28:18.

²⁸ John 20:21; Acts 1:8.

²⁹ Matthew 28:19. The Greek *ethnos* does not mean a 'nation' in the modern sense, instead representing the various people groups throughout the world. 'God's will for missions is that every people group be reached with the testimony of Christ and that a people be called out for his name from among all the nations.' John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 258.

³⁰ Matthew 24:14.

³¹ Luke 24:47; John 20:22.

³² Romans 10:14-17.

³³ Romans 10:9.

³⁴ Matthew 28:19.

³⁵ Matthew 28:20.

³⁶ Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10; Acts 1:11; Romans 11:25.

disciples who then make disciples. We rarely have evangelists working in local churches alongside the other leaders Paul envisages.³⁷ Outside servicing the machinery of the Church there are admirable efforts to reach out to those in need with social action. However, we have forgotten that the Church, all that it is, exists to win the lost and disciple the found. We must not merely share Christ through ministries of mercy, but by offering forth the word of life.³⁸

God in his metaphoric DNA is an evangelistic God. The entire story of God's people, from the Fall to the birth of Jesus, can be summarised as God preparing the world for its Saviour, Jesus of Nazareth. Evangelism was central to His work. Jesus went into Galilee calling people to believe the good news that God's kingdom had broken into the world through him.³⁹ He refused to be tied down to one place, and so travelled the nation preaching the Gospel.⁴⁰ Jesus formed a small community of followers through his ministry. He then died on a cross, rose from the dead, and commanded that we walk in his footsteps bearing our own crosses of suffering.⁴¹ Evangelism and the formation of new disciples is our core business. We exist to take our part in this mission. This is the reason we are left behind by God imbued with his Spirit. We are to be his Spirit-empowered and led witnesses to the world.⁴²

The power of the Gospel to save and repel

Scripture reveals in various ways that God's word is power. So, at creation, God created through divine command: 'And God said' (twenty-one times). Every time he spoke, 'there was ...' (fourteen times), indicating what he said came to pass.⁴³ Isaiah says of God's word:

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.⁴⁴

³⁷ Ephesians 4:11.

³⁸ Philippians 2:16a. On this passage, see Mark J. Keown, "ΛΟΓΟΝ ΖΩΗΣ ΕΠΙΧΟΝΤΕΣ (Holding Forth the Word of Life)," in *Holding Forth the Word of Life: Essays in Honour of Tim Meadowcroft*, ed. John de Jong, Csila Saysell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 98–117. See https://www.academia.edu/42844808/Holding_Forth_the_Word_of_Life.

³⁹ Mark 1:14–15.

⁴⁰ Matthew 9:36; Mark 1:35–39.

⁴¹ Mark 8:34–35.

⁴² Acts 1:8.

⁴³ Genesis 1:1–2:3.

⁴⁴ Isaiah 55:11.

Jeremiah likens the word to a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces,⁴⁵ like a fire in his mouth that devours people.⁴⁶

In the New Testament, Paul describes the Gospel as ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes’.⁴⁷ He sees the word of God as the sword of the Spirit all believers wield as they move about wearing the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace.⁴⁸ Everywhere Christians go, they are to take up the word of Christ and are to defend and advance the Gospel.⁴⁹ Paul also states ‘So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.’⁵⁰ The word of God spoken through Scripture and his people is God’s primary agency to bring about the salvation of other humans. And God wants all people to be saved.⁵¹

These texts show that evangelism is an absolute necessity if we want people to become Christians. They have to hear the Gospel! As the Gospel is spoken, the sword of the Spirit reaches into the hearer’s heart and seeks to pierce it. One might say the Gospel seeks to kill the old person,⁵² so that God can flood that heart with the Spirit and bring the person into resurrection life. Or one could see it as ‘heart circumcision’ whereby the sword of the word cuts off the foreskin of the heart.⁵³

However, this faith-outcome is not guaranteed. Jesus warned us that the word does not convert everyone to whom we share it. He told the Parable of the Sower, which speaks of four different responses to the word: 1) incomprehension, due to Satan’s disruption; 2) a seemingly genuine faith commitment, then falling away; 3) people with a nominal faith, suffocated by the weeds of materialism; and 4) genuine fruitful faith.⁵⁴ Paul warned that some, like most first-century Jews, are veiled from understanding the Gospel. They are blinded by Satan, the god of this age.⁵⁵ In a passage parallel to Romans 1:16, Paul states ‘For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.’⁵⁶

We can note here the dualizing effect of the Gospel: some hear it, believe, and are anointed and sealed by the Spirit, the deposit guaranteeing their future redemption.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ Jeremiah 23:29.

⁴⁶ Jeremiah 5:14.

⁴⁷ Romans 1:16.

⁴⁸ Ephesians 6:17.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 4:11-12.

⁵⁰ Romans 10:17.

⁵¹ 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

⁵² Romans 6:6, 8; Galatians 2:19; Ephesians 4:22.

⁵³ Deuteronomy 10:16; Romans 2:29.

⁵⁴ Mark 4:1-20.

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14.

Others reject it and continue in unbelief, destined for eternal destruction. So, Paul can say, in one of the most vivid texts in Scripture:

For we [those who share the Gospel] are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?⁵⁸

For those being saved the Gospel is a beautiful fragrance like glorious jasmine, and they believe it. For others, who are perishing, it is the stench of a rotting corpse and so they reject it.

The word of God then, when spoken, either generates belief, or it repels. As it is rejected, in a sense, as law ‘amplifies sin,’ the gospel ‘amplifies’ the wrath of God for those who reject it—they are all the more culpable for their rejection of the Gospel.⁵⁹

Elsewhere in 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul uses the most common New Testament idea for mission, that of harvest.⁶⁰ Paul speaks of times where the mission is ‘in season,’ and at times is ‘out of season.’⁶¹ What he means here is that when we preach the Gospel in some situations, many will come to Christ. Such a season is seen in such New Testament settings as Pentecost, Samaria, and Ephesus, and in the great revivals of history. At the moment, such a harvest is occurring in parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.⁶² If we share the Gospel in such seasons, we can expect a great response. However, the Church is declining the fastest in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.⁶³ We can say unequivocally that, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Gospel is ‘out of season.’ Put another way, it is a hard place to catch fish!⁶⁴ Like first-century Jews, trapped in the -isms of the Western world, many Kiwis have a veil over their eyes.

Yet, what does Paul tell Timothy to do?

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

⁵⁹ Romans 5:20; 7:7-11.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35.

⁶¹ 2 Timothy 4:2.

⁶² See Russ Mitchell, “The Top 20 Countries where Christianity is Growing the Fastest,” *Disciple All Nations* (blog), accessed July 6, 2024, <https://discipleallnations.wordpress.com/2013/08/25/the-top-20-countries-where-christianity-is-growing-the-fastest/>.

⁶³ “Decline of Christianity in the Western World,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, last modified June 30, 2024. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_Christianity_in_the_Western_world.

⁶⁴ See Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.⁶⁵

This passage is as relevant today as it was then. We are in a context in which it is difficult to share the Gospel. With access to a myriad of false teaching through the internet, Christians are being led astray all over the place. Our response must not be withdrawal from engagement through retreatism or quietism, but to continue to share the Gospel with whom we engage. We are to do so full of the fruit of the Spirit,⁶⁶ with gentleness and respect,⁶⁷ with deeds of mercy and justice,⁶⁸ trusting the power of God, and with words full of grace and seasoned with salt.⁶⁹

Our confidence in the Gospel should not be shaken by people not wanting to believe the message. The problem is not the Gospel, and it is not us as long as we are faithful to the mission call. The problem lies with a society trapped in the idols of materialism, consumerism, hedonism, scientism, celebrityism, and more. Yet, amongst those flightless Kiwis are some who are searching for the truth. These are people like you and me, who God reached through others who faithfully shared the Gospel with us. So, we too must keep sharing the Gospel, leaving it up to God to do his work. We plant and water, he brings the growth.⁷⁰

In 1 Corinthians 1:23-25 Paul writes that he proclaims 'Christ crucified' and that the crucified Christ is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.' Our Gospel is highly counter-cultural. The world today does indeed see it as foolishness and weakness, but the crucified Christ actually does display and embody God's wisdom and God's strength. We can have confidence in the Gospel because our confidence is not in our own ability, or the rhetoric of our preaching, but in Christ crucified. We cannot expect an easy hearing, but God's power is at work precisely in the weakness and vulnerability of both the cross, and ourselves as proclaimers of the cross.

Professor Paul Trebilco, University of Otago.

⁶⁵ 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

⁶⁶ Galatians 5:22-24.

⁶⁷ 1 Peter 3:15.

⁶⁸ As seen in Jesus' ministry of healing (Matthew 19:2), feeding (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-11), and forgiving (Mark 2:5; 7:48).

⁶⁹ Colossians 4:5.

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

Our response

In the environment described above, our churches must resist being pulled inward to the needs of self-maintenance. We must become much more intentional about evangelism. Elders must gather, pray as never before for the mission, study Scripture to fully understand God's desires and hear his voice, and strategise to evangelise their context. They must redirect resources away from maintenance to evangelism, employing proven evangelists to lead the mission and to equip the people of God to share the Gospel.⁷¹

We are fortunate to have great expertise across the parachurch evangelistic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand. Wouldn't it be amazing to see a new era of partnership between church and parachurch to evangelise the nation? Christians are not sharing the Gospel because it is hard, and they are not prepared to answer the questions posed to them. They require training for our context, and church leaders, preachers, evangelists, and teachers are responsible for this to occur either through their own ministries or through partnering with others. We can be confident that as we do this work, God will lead us to new ministries that reach people in the community. He will direct us toward the evangelistic renewal of our churches, the establishment of new congregations, small group evangelistic ministries, and church planting.

Central to this impulse will be a renewed passion to evangelise children and youth. We need a new generation of young Christians who are not only saved, but flourish into disciple-makers.

As I recall coming to faith as a student, I think of three 'good' words that built my confidence in the Gospel: 1) good grief, as I was helped to process loss and sin in light of Jesus' death and resurrection; 2) the good book, as I learned to love the Bible as the very word of God; and 3) good friends, as others walked alongside me with their eyes fixed on Christ. Today, the needs of young people are not so different. They see the emptiness of bells and whistles, pretence and performance; they're looking for something substantial. Something authentic enough to relate with the brokenness in and around them, but also good enough to offer hope. We must invite our youth to see where grief and grace can meet – in Jesus, in the Scriptures that testify to Him, and amongst friends who'll seek Him together.

Josh Irving, TSCF.

There will also be a renewed effort to share Christ to both Māori and Pakeha, restoring confidence in the Bible story, knowing the Gospel better, and remembering what it is.

⁷¹ Ephesians 4:11-12.

As one of the 25% of New Zealand citizens who chose to come here from overseas, I'm somewhat reticent to speak too quickly about our context. However, part of our challenge is to listen bi-culturally and multi-culturally in a rapidly changing Aotearoa New Zealand. Part of the reason we came to New Zealand sixteen years ago, is because we saw a general lack of confidence in Scripture, in the clarity, authority and sufficiency of God's Word to do God's work, and also, a lack of clarity and confidence in the Gospel. The Gospel is 'good news of great joy... for all the people.' More, it is about Jesus: "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11).

Ben Carswell, TSCF.

And more than anything, we get on our knees and pray. We pray for workers for the harvest.⁷² We pray for increased boldness to preach the Gospel boldly and without fear.⁷³ We pray that God would open gospel doors for us, opportunities to share the Gospel. We plead that God will lead us to the open hearts around us, and that we share Christ clearly and well.⁷⁴ We pray that the word of God would run rapidly,⁷⁵ as it first raced through Aotearoa New Zealand.

My prayer for you as you read this piece is that you will find yourself swept up with the same heart Paul had for his people expressed here in a paraphrase of Romans 9:1–5 and 10:1:

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Theirs is the proud and magnificent Māori people, the Tangata Whenua who came by waka to this land; theirs are the Pakeha who brought God to the nation; theirs are the many other peoples from the Pacific, Asia, and the world who have come to be a part of this great nation; and theirs is the great National Anthem; and to them has come the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised, Amen. Yes, brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Kiwis is that they may be saved. Amen.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Do you find it easy to share the Gospel? What are the things that hinder you, and what might enable you?

⁷² Matthew 9:38.

⁷³ Acts 4:29; Ephesians 5:19.

⁷⁴ Colossians 4:2-4.

⁷⁵ Psalm 147:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

2. What parachurch ministries are you aware of, that you might support in their activities to share the Gospel?
3. What might your church do to further participate in the primary mission of the Church, that is, to share the Gospel? What part might you play?

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Also contributing to this chapter are Professor **Paul Trebilco** (Head of Theology Programme, University of Otago), and **Josh Irving** (Auckland Team Leader, TSCF) and **Ben Carswell** (National Director, TSCF).

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Reaching Aotearoa New Zealand with the Gospel

Ronji Tanielu

“We see public street preaching and evangelism as an act of worship to God, an act of worship through the public sharing of the Gospel. And God has graciously blessed this work with great eternal fruit that we honour Him alone for!”

‘I’m just too busy to go out evangelising today.’ ‘Someone else will go out and evangelise today so I don’t need to go.’ ‘I don’t want to mess up and say the wrong things.’ ‘We shouldn’t Bible-bash people about Christianity.’ ‘I’ll just let my life and actions speak about Jesus.’ ‘I don’t need to openly tell people the Gospel, do I?’

These are just some of the thoughts I have when I’m too scared to share the Gospel with someone. They are also excuses I use to try and avoid going out to the Mangere Markets in South Auckland on Saturdays to publicly share the Gospel. Everyone I’ve ever evangelised with in public has shared they have these thoughts. I’m not going to lie to you: it’s super scary every time we share Christ, whether privately to friends and families or publicly to complete strangers. Even though I’ve shared the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ thousands of times in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world, I still get scared and nervous every time I do it. Maybe you’ve battled similar thoughts or struggles in your mind as you’ve considered sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others? Don’t worry. You’re not alone.

It was a blessing for me to share some of these realities and challenges of evangelism at the New Zealand Christian Leaders Congress in 2023. I am not an expert in evangelism, but I take God’s words seriously. We have our Messiah’s own exhortation to go ‘and make disciples of all nations, baptising them... [and] teaching them...’;⁷⁶ Paul’s cry of ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’;⁷⁷ Peter boldly telling multitudes to ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’;⁷⁸ and Paul’s encouragement to the young pastor Timothy to ‘do the work of

⁷⁶ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:16.

⁷⁸ Acts 2:38.

an evangelist....⁷⁹ I could go on with the clear appeals and commands from God's Word to His followers to make Jesus known to the world, to let all people know of the salvation available through trust in the Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection. But my point is made; true followers of Jesus should be telling others about Him. Unfortunately, for numerous reasons, this doesn't always happen.

My story as an evangelist in South Auckland

At the 2023 Congress I was privileged to join a panel of people who shared the different ways they were reaching Kiwis for Christ. I was awed by the efforts of the other panelists and the big ministries or churches they were involved with. Some cool things are being done in evangelism. But 'big' is not my context. My wife and I attend a small house church based in Mangere, South Auckland. We're both Samoan and I'm also part Tokelauan (my great grandparents were missionaries from Samoa to Tokelau, which is a spiritual heritage I'm very blessed by). We've served as tentmaker (self-funded) missionaries globally involved in ministry to persecuted Christians, evangelism and various other blessed work and ministry. We returned to live in New Zealand in 2017 and have been involved in various ministries here including street evangelism, campus ministry, and community Bible studies. During the Congress panel session, I was able to share some of the things we're trying in evangelism in our part of the spiritual battle lines in South Auckland.

In 2020, a group of five South Auckland men, by God's grace and provision, started what we lovingly call a 'broke-as, budget-as' ministry called *Fresh Truth Ministries*.⁸⁰ *Fresh Truth* is a small online gospel and apologetics ministry using social media (*Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *Spotify*) to unashamedly share the Gospel, stand for sound biblical doctrine, and contend for the biblical worldview. We had no money when we started, and we still have none! But the Father has borne abundant spiritual fruit through *Fresh Truth*.

The ministry is connected to two small house churches in South Auckland, Water-hole Church in Otahuhu and Peachwood Bible Church in Mangere. As of 2024 we have a team of about 20 volunteers, all Polynesian, many of them young. We run a podcast, the *FRESH TRUTH Podcast*,⁸¹ which features interviews with Christians involved in different ministries across Aotearoa New Zealand. We record Bible teaching videos in our Pacific languages and also English, and cover a range of topics from tithing, culture,

⁷⁹ 2 Timothy 4:5.

⁸⁰ See Fresh Truth Ministries, "Home – Fresh Truth Ministries." Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://freshtruthministries.com/>.

⁸¹ See New Zealand Podcasts, "Fresh Truth Podcast." Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://nzpod.co.nz/podcast/fresh-truth-podcast>.

gender and sexuality issues, Bible verses taken out of context, and many others. We provide written blog entries fortnightly, writing articles that address different Bible topics, theology, and art-centred posts where an artist generates work connected to the Bible as an invitation to think deeply about God's Word.

We also run some in-person events. We've run two men's breakfasts in 2022 and 2023, during which hundreds of men have heard sound preaching and experienced rich fellowship across denominational and geographic lines. We share Christ through a mailbox ministry⁸² we run just before Christmas, providing 'CHRISTmas' themed Gospel tracts, and mobilising Christians to post gospel tracts into the mailboxes of their neighbours and wider community. This is now an annual event. Across the two Christmases we have done this in 2022 and 2023, we estimate tens of thousands of tracts have been shared and we've heard numerous testimonies of others having witnessing opportunities through this crazy venture. All glory to God!

What do we know about social media, let alone Christian ministry through social media? Not much! But we saw a gap in ministry across this space in Aotearoa New Zealand and sensed an opportunity. We trusted God to open and close doors as He alone willed, and we rejoiced as He added other helpers. We are completely focussed on preaching the Gospel; to equipping, challenging, and encouraging the saints; and to standing for Christ and the biblical worldview in the Aotearoa New Zealand that's increasingly apathetic or hostile to these.

Over three years, God has used and blessed *Fresh Truth* in innumerable ways. Thousands of people are watching, reading, following, commenting, sharing, and liking our social media pages. Hundreds are contacting us each month, asking us Bible questions, seeking recommendations for good local churches and Bible studies, and sharing testimonies of how God has used this 'broke-as, budget-as' ministry to bless them and others in some way. Hallelujah!

Preaching in public

At the Leaders Congress I also shared our efforts in public street preaching and evangelism. Again, we are not experts by any means. But since returning to New Zealand in 2017, we've tried to intentionally go out with another small group of believers to publicly preach and share the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ at local marketplaces, on street corners, and in other public places. We primarily do this through street preaching and the public proclamation of biblical truth; distributing Bibles; sharing Gospel tracts that summarise the Gospel (we call these 'paper missionaries' because they go to places we often can't); conduct sign evangelism (holding giant signs that display Bible verses

⁸² We call this the *MailBox Ministry*.

or challenging questions such as ‘Where will you spend your eternity?’); and prepare flip charts and sketch boards, which involve doing public surveys and taking people through different presentations of the Gospel. We try to be at the Mangere Markets doing this work every Saturday.

God has been gracious to us by allowing thousands of Gospel conversations over the years in these public spaces. Many of these conversations have been deep, others short and sharp. We use our Pacific languages, too, in public evangelism whenever possible. Preaching and having Gospel and Bible conversations in our Pacific languages, especially in the Mangere and Otara Markets, is such a joy! A regular, weekly presence at Mangere Markets permits many conversations over time. People know we will be in the same spots at the Markets and so come back to us regularly with questions, comments, and challenges. We also try to ensure a team is present in these public places, working in pairs or small groups.

This public work is extremely hard, tiring, and contentious. We’ve had many hard conversations, pushing back at cults including the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the last few years, we’ve seen a rise in the Korean cults, too, who are actively and openly deceiving people in the Markets with false teachings. We also regularly push back at the prosperity theology that some church groups promote. We’ve also engaged Muslim ‘evangelists’ and apologists in the Markets, having rich Bible conversations with them. One of our points here is to challenge their constant public claims that ‘Jesus is a Muslim,’ which, clearly, He isn’t.

We desire to preach the Gospel and contend for Christ in these public spaces. We aim to do it with both love and truth, pointing to Paul’s reminder that our words need to be ‘...gracious, seasoned with salt,’⁸³ as we share about Christ and answer people’s questions or talk through their disagreements. Many Christians are encouraged by this ministry and pass on that encouragement to us. Other Christians criticise and mock us for this public work, saying that we shouldn’t be so ‘out there’ with the Gospel of Christ. But we remind them that our Messiah was publicly put on trial, beaten, tortured, and horribly crucified to pay the price for the sins of humanity. It is incumbent on us, as His disciples, whenever and wherever possible and appropriate, to publicly contend and stand for Christ in the literal public market-place as did Peter in Acts 2, Paul in Acts 17, and many others since have done. We see public street preaching and evangelism as an act of worship to God, an act of worship through the public sharing of the Gospel. And God has graciously blessed this work with great eternal fruit that we honour Him alone for!

⁸³ Colossians 4:6.

So, let us contend...

I've shared two simple ways I'm involved in to try and reach Aotearoa New Zealand with the glorious Gospel of Christ, primarily in our beloved South Auckland but also through social media. A few key reflections stand out about this work the Lord has allowed us to join Him in.

First, the Church must remain focussed on Christ. Paul reminds us to 'preach Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'⁸⁴ Which Jesus are you sharing? An effeminate Jesus? A political Jesus? A social justice Jesus? A Jesus that you've created in your own head? A weak Jesus? A prosperity Jesus? Or the Jesus of the gospels? Reaching Aotearoa New Zealand with the Gospel requires us to remain Christ-focussed and present the biblical Jesus.

Second, I pray the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand will have greater courage to preach and share Christ. Courage is especially needed as our nation becomes increasingly secularised, atheistic, and apathetic, or even hostile, to Christ. We as Christians love our 'holy huddles,' and our weeks are usually full of church activities. This is wonderful and has its place. But I often wonder when and where the opportunities are for Christians to apply and live out their faith and tell others of Jesus. I wonder if we prefer a safe and comfortable Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand, not wanting to rock the boat too much. This saddens me greatly. We've tried street evangelism and other ministries through *Fresh Truth* to courageously stand for the Gospel and biblical truth in social media, public spaces, and any other place we can find. These small ministries have spurred other Christians with opportunities to gain courage, as they join us in these gospel efforts to give public voice to their faith. As Billy Graham famously said, 'Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.'⁸⁵

Finally, Christians need to have a desire to contend for the Gospel. Jude reminds us 'to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.'⁸⁶ I love this passage, alongside the many other exhortations in Scripture. We're trying in our own small way in South Auckland to 'earnestly contend for Christ' through the various ministries described above. These are the fish and loaves we have to offer to our Master for Him to use for His purposes. Jesus does the miracles. But we must be obedient and faithful with what we have and put them into the Master's hands as we earnestly contend for Christ to reach Aotearoa New Zealand with the Gospel. We must be intentional in our efforts, willing to sacrifice and pay the cost in labouring for the Lord, rather than

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.

⁸⁵ Crosswalk. "40 Courageous Quotes from Billy Graham." Crosswalk. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/40-courageous-quotes-from-billy-graham.html>

⁸⁶ Jude verse 3.

seeking to please people! Jesus Himself beautifully summarised this cost of true discipleship by saying ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’⁸⁷ Paul also encourages us to ‘be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.’⁸⁸

I’m thankful the Gospel still has a place in Aotearoa New Zealand. But I would urge my brothers and sisters in Christ to be urgent, diligent, and intentional with sharing the Gospel. Why? *Because someone’s eternal destination depends on this.* I pray the Church would stay Christ-focussed, be courageous in sharing the Gospel in public and in private, and to earnestly contend for Christ in our contemporary culture. Our small efforts through *Fresh Truth* and across our various ministries are our contributions by God’s grace to glorify Him alone and extend His Kingdom alone! Soli Deo Gloria! (*To God alone be the glory!*)

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. I’ve shared how we’ve used social media and public evangelism to creatively share the Gospel. These are the ‘fish and loaves’ in our hands. What fish and loaves do you have? What creative ways can you think of to share the full gospel with others?
2. Do you think Christians in Aotearoa New Zealand prefer ‘holy huddles,’ and a safe kind of Christianity? Why? Can or should this change?
3. Why do Christians struggle to share their faith with others? Do the words ‘scared,’ ‘ill-equipped,’ or ‘apathetic’ apply? What should be our response?

Pray:

- That Christians throughout Aotearoa New Zealand will develop courage to share the true saving Gospel to family, friends, and strangers.
- For strength and encouragement for those people and ministries sharing the Gospel across multiple public places.
- That Christians will be bold in sharing the Gospel through social media pages and online platforms.

⁸⁷ Matthew 16:24.

⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Author Profile:

Ronji Tanielu is, in his words: married to stunning Rabena; born in Samoa, but raised in the capital of the Universe, Māngere; a wretched sinner saved by God's amazing grace; passionate about the Gospel and sound Biblical doctrine; and both burdened and blessed to serve in persecuted Church, evangelism and social media ministries. *Viiā le Alii! (Praise the Lord!)*

Section Two:

GOSPEL AND TREATY

CHAPTER SIX

6. The nature and extent of the Māori Conversion

Malcolm Falloon

“The CMS mission was, by 1845, an overwhelmingly Māori-led organisation that operated predominantly within the cultural context of the local kāinga (settlement). This is far from it being a European missionary-dominated institution...”

The conversion of Māori to Christianity in the early to mid-nineteenth century is one of the most remarkable features of New Zealand’s short history. As a historical movement, the Māori Conversion extended between 1830 and 1850, during which over 90% of Māori came to profess Christianity in some form.⁸⁹ Yet, from the very inception of New Zealand as a British colony, the nature and extent of Māori Christianity has been the subject of debate. These debates, although at times coloured by various religious, political, and social agendas, underline the continued importance of the Māori Conversion for an understanding of New Zealand history. This chapter will outline the story of how *Te Rongopai* (the Gospel) came to these shores, and the way it came to be embraced by Māori. It is a story that continues to shape our contemporary society, and so it is important for the Church to be able to tell its own story on its own terms. Understanding this story will advance the Christian Gospel in shaping our nation in the years ahead.

The coming of Te Rongopai

The Christian message was first brought to New Zealand in 1806 by an anonymous Māori chief returning to the Bay of Islands after having visited New South Wales.⁹⁰ The identity of this chief was likely to have been Te Pahi, a Ngā Puhi *rangatira* (chief).⁹¹ Te

⁸⁹ For a fuller treatment of this subject see Malcolm Falloon, “The Māori Conversion and Four Early Converts” (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2021). Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://hdl.handle.net/10523/12099>.

⁹⁰ Falloon, 136.

⁹¹ See Angela Ballara, “Te Pahi,” Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t53/te-pahi>.

Pahi was known to have met and talked with Samuel Marsden, the senior chaplain of the colony, during his visit to New South Wales. It was as a result of these conversations and those held with other visiting Māori (such as Ruatara) that Marsden conceived of a Christian mission to New Zealand. The aim was to introduce Māori to the benefits of Western civilisation along with instruction in the Christian faith. The strategy was developed by Marsden in consultation with Te Pahi and Ruatara, both of whom he appears to have privately regarded as converts to the Christian faith.⁹² In 1807, Marsden returned to England and put his plans before the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in London, to gain their permission to begin recruiting missionaries for the task.

Tragically, Te Pahi died before the mission could come to fruition. Yet, while Marsden was returning to New Zealand in 1809, he was able to renew his friendship with a seriously ill Ruatara, who he found on board the ship. During the voyage Marsden nursed Ruatara back to health and, in return, Ruatara taught Marsden a respectable degree of fluency in *te reo Māori* (the Māori language). It was on account of this mutual friendship that Ruatara accepted Marsden's offer to settle three missionary families in the Bay of Islands under his patronage.

The mission in New Zealand was launched at Rangihoua on Christmas Day 1814 with a service hosted by Ruatara, who also acted as Marsden's interpreter for the occasion. The service was attended by 400 warriors along with a similar number of residents from Rangihoua and a small band of Europeans. The service was characterised by joy, and began with the missionaries singing of the hymn, *All Creatures that on Earth do Dwell*. Marsden spoke on the Christmas theme of the angel's message in Luke 2:10, 'I bring you good news of great joy...'. To the surprise of the Europeans, they were greeted with a joyful *hāri* (dance) from the warriors as the service ended. In this way, Ruatara received the endorsement of his community for bringing the missionaries to the Bay of Islands, and for his vision for a Māori society transformed by Christian ideas and Western technology.⁹³

The extent of the Māori Conversion

The CMS mission was to see little spiritual fruit until the baptism of the rangatira Te Rangi of Waitangi, by Henry Williams in September 1825. Te Rangi was the first Māori to be baptised by the missionaries as a convert.⁹⁴ Williams, the leader of the mission, had written a series of transcripts of the conversations he had had with Te Rangi over the previous 18 months, which give insight into Te Rangi's emerging faith.⁹⁵ Having

⁹² Falloon, 128–29.

⁹³ Falloon, 115–17.

⁹⁴ Falloon, 163.

⁹⁵ These transcripts have been included as *Appendix I: Waitangi Dialogues* in Falloon, 273–290.

made a public profession of his faith, Te Rangi was baptised and took the name of *Karaitiana* (Christian). Unfortunately, Christian Rangi was seriously ill and died the next day of consumption (the last stages of tuberculosis).

It wasn't until February 1830 with the baptism of Taiwhanga, the leading rangatira living with the missionaries at Paihia, that Māori interest in Christianity began to grow. Things came to a head later in the month, on 24 February 1830, at the Wednesday evening chapel service led by the missionary Richard Davis. Davis noticed at the end of his sermon that the congregation had become especially attentive, so much so that he invited those 'particularly desirous for the salvation of their souls' to follow him home for further conversation.⁹⁶ Thirty men and boys responded to his offer. 'I spent,' wrote Davis, 'such an evening with them as I shall never forget.' There was a similar response among those women and girls who met separately with Davis's oldest daughter, Mary Ann.

In the week that followed the chapel service, Henry's brother William Williams observed that the interest of that few had become more general. Even more surprisingly, perhaps, the spiritual awakening continued into March, even as the Bay of Islands becoming engulfed in the conflict known as the Girls' War.⁹⁷

By April of 1830 the transformation at Paihia also began to affect Māori living at the other mission stations of Kerikeri and Rangihoua, though the wider population remained indifferent to the missionary message. Samuel Marsden, on his sixth arrival to Aotearoa New Zealand in March 1830, witnessed the next four baptisms on Easter Sunday at Paihia. George Clarke observed Marsden's surprise at the changes that had taken place:

The good old Gentleman's heart seemed to overflow with love and gratitude to God for what He had done. He said he could hardly have expected to see so much done in his days, knowing as he did the difficulties which were in the way of benefitting them in a spiritual point of view.⁹⁸

From early on the Māori converts were keen to become missionaries to their own people. In September 1830, Richard Davis was delighted to overhear Māori praying that God might enable this to happen. Their example was followed by others, and it was not long before Māori living away from the mission stations were coming to faith in Christ.

⁹⁶ John Noble Coleman, *A Memoir of the Rev. Richard Davis: For Thirty-nine Years a Missionary in New Zealand* (London, 1865), 127–28. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document?wid=1149>.

⁹⁷ John Rawson Elder, ed., *Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden* (Dunedin: Coulls Somerville Wilkie, Ltd. and A. H. Reed for the Otago University Council, 1932), 451. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document?wid=1065>. This initial engagement of the conflict at Kororāreka on 6 March 1830 left two hundred Māori killed or wounded.

⁹⁸ Falloon, 259.

The first baptism amongst the Wesleyan mission in the Hokianga, that of Hika Tawa, took place in January 1831.

Up until this point, the conversions were confined to the far North, but with the end of the conflict between the Bay of Islands and Tauranga in October 1833, the way was open to establish mission stations throughout the rest of the North Island. By 1840, when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, some 2,000 Māori had been baptised by the Christian Mission Society (CMS), with many more regularly attending Sabbath day services led by Māori catechists. Attendance at these services in 1840 was estimated by Henry and William Williams to be between 27,000 and 30,000, out of a total population of perhaps 80,000 to 90,000 Māori.⁹⁹

With the spread of Christianity came a corresponding growth in the number of mission schools. By 1845 there were 15,500 students in the CMS schools. Most of the 350 teachers (92%) were Māori. The CMS mission was, by 1845, an over-whelmingly Māori-led organisation that operated predominantly within the cultural context of the local *kainga* (settlement). This is far from it being a European missionary-dominated institution, at least from an educational perspective.

In 1852, William Williams was interviewed in London by the CMS. He gave an account of the New Zealand mission, informing the committee that there were 65,000 Māori associated with the CMS and Wesleyan missions, along with 5,000 Roman Catholic Māori. Together, these represented upwards of 90% of the total Māori population.¹⁰⁰ Governor Grey, also interviewed by the CMS at this time, told the committee that there were ‘not more than 1,000 that did not make a profession of Christianity.’¹⁰¹ Grey’s testimony suggests that Williams’s figure of 90% Christian profession should be considered a somewhat conservative estimate, and that the true rate of profession could well be higher.

The nature of the Māori Conversion

European colonial observers often dismissed Māori Christianity as being largely nominal in nature. They considered many Māori converted for ulterior motives, while retaining traditional beliefs deemed incompatible with Christianity. Similar views have been expressed by more recent historians. Yet such views are inconsistent with the evidence of transformation displayed by most Māori converts. It is *their* testimony that

⁹⁹ Falloon, 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Missionary Register* (London: 1852), 238. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document?wid=3198>.

¹⁰¹ *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East* (London: 1853–1854), 153–54.

invites a far more positive assessment of the nature of Māori conversion. Five points can be made.

First, the Māori Conversion needs to be seen as a fundamentally religious movement involving the transformation of Māori both as individuals and as a society. The suddenness of the expansion of Christianity, particularly in the southern regions of the North Island away from the direct influence of Europeans, undermines any explanation that downplays the religious character of the Māori Conversion in favour of theories based solely on social disruption or cultural assimilation.

Second, the self-identification of Māori as Christian was more than a nominal conformity to European religion. While some colonial voices caricatured Māori Christianity in this way, it cannot be written off as merely superficial or skin-deep because we must acknowledge that the European dichotomy between outward practice and inward belief would have made little sense to early Māori converts.

Third, the presence of ulterior motives is not sufficient grounds for questioning the legitimacy of Māori conversion. All individuals and groups convert for a variety of reasons, and so each conversion can be said to have a particular socio-economic context and a mixture of motivations. Yet the presence of these other influences does not invalidate a convert's active choice to embrace religious change. Nor does the fact that large numbers of Māori began to convert after 1830 make their conversions merely a matter of fashion.

Fourth, while the Māori Conversion displayed elements of both continuity and discontinuity with past beliefs and practices, there is little evidence to suggest that this represented a Māori subversion of Christianity or the 'conversion of conversion' as some have claimed.¹⁰² Conversion properly understood does not require that there be a complete break with a convert's past; some beliefs and practices will be supplanted, while others will be affirmed or repurposed. Neither does a convert's beliefs need to be entirely consistent before his or her conversion is eligible to be recognised. Some beliefs will change straight away while others might take years, even generations, to be influenced by a Christian worldview.

Fifth, the Māori Conversion led to an interest in new forms of peace, agriculture, and literacy in a way that is difficult to explain apart from the transformative impact of embracing the Christian message. One example is the observation made by William Williams that the 'first effect' of Christianity was the giving up of traditional forms of warfare.¹⁰³ Another is the rise of literacy, which up until 1830 held little interest for

¹⁰² See, for instance, James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996), 223.

¹⁰³ William Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders* (London: 1867), 349. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document?wid=694>.

Māori; it was perceived as ‘more a novelty than a benefit,’ as the CMS missionary, John King, remarked.¹⁰⁴ But, as Christianity spread, so too did literacy as it allowed new converts to access the source of their spiritual authority, the Bible. Literacy also enabled a more independent Christian identity not reliant on the presence of European missionaries for its viability.

Why did Māori convert?

There appear to be four main reasons for the Māori response to the Gospel.

First, strong friendships were formed between Māori and European missionary. This relational aspect of conversion has at times been overlooked by historians, who have wanted to downplay the role of the missionaries and their influence with Māori. Yet it was these cross-cultural friendships that were able to catalyse the social and religious change that are a feature of Christian conversion.

Second, Māori were attracted by the Christian ideas that the missionaries brought, that provided a satisfying account of the new world European contact opened to them. Christianity allowed Māori to set aside the burden of maintaining traditional *tapu* (sacred customs), and experiment instead with an alternative way of living. It was not coincidental that Christian Māori were at the forefront of those from their people opposing the longstanding divisions and animosities of the past.

Third, Māori accepted the Bible as the Word of God and as a source of spiritual authority. The Bible had a great appeal to Māori, as demonstrated by the high demand for the Scriptures and the great interest in learning to read its text for themselves. The authority of the Bible disrupted the traditional social hierarchies based on the obligations of *tapu* (sacredness) and *utu* (reciprocity). As converts discarded the conventions of the past, the Bible also provided them with a new system of law and order that allowed a distinctly Māori Christian society to emerge.

Fourth, the Māori experience of Christian prayer and Sabbath observance led to personal and communal transformation. Missionaries had encouraged Māori to pray for a new heart within, as they themselves had experienced in their own lives. It was as Māori came to believe that God had answered their prayers that they made public profession of faith in Christ. Likewise, the enthusiasm and commitment of Māori catechists had its source in their confidence in the experiential truth of Christianity. The substance of this experience was a major factor in their effectiveness in spreading the Christian faith far and wide.

¹⁰⁴ Falloon, 265.

In summary, Māori converts were attracted by Christian ideas as providing a satisfying and alternative way of living in the changing world brought by Western contact. New allegiances and identities based on the spiritual authority of the Bible allowed converts to dispense with the divisions and animosities of the past, to pursue new forms of peace. Their practice of such things as Christian prayer, Sabbath observance, and baptism reinforced a new way of being, which in turn bought about the transformation of traditional Māori society and the emergence of a distinctly Māori expression of Christianity.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. How much of the history of Māori conversion as written in this chapter was known to you? What aspects surprised you, or challenged your previous understanding?
2. To what extent do you see your own story of conversion mirrored in that of Māori as described in this chapter, mindful that it is different to become a Christian from within a country with a Christian tradition than within one new to the Gospel?
3. What would allow contemporary New Zealanders to share the same faith discovered by the early Māori converts? What would motivations be today for accepting the Gospel?

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Further reading

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CHAPTER SEVEN

7. Re-imagining the Treaty

Alistair Reese

“Love is the hermeneutical portal for understanding the Treaty. It is the interpretative key.”

Haere mai e te Tiriti o Waitangi. Haere mai ki tēnei ao. Haere mai me ngā hua kei roto
ki a koe. Tū mai ki tō mātou taha. Takiri a Nuku. Takiri a rangi. Te Manawa tī, te
manawa tā. Tēnei te kare kau. Te kare a roto e!

*Welcome O Tiriti of Waitangi. Welcome to this world. Welcome to the fruits you have in you. Stand
by our side. Sit by our side. Proceed along the land. Proceed along the heavens. 'Tis the enduring
breath. The breath of life. Here are the ripples. The ripples of passion and emotions within.*

This is a prayer by the Ngāti Hau, Ngāti Kaharau *rangatira* (chief) Ngāmanu. It is a prayer of welcome to Te Tiriti and the fruits that he believed would reside with the agreement. Ngāmanu's *moemoea* (dream) gives us the opportunity to re-imagine the Treaty and align it with God's mandate for living. Jesus condensed all of the law's commands into just two: love God, and love one other. In doing so, Jesus simplifies following God in our everyday lives and defines our blueprint for living. A challenge for us here in Aotearoa New Zealand is, can the Treaty of Waitangi be aligned with God's organising ethic for creation?

Let's begin with a look at the local context of the Treaty signing.

There have always been prayers at Waitangi. In fact, after a visit to James Busby in the Treaty House, a journalist from Sydney was moved to write: 'It is rather too formal and religious for me – there are far too many prayers at Why-tangie.'¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the European settlement at Kororareka, known as 'the hell hole of the Pacific'¹⁰⁶ and 'where Satan has his dominion,'¹⁰⁷ Waitangi has always been a sacred space.

¹⁰⁵ Ned Fletcher, *The English Text of the Treaty of Waitangi*, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022), 135.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Wolfe, *Hell-hole of the Pacific*, (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2005), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Quote attributed to Samuel Marsden.

Another significant prayer was prayed at Waitangi almost one hundred years after that of Ngāmanu. In 1934, the land surrounding Waitangi was gifted to the nation of New Zealand by Lord Bledisloe, who declared: ‘Let Waitangi be to us all a Tatau Pounamu, a place of Reconciliation for us all.’¹⁰⁸ He then prayed: ‘O God... Grant that this sacred compact here made in these waters will be honourably and faithfully kept for all times.’¹⁰⁹ Bledisloe saw the restoration of the Treaty grounds in a symbolic way. Drawing upon Te Ao Māori he likened the Treaty as the doorway to reconciliation. Living in the Treaty equates to being reconciled one with another.

Re-imagining the Treaty as a love story

Not many of us know that the place name of Waitangi is in remembrance of a love story. A young woman, Maikuku, had been hidden in a watery cave by her whānau to protect her from unwelcome suitors. However, she was discovered hiding there by a young man named Hua Takaroa. It was the revealing sound of a tangi, a call from deep within the waters of the cave, that gave her position away and led Takaroa to his future bride. Their marriage brought forth Te Ra,¹¹⁰ the ancestral reference point for a new hapū identity, Ngāti Rahiri.

In these complex times of *realpolitik* it is wonderful to think of the Treaty of Waitangi originating as a love story. Queen Victoria responded to the tangi in Aotearoa New Zealand, the sound of Ngāpuhi rangatira’s discontent with the unruly settlers from Europe. The Treaty was offered as a covenantal agreement that some have likened to a marriage. As with Maikuku and Hua Takaroa, the Treaty, too, created a new identity.

After British consul William Hobson arrived in the Bay of Islands, he asked James Busby and the Christian Mission Society leader Henry Williams to assist with the formulation and translation of a draft treaty between the Crown and the indigenous Māori. On 5th February 1840, northern rangatira gathered at the grounds of Busby’s house in Waitangi. Henry Williams read the Treaty aloud and explained its meaning. As at any hui, arguments for and against went back and forth. For a time, the outcome was in the balance.

At the end of that day Hobson retired to his ship and the rangatira gathered at Te Tou Rangatira, an ancestral gathering place beside the local marae, Ngāti Kawa. Here they convened a *wānanga* (conference) to further discuss the Treaty following a day of

¹⁰⁸ Lord Bledisloe, Speech at Waitangi, 1934. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22302480?search%5B%5D%5B_authority_id%5D=9562&search%5Bpath%5D=items.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Waitangi Marae. “Pito Korero.” Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.waitangimarae.co.nz/pitopito-korero.html>.

vigorous debate. They were joined by Henry Williams, who assured them that the Treaty was a good thing. He summarized the Crown's intentions in this way: 'This is Queen Victoria's act of love to you. She wants to ensure that you keep what is yours – your property, your rights and privileges, and those things you value...'.¹¹¹

Framed by Williams, the Treaty was understood by many as a covenant. As the first signatory Hone Heke exclaimed: 'It is even as the Word of God.'¹¹² He likened the Treaty to *Te Paipera Tapu* (the Holy Scriptures), the revelation of God's love to his Creation. The Scriptures also define the nature of God's love, which resembles a cross-shaped ethic where one is willing to lay down their life for the other. Naturally, then, a covenant of love such as the Treaty is a sacrificial covenant; this is the love that Williams referred to at Te Tou Rangatira, an ethic that seeks the best outcome for the other. And, to paraphrase the Apostle Paul, 'love is patient, love is kind, love does not dishonour others and love never fails'¹¹³ With this equating of the Treaty with love, Williams was committing Queen Victoria's representatives to perpetually seek the highest good for Māori.

If the Treaty was an 'act of love' by Queen Victoria to Māori, then by extension it needs also to be an act of love by our governments to Māori. Love is the hermeneutical portal for understanding the Treaty. It is the interpretative key. Interpreting the Treaty without the lens of love leads to a distorted vision and an arid legalism. King Potatau Te Wherowhero implied this in a well-known saying: '*A muri ki au, kia mau ki te ture, ki te whakapono, ki te aroha*. When I have gone, hold fast to the law, hold fast to faith, hold fast to love.'¹¹⁴

When love fails

While the Treaty began as a love story, it is not without its issues (as with all relationship stories in real life.) Hollywood does not write our script. It was not long before the budded fruits of Waitangi began to wither. The prayer of Ngāmanu that opened this chapter does not seem to have been answered.

In short time, Hone Heke (of flagpole-cutting fame) understood this; Pana-kareao, a great Te Rarawa chief, did also. It was Pana-kareao (after being convinced by the missionary William Puckey that 'sovereignty' was a relative term well translated by the

¹¹¹ Henry Williams, cited by Anne Salmond in "Muriwhenua Land Claim", *Wai 45, FO19*, 6.

¹¹² Hone Heke, cited in T.Lyndsay Buck's *New Zealand's First War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

¹¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

¹¹⁴ King Pōtatau Te Wherowhero, cited in Rahui Papa and Paul Meredith, "Kīngitanga – the Māori King Movement." *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, last modified March 2, 2023. Accessed July 6, 2024, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/kingitanga-the-maori-king-movement>.

word 'kawanatanga' in the Treaty) who came up with the famous biblically inspired maxim: 'What have we to say against the governor, the shadow of the land will go to him, but the substance will remain with us.'¹¹⁵ Only a year later he realised this was not the shared interpretation. According to the missionary Richard Taylor, 'Panakareao [sic] now fears the substance of it [the land] will go to [the British] and the shadow only be [the Maori] portion.'¹¹⁶

By the time Governor Grey had sent General Cameron across the Mangatawhiri to invade the Waikato in 1863, the fruits hoped for in Ngāmanu's prayer had become completely rotten. The invasion was like an act of violence by an unfaithful spouse. In response, the influential Ngāti Hauā Christian chief Wiremu Tāmihana (known as the kingmaker) was moved to petition Queen Victoria. Tāmihana wrote:

Madame... Your covenant came to this island, and you said in good faith that the Maoris [sic] should retain their chieftainship, their mana and their lands.... These are your declarations.... And now, O Mother, assert your authority – the authority which has been trampled upon by Governor Grey, and give us back our land, our chieftainship, and our mana of which the colonists and the Governor are seeking to deprive us.¹¹⁷

Tāmihana argued that the Queen's authority had been trampled upon by Her representatives, because they trampled upon the mana of the Treaty. By extension, her intentions of love, embedded within the Treaty, were being ignored. The lack of love and justice in the Crown's actions after the Treaty was a source of puzzlement for Christian rangatira such as Tāmihana.

Where is the Church, the third party at the Treaty table?

The question needs to be asked: Where was the third party at the Treaty table at this time, the Church, whose representatives had convinced Māori that the Treaty was a 'good thing'? Where was the Church during the invasion of the Waikato? Where was the Church at Pukehinahina (Gate Pā) when the British attacked? Where was the Church in 1881, when Native Minister John Bryce, with a force of some 1,600, invaded the pacifist community at Parihaka?

In short, the missionaries, and the settler church in the main, abandoned Māori. Apart from a few lone voices, the settler church remained silent as Māori land was confiscated and lost; as the language became increasingly alienated; and as the mana of the rangatira

¹¹⁵ Journal of John Johnson, cited in Ned Fletcher's, "A Praiseworthy Device for Amusing and Pacifying Savages?" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2014), 758.

¹¹⁶ Richard Taylor, Journal, vol.2, pt.2, qMS-1986, Alexander Turnbull Library.

¹¹⁷ Wiremu Tāmihana's Petition to the Queen, *Daily Southern Cross*, Volume XXI, Issue 2506, 31 July, 1865, 7.

was trampled upon. By our silence we, the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, have been complicit in this betrayal. We can only hope that the recovery of a prophetic voice which began in the 1980s, especially within the Anglican Church, will gather further momentum.

So, why does the Church now need to step up? Simply because in 1840 there were three voices at the Treaty table: Māori, the crown, and the Church. We have an historical responsibility. Not only were the Māori leaders gathered at Waitangi convinced by the missionary rhetoric, but all around the motu it was usually the missionary mediating and explaining the terms of the Treaty when it was presented. Additionally, in most locations (including Waitangi) the Church signed as witnesses to the Deed. In short, without the event at Rangihoua (where the Gospel message was first preached) there would be no event at Waitangi.

However, responsibility rests not only on the Church's genealogical responsibility as the mediator of the Treaty. The Treaty is itself, in part, also a theological document. The Treaty cannot truly be interpreted without some biblical understanding. Some of its genesis, language and covenantal intentions are drawn directly from *Te Paiāpera Tapu*. The Church should, in these days when the Treaty is under attack, be reminding the nation of its covenantal commitment. Listen to the words of Sir William Martin, our first Chief Justice (also a Church Missionary Society leader):

We have covenanted with these people and assured to them the full privileges of subjects of the Crown....The compact is binding irrevocably. We cannot repudiate it so long as we retain the benefit which we obtained by it.¹¹⁸

What is that benefit Martin speaks of? Sir Eddie Taihakurei Durie, another Anglican churchman, explained it well in 1989:

We must not forget that the treaty is not just a bill of rights for Māori, it is a bill of rights for Pākehā too. It is the treaty that gives Pākehā the right to be here. Without the treaty there would be no lawful authority for the Pākehā presence in this part of the South Pacific.¹¹⁹

Hence, we know Pākehā as *Tangata Tiriti*, the people of the Treaty. I add it is a treaty for all who enter this *tatau pounamu* (peace agreement), this *waharoa* (gateway of reconciliation).

It is the Church that should be reminding the nation on its 'commitment of love,' not a Hollywood transient love, but the sacrificial aroha demonstrated in the life and death of

¹¹⁸ Sir William Martin, cited in "The Taranaki Question" in *New Zealand Wars*, NZETC.

¹¹⁹ As cited in Katherine Peel, "Treaty is about rights of all NZers," *The Press*, Thursday 11 October 2007. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.nwo.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Treaty-Rights-of-All-NZers-Press-Oct-07.pdf>.

its author, Jesus. It is the Church that should be explicating what love has to do with *realpolitik*. The Treaty is irrevocably binding, yes; but, without an understanding of its foundations, the Treaty is in danger of becoming either an historical artifact or a legalistic charter of rights. Neither of these extremes will bring the life what was hoped for at Waitangi in 1840. At its core, the Treaty is a relational commitment to ‘love one another’ so that both parties might prosper and achieve their potential.

We are at an opportune and decisive moment as a nation, characterised by mana trampling. It is high time to honour the Treaty, and unequivocally restore its mana. It is time to restore the mana of the crown. It is also time to restore the mana of te Iwi Māori and each of the signatories and witnesses to this sacred covenant, including those of the Church. It is not too late; we can return to the Treaty as a ‘sacred compact made in these waters [that] may be faithfully and honourably kept for all times to come.’¹²⁰

I have confidence that Lord Bledisloe’s aforementioned prayer will be answered because Covenants are a God thing, in that they attract His attention. In times past it has seemed that the Treaty might be dead; think Judge Prendergast’s ‘simple nullity’ ruling in 1887.¹²¹ But the Treaty’s longevity continues to surprise us. Sir Apirana Ngāta, at the opening of the great Whare Runanga in 1940, signalled its resurrection when he and hundreds of warriors performed the famous Te Rauparaha haka: *Ka mate, ka mate, ka ora, ka ora* (It was dead, and now it lives!)

Prophetic challenge

I here close with the 1990 prophetic words of the Anglican Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe to the late Queen Elizabeth and the assembled crowds assembled at Waitangi. Paraphrasing Psalm 137, he said: ‘By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion.’¹²² It is much more expressive in te reo Māori, and I here take liberty with the location: *I te taba o ngā wahi o Waitangi nobo ana tātou i reira. A, e tangi ana tātou ka mahara kia Hiro*. Continuing, Bishop Vercoe said:

We have come to this sacred ground because our tupuna left us this ground, 150 years ago a compact was signed, a covenant was made between two people – a unique and unusual circumstance.

As I remember the songs of our land, as I remember the history of our land; I weep here on the shores of the Bay of Islands. May God grant us the courage to be honest

¹²⁰ Lord Bledisloe, 1934 Speech at Waitangi as cited in Rt Hon Sir Anand Satyanand, GNZM, QSO, “Bledisloe High Tea,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://gg.govt.nz/publications/bledisloe-high-tea>.

¹²¹ Judge Prendergast, *The Wī Parata Case in NZ Law and History*, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.lawfoundation.org.nz/?p=1148>.

¹²² Psalm 137:1.

with one another, to be sincere with one another and above all to love one another in the strength of God. So, I come to the waters of Waitangi to weep for what could have been a unique document in the history of the world of indigenous people with the Pakeha, and I still have the hope we can do it. Let us sit and listen to one another.¹²³

Let the Church again be the reconciliatory mediators to enable the prayers of Ngāmanu and Lord Bledisloe to come to fruition.

Me wahakatau tātou ki ngā hua kei roto i te Tiriti!
Let us welcome the fruit that resides within this event.

Toitū te kupu; toitū te kawanata; toitū te Tiriti!
Hold fast to the Word; hold fast to the covenant; hold fast to the Treaty!

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Love is the key to interpreting the Treaty of Waitangi. What are the contrasting interpretive means we often see in Aotearoa New Zealand?
2. The Treaty is presented in this chapter in covenantal terms, with the Church as party. What are some practical opportunities the Church, and so each Christian, has to honour the Treaty with this in mind?
3. How optimistic are you that the fruits of prayer from both Ngāmanu and Lord Bledisloe will come to pass? What will it take?

Author Profile:

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¹²³ Bishop Vercoe's Waitangi Speech, Radio New Zealand, February 6, 1990. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/whakamaori/story/2018838131/bishop-vercoe-s-waitangi-speech>.

Section Three:

“RE” THE CHURCH

CHAPTER EIGHT

8. Restoring the critical ministry of the Evangelist

Lew Meyer

“Why, then, in view of our Master’s clear instruction to make disciples, would we ever appoint a maintenance person to be the key leader of a church?”

John was consultant to businesses in decline. In a meeting with management, he asked some critical questions.

‘How much investment are you putting into good quality maintenance and product repair?’

‘About 70%,’ came the reply.

‘And how much in sales?’

‘About 10%.’

John stood up, closed his folder and said, ‘Therein lies your most urgent problem. Sort it. If you don’t make significant investment in the sales department, the day will come when you have nothing to maintain or repair.’

Evangelists can be thought of as the sales department of the Church, and they are one of the tools (or gifts) given by the Head of the Church for equipping God’s people for works of service.

Ephesians 4:11- 13 reads, in the English Standard Version,

And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..

Paul here lists the so-called ‘foundational giftings’ of the Church. There are various opinions about how these roles function in the modern Church, but a reasonable and helpful one is to simply follow the apparent progression. First come the ‘apostles.’ These are the equivalent to the missionary or church planter, who needs to fill the

initial, primary role in leadership until other qualified leaders can be appointed. Then, the ‘prophets.’ These are the ones who call people out of idolatry and other sin to faith in God. These prophets are also evangelistic preachers, who call the lost to the Saviour. Those specifically called ‘evangelists’ continue that work, and also train other believers in evangelism. Their ministry is fourfold: first, and most importantly, to preach the Gospel (that is, to tell them about Jesus); second, to train others to articulate the Gospel; third, to resource the Church with Gospel materials (like gospel booklets, tracts for distribution, apologetics materials for answering questions, video series, follow up literature); and fourth, to protect and defend the Gospel in light of the numerous cults and heresies that distort the truth.

Then come the maintenance people, the ‘shepherds and teachers,’ the pastors, who are very important for the ongoing maturing of the believers.

Why, then, in view of our Master’s clear instruction to make disciples, would we ever appoint a maintenance person to be the key leader of a church?

Evangelists in decline

It is a generalisation, but I have noticed that where there is significant evangelistic activity and growth in a local church the leaders have an evangelist as part of their core leadership team. That, or someone with a strong evangelistic streak in their gift mix who is constantly telling others about Jesus and encouraging others to do likewise.

If I was the devil, I would be targeting the sales team of the Church. That, or more subtly, I would cause the Church to neglect, underfund, or, more boldly, even reject them. Our adversary wants the Church to throw the gift of the evangelist back in the Lord’s face, either by relegating it to insignificance, or by promoting distaste for it. We can all readily see examples of the disgracing of evangelists through the disgraceful antics of those charlatans drawing attention to themselves, and their wallets, as televangelists.

As an enthusiastic evangelist of about 40 years’ experience, I am well known for going on about (some would even say harping on about) the issue of neglect when it comes to the gift of the evangelist. I was brought up in a time that included regular visits of gifted evangelists to our small church. I have been involved in Billy Graham, Luis Palau and other ‘crusades.’ Over the years I have seen believers from different denominations coming together, working together, in deliberate initiatives to win the lost.

Yet we see the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, and across the Western world, in decline.

So, I have been asking unpopular questions.

- Why is the Church starving its evangelists out of existence?
- Why are churches not engaging evangelists? Why is this left to para-church organisations?
- Why are there so few, if any, evangelistic campaigns that have brought so much good fruit to the Church in the past?
- And a host of questions from the same theme: why have the theological seminaries and Bible colleges in recent decades almost universally neglected the purposeful training of evangelists, or even training in evangelism? Where are the courses on evangelism? Where is their teaching on apologetics, those explanations that complement evangelism? As soon as a person starts sharing their faith, they become an apologist. That's because people ask questions, and apologetics is about knowing how to answer them.
- Why do we have the bizarre situation of people entering the ministry of church leadership as pastors who have never gone on a mission, or never led a person to Christ?

Credibility issues

Evangelists can be awkward to have around; they are never satisfied with the amount of outreach being done! Sometimes evangelists might be more eloquent than the 'pastor,' the traditional focus of church leadership, and thus a perceived threat to an insecure leader. People can be quietly terrified they will be asked to come door knocking or, even more dreaded, expected to share their faith out in public before strangers and non-believers.

Let's face it: some evangelists are simply downright odd. Some are hypocritical. Some vent raw emotions of judgement and condemnation onto an unsuspecting crowd. Some are intense, even insensitive, not reading social situations well. Some fancy themselves as great preachers, or perhaps the next Billy Graham, but exhibit various levels of being unhinged. A bad evangelist can scatter those who need to hear about Jesus. We'll probably never be rid of those who are an embarrassment to us all, but many of these issues can be solved by proper training. The enthusiasm of an evangelist at heart usually simply needs to be pointed in the right direction to share the right message using the right techniques.

God gave the gift of the evangelist to his Church for the best of reasons. If we are to reclaim it, restore it, encourage those among us with it, we must surely ask for leaders to repent, and deliberately work to restore this gift to the Church. It is heartening to see that at least one theological training facility in Aotearoa New Zealand has realized the

lack and is seeking to contribute to the restoration of this critical gift.¹²⁴ All power to them. There are not enough mature and sensible evangelists to go round, not even one for every local church, so in the meantime, they must be shared!

Evangelists can also take the initiative, by seeking to serve across groups of churches. At the least, local churches should embrace the ministries of so-called para-church evangelist organisations, to ensure evangelism still takes place. Para-church organisations should, themselves, realise that their legitimacy is directly linked to their commitment to serve local churches in evangelism.

Restoring the critical ministry of the evangelist relies on those with the gift, and those congregations desperately needing it, to recognise each other.

The lost are lost. Or are they?

Recently I was in conversation with a senior pastor of a well-known evangelical church about outreach invitation services. He admitted that most of the congregation would not invite anybody. They generally believe the Gospel message, but they do not believe their neighbours need to hear it! Another pastor pointed out that the people in their denomination (I would argue, those in a lot of other denominations) are ‘practical universalists.’ That means that they have a fluffy understanding of God in that He is considered too loving to bar anyone from heaven, and too loving to send anyone to hell. They want the love of God, but not His justice.

I’m the first to admit that hell is a difficult subject. It is often poorly understood, and is often preached inappropriately, but it was a key factor in evangelism and the growth of the Church. One of my best friends lives in oppressive heat, in a bamboo hut, half an hour by motorbike from a usable road, beyond a river that nearly drowned him, with poisonous snakes and infected mosquitoes. He is not far from communists who deny his message and would see it as a threat. My friend is there to translate the Word of God into the local language, to preach the Gospel, and to encourage people in Christ. He is also a very good theologian. He once said to me, ‘I do all of this because I believe in hell.’

We have neglected the ministry of evangelism by replacing it with a fuzzy concept we term ‘the mission of God,’ which of course means lots of good activities that can make us feel good, but which don’t often win the lost. Christian service is not evangelism. Speaking the Gospel is.

¹²⁴ I speak here of Laidlaw College, which recently appointed a Director of Evangelistic Leadership.

The reason we don't often encourage or involve evangelists is because we don't think we need them. Apparently, then, Jesus was mistaken! Our Christ-rejecting, idol-worshipping neighbours aren't really heading for hell. They don't need a Saviour. But they might want a life-improver. They may want to add God to the other things they seek fulfilment in to help make their life work. But that's a different gospel. A false one.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Have you noticed a decline in evangelism over the years you have been a Christian? If so, why do you think that is the case? If not, what forms of evangelism do you see taking place today?
2. Do you consider yourself an evangelist? If not, what responsibility do you consider you have for sharing the good news of Jesus?
3. Do you recognise evangelists within your own church context? How might they be encouraged to exercise their gift? If there is no one, who would you call on to give a reliable communication of the Gospel?

Author Profile:

Lew Meyer is an evangelist, apologist, and church leader. His ministry includes three years as a youth pastor, three years as a Scripture Union worker in schools and camps, and about 35 years with OAC Ministries (formerly Open Air Campaigners) across its various outreaches, including training Community Chaplains.

CHAPTER NINE

9. Back to the future with Joseph Kemp: what our past can teach us about church renewal today

John Tucker

“...what challenges me is the depth of Kemp’s conviction that prayer and power are inseparably connected. Do you believe that?”

I have recently been reviewing statistics on the New Zealand church. They make for grim reading. Since 2010, church attendance has declined by a third. In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of people who consider themselves to have ‘no religion.’ A significant percentage of New Zealanders (30%) now report themselves to be ‘cool’ or ‘hostile’ towards Christianity, sometimes with good reason. The Kiwi church needs renewal. Our churches desperately need the wind of God’s Spirit to blow through them with his renewing power.

In 2026 Carey Baptist College will be celebrating 100 years of training pastoral leaders for churches in New Zealand. One of the pivotal figures in the formation of the College was Joseph Kemp. He pastored the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle from 1920 until his death in 1933. During those years, while other churches looked dead in the water, the Baptist Tabernacle took off. Hundreds were baptised. Dozens were sent overseas on missionary service. Many, many lives were transformed. Increasingly, leaders across the country looked to Kemp for inspiration. And when they asked him for leadership advice, do you know what he said? We need revival. We need renewal. We need the wind of God’s Spirit to blow through our churches.

Now, Kemp was the first to admit that the Spirit is sovereign. You cannot work up a revival. You cannot force renewal. The ‘wind blows where it wishes.’¹²⁵ However, while we might not be able to control the wind, Kemp believed that we can take steps to get in the way of the wind. Like Peter Burling and his crew trimming the sails on Team New Zealand, there are certain things we can do to catch the wind of the Spirit when it

¹²⁵ John 3:8.

does blow. Kemp called these things the ‘necessary conditions’ of revival.¹²⁶ He said we are more likely to experience the Spirit’s power and blessing in our churches if we fulfil these conditions. So, what are they?

1. Recognition of the need

First, Kemp said there must be, in his words, ‘an honest recognition of the need.’¹²⁷ In his speaking and writing Kemp constantly tried to impress upon New Zealand Christians just how desperately our churches needed renewal. He declared,

on the one hand the professing Church is rapidly losing her hold upon the world, and on the other hand the world is sinking deeper and deeper into heart-breaking indifference. The Church makes loud pretensions and accomplishes so little; [all] the while, the world looks on and laughs.... Church of God, recognise [your] need and confess it before Him.¹²⁸

If we want to experience the Spirit’s power, Kemp said, we first have to admit our weakness. This is the witness of Scripture. What did Jesus say to Paul? ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’¹²⁹ That is why Paul goes on to say, ‘I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.... For when I am weak, then I am strong.’¹³⁰

A few years ago, I had several conversations with a PhD student at Carey. He was a veteran Pentecostal pastor, and his tentative thesis was entitled, ‘From Holy Ghost to Wholly Growth.’ He wanted to trace the way his Pentecostal denomination had, in his view, moved from a place of depending deeply on the Spirit to relying increasingly on business strategies and the world’s wisdom.

What are you relying on? Do you ever lie awake at night thinking about the mission challenges facing your church? Do you sometimes find yourself looking up at a dark ceiling and thinking, ‘It seems hopeless?’ Good. As the great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, said:

Only the prisoner shall be free;
Only the poor shall be rich;
Only the weak shall be strong;

¹²⁶ Joseph W. Kemp, “Revival and its Necessary Conditions,” *Reaper* (January 1924), 309.

¹²⁷ Joseph W. Kemp, “In Expectation of the Coming Revival,” *New Zealand Baptist* (October 1922), 189.

¹²⁸ Kemp, “In Expectation of the Coming Revival,” 189.

¹²⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:9

¹³⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:10.

Only the humble exalted;
 Only the empty filled.¹³¹

If we are to experience the Spirit's blessing, there must first be an honest recognition of our need.

2. Return to the place of prayer

This brings us to the second condition. According to Kemp, there must also be a return to the place of prayer. 'All history,' he said, 'teaches us that revivals come by the way of intercession.'¹³²

That was his experience as a young pastor at Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh. There he called his small struggling congregation to pray until 'the fire falls.' It did. During two remarkable years of revival, hundreds of people were saved, hundreds of lives were transformed, and an empty chapel became the largest Baptist church in Scotland.

From that point on Kemp lived with the conviction that 'prayer and power are inseparably connected.'¹³³ At the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle he scheduled prayer meetings for every night of the week, and every lunchtime during the week. He introduced special day-long prayer meetings and all-night prayer vigils. In a letter to his denomination, he suggested that every pastoral leader should consider giving six hours each day to prayer.

I am not suggesting that we should all do that. But what challenges me is the depth of Kemp's conviction that prayer and power are inseparably connected. Do you believe that? Prayer is not magic, and the Spirit is sovereign, but maybe James was right when he said, 'You do not have because you do not ask God.'¹³⁴ Our good Father in heaven wants to give us his Spirit's blessing, but maybe one of the reasons we do not experience it in our churches and communities is because we simply do not seek it.

Henri Nouwen used to say that we ought to schedule in our time with God with the same realism that we schedule our time with people. Do you do that? Does your church do that? I spend a lot of time as an itinerant preacher visiting different churches. I am amazed at how often I will sit through a service and there is not one single prayer offered by way of intercession for the Church community or the world around us. Return to the place of prayer, Kemp would say.

¹³¹ Quoted in Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the 6th edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, (London: OUP, 1968), 42.

¹³² Kemp, "In Expectation of the Coming Revival," 189.

¹³³ Joseph W. Kemp, "A Presidential Message," *New Zealand Baptist* (February 1930), 48.

¹³⁴ James 4:2.

3. Readiness to put away every evil

But there's a third condition. If our sails are to be trimmed to catch the wind of the Spirit, it will also mean, in Kemp's words, 'a readiness to put away every evil thing.'¹³⁵ It is useless to pray if we do not also renounce anything that we know is grieving or quenching the Spirit.¹³⁶

When he first arrived at the Baptist Tabernacle, and discovered to his horror that the youth group had its own football club which promoted 'immorality' by holding the occasional dance, Kemp immediately announced the club's closure.¹³⁷ During his first major evangelistic campaign at the Tabernacle, Kemp delivered a series of pungent public lectures warning his people about (and these are his titles): 'The Delirium of the Dance,' 'The Menace of the Movies,' 'The Woes of the Wine Cup,' and 'The Curse of the Card Table.'

As you can imagine, this approach to holiness spawned a very insular and legalistic form of Christianity that was arguably counterproductive in terms of ministry and mission. But Kemp's call for holiness is an important one. Why is the Church in New Zealand struggling? One of the reasons is we've absorbed the values of our culture. We worship the idol of individualism.

But the early church did not. Luke says the believers were 'devoted to the fellowship'.¹³⁸ They were committed to one another. Tertullian, one of the early church leaders in North Africa, said,

It is our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Look,' they say, 'How they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another.'¹³⁹

It was the early Christians' self-sacrificial love for one another, their costly commitment to one another, that drew people to faith in Jesus. Mission is not firstly about going or doing; it is about being – being a counter-cultural community that shows the world what God is like.

¹³⁵ Kemp, "In Expectation of the Coming Revival," 189.

¹³⁶ Ephesians 4:17-24.

¹³⁷ John Tucker, "Joseph Kemp, Revivalism and the New Zealand Baptist Movement," in *Baptists and Revival*, ed. William L Pitts, Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2018), 361.

¹³⁸ Acts 2:42.

¹³⁹ Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 39.

4. Restoration of the great biblical words

But, Kemp says, if we're to experience the Spirit's blessing in our leadership, there must also be – and this was his final condition – 'a restoration of the great biblical words.'¹⁴⁰

Writing in the 1920s, Kemp lamented that gospel words like 'sin, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, Christ's intercession on high'¹⁴¹ were all disappearing from our preaching and teaching. They were disappearing, Kemp said, because his generation was losing confidence in the Bible. They were losing confidence in the word of God. And in Kemp's mind that accounted for much of the weakness in the Church's life and witness. Is it any different today? Our churches long for the Spirit to move in power, but we often forget that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.¹⁴²

How did God create the world? 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath [*ruach*] of his mouth.'¹⁴³ And how does God redeem the world? 'For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit [*ruach*] will gather them together.'¹⁴⁴ The Hebrew word *ruach* means 'breath,' 'wind' or 'spirit.' As John Woodhouse explains, 'In biblical thought, the Spirit of God is as closely connected to the Word of God as breath is connected to speech.'¹⁴⁵ They are inseparable. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God.

I wonder if some of us have forgotten that. I was at a preaching seminar a few years back. Between sessions, one of the pastors attending the event took me aside and said to me,

I never spend more than four or five hours preparing my weekly sermon. As a leader, there are so many other calls on my time, I just don't think it's possible or responsible to spend more than five hours preparing a sermon.

Really? Yes, for pastoral leaders there are programmes to run, staff to supervise, board meetings to attend, strategic plans to develop. These things are all good and important, but they are demonic if they distract pastors from their calling to open the Scriptures and speak God's word.

¹⁴⁰ Kemp, "In Expectation of the Coming Revival," 189.

¹⁴¹ Kemp, "In Expectation of the Coming Revival," 189.

¹⁴² Ephesians 6:17.

¹⁴³ Psalm 33:6.

¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 34:16.

¹⁴⁵ John Woodhouse, "The Preacher and the Living Word: Preaching and the Holy Spirit," in *When God's Voice is Heard: The Power of Preaching*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 55.

5. Renewed commitment to justice

According to Joseph Kemp, these are the necessary conditions of renewal: there must be a recognition of our need, a return to the place of prayer, a readiness to put away every evil thing and a restoration of the great biblical words in our preaching. What is missing from this list? I would add that if we are going to trim our sails to the wind of the Spirit, it will also mean a renewed commitment to justice.

When Jesus announced the beginning of his public ministry, what words did he use?

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.¹⁴⁶

Yes, Jesus came to preach forgiveness. But he also came to bring justice. And as the Father sent him, so he sends us. If we are to keep in step with the Spirit of Jesus, it will mean standing with those who are oppressed. Who are the poor in your community? Who are the prisoners? Who are the blind? Stand with them and you are aligning yourself with the Spirit of Jesus.

G. K. Chesterton once said, 'Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave.'¹⁴⁷ The statistics may not look good, but we have enormous grounds for hope. God can raise the dead to life. He knows his way out of the grave. And if we are to follow him on that way, if our sails are to be trimmed to catch the wind of the Spirit, it will mean a recognition of our need, a return to the place of prayer, a readiness to put away every evil thing, a restoration of the great biblical words in our preaching, and a renewed commitment to social justice.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Māori have a saying, *Ka mua, ka muri* (we walk backwards into the future). If we are to approach the future with wisdom, we must not forget the past. Do you agree? Why?
2. The history of Christianity is the record of God renewing his Church time and time again. Can you think of any significant Christian renewal movements in history? From a human perspective, what were the key elements? How did the Spirit of Jesus breathe new life into a struggling church?

¹⁴⁶ Luke 4:18-19.

¹⁴⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), ch. 6.

3. Look through the five headings in this chapter on the ‘necessary conditions’ of revival. When you think about the Church of Aotearoa, and your church in particular, which of these conditions is most needed today? Why?

Pray:

- Spend some time quietly waiting on the Lord. What could you do to help fulfil this condition in your church?
- *Lord Jesus, give us, your people in Aotearoa, the grace to humbly acknowledge our need for God, to prayerfully seek after the power of God, to carefully cultivate the holiness of God, to diligently proclaim the word of God, and to consistently embody the justice of God. We ask this so that the wind of your Spirit may again breathe life and power in and through your church.*

Author Profile:

Dr **John Tucker** is Principal of Carey Baptist College, Auckland, where he teaches Christian history, pastoral leadership, and biblical preaching. His passion is to train Christian leaders who, by the Spirit’s power, can equip God’s people for the work of ministry, and engage in God’s mission of renewing this world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TEN

10. Renewing and reviving the Church in Aotearoa

Tak Bhana

“...when the Church needs reviving, it’s in a bad condition. The Church needs to be brought back to life only when it has forgotten its priority; the Church needs to be brought back to life when seeing people saved is no longer the driving force.”

Throughout 40 years of full-time church leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic stands out for me as an extremely tough time for the Church. It’s the same for many leaders. Some churches were seriously knocked around. Apparently, one large denomination experienced a 25-30% drop in attendance. That’s hard, but I’m a great believer in Paul’s appraisal: ‘And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.’¹⁴⁸

One thing the pandemic highlighted to me was the degree of lukewarmness in the Church, and this has driven me to prayer. My personal prayer life has greatly increased, and at *Church Unlimited* we have established several revival prayer meetings. As I’ve sought God, He has given me a growing hunger and determination to see the Church revived, and on fire!

Prior to the pandemic I never felt sure that I would see the Church revived in my lifetime, but now I feel certain. I believe revival is the greatest need in the Western Church today. I’m praying for nothing less than New Testament Christianity, the kind we read about in the book of Acts, with Christians filled with zeal, powerful miracles, healings, thousands getting saved, churches growing rapidly based on new believers, and communities being transformed.

Revival starts with the Church, then it spreads to unbelievers. I sense a stirring in my spirit, and I’m excited about what God is going to do. A revival would also be evidenced by people turning up to church services early; packed out church and prayer meetings;

¹⁴⁸ Romans 8:28.

passionate worship; greatly increased serving and giving; miracles; and transformed lives. Best of all would be the main thing: great growth, based on new believers.

So, what does a revived Church look like today? Let's focus on some stand out features of the early Church, as seen in Acts chapter 2. The emphasis was on Jesus;¹⁴⁹ repentance;¹⁵⁰ a passion for prayer, and a strong hunger for the Word of God;¹⁵¹ a burden and passion for the lost;¹⁵² a massive number of converts;¹⁵³ and the manifest presence of God, as seen through encounters with God.¹⁵⁴

Repentance

In 2 Chronicles we read this: 'if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.'¹⁵⁵ This important verse urges us to pray. Note also that humbling ourselves and turning from our wicked ways, that is, repenting of sin, are part of the process of praying for God to heal our land. As God begins to revive His Church, that is, to revive us, we must respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction and turn from our wicked ways.

We also read in Acts 3:19-20, 'Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...' We must become aware of our sin, confess it, and deal with it. A fresh call to repentance comes with revival. On one hand, repentance can be hard because it involves a permanent change in our behaviour; on the other hand, it's one of God's greatest gifts. Repentance brings more of Him in our lives, which is our ultimate blessing. Only this relationship can satisfy and fulfil our deepest desires. Repentance also leads us into holiness and helps us to walk in obedience to God.

So, how do we repent, and change, and walk in obedience to God? By His grace and strength.

If you turn at my reproof,
 behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
 I will make my words known to you.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Acts 2:36.

¹⁵⁰ Acts 2:37-38.

¹⁵¹ Acts 2:42.

¹⁵² Acts 2:40.

¹⁵³ Acts 2:41, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Acts 2:40, 43.

¹⁵⁵ 2 Chronicles 7:14.

¹⁵⁶ Proverbs 1:23.

Prayer

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, which empowered the early apostles and Christians, happened as the first disciples prayed together in the Upper Room. Prayer, especially united prayer, is the vital key for revival.

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, said ‘there has never been a renewal of the Church without the renewal of prayer.’¹⁵⁷ Without prayer there will be no renewal of the Church, and without a renewal of the Church there is very little hope for the world. Revival literally means ‘the act of bringing back to life.’¹⁵⁸ Clearly, if someone, or something, needs to be brought back to life there is something serious going on! Likewise, when the Church needs reviving, it’s in a bad condition. The Church needs to be brought back to life only when it has forgotten its priority; the Church needs to be brought back to life when seeing people saved is no longer the driving force.

Salvation is vital. When a well-known person dies there’s often an obituary, or article, in the paper, and sometimes a tribute on television. When I see these my first thought is always, ‘Where are they now?’ My biggest concern is, ‘Where they will spend eternity? Heaven, or hell?’ Hell is a harsh reality. Our earthly life can feel so long at times, but in biblical terms it’s like a breath compared to eternity, which goes on forever! Hell is seriously unthinkable, but when we have some understanding of what it’s like we will be much more motivated to do all we can to see people saved.

Seeing people saved is the main thing. It’s the reason why our loving heavenly Father sent his one and only son, Jesus, to come and to die for us.¹⁵⁹ Yes, the holy Son of God, also known as ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’,¹⁶⁰ who laid down his sinless life to pay the horrendously costly ransom for our souls. He went all the way and died on the cross; he was tortured to death over many hours. He died by crucifixion, a word directly related to the English word ‘excruciating.’¹⁶¹ It was such a terrible form of execution the Romans would never let one of their own citizens die in that way.

¹⁵⁷ Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. “No Renewal of the Church without Renewal of Prayer.” *Anglican Communion News Service*, July 1, 2014. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/07/%E2%80%9Cno-renewal-of-the-church-without-renewal-of-prayer,%E2%80%9D-abp-of-canterbury.aspx>.

¹⁵⁸ “Revival,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/revival>

¹⁵⁹ John 3:16.

¹⁶⁰ John 1:29.

¹⁶¹ “Excruciate,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/excruciate>.

The reality of hell, which Jesus came and to save us from, will help us to keep the main thing the main thing. A revival ‘presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and a revival consists in the return of the church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners.’¹⁶²

You may have read about or heard of Charles Finney, known as ‘the Father of Old Revivalism.’¹⁶³ He was an American Presbyterian minister, who lived from 1792 to 1875. Finney was of the view that, rather than waiting for the Spirit to act, ‘men and women of faith had to take the initiative and act.’¹⁶⁴ He was quoted as saying, ‘A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is, when they pray as if their hearts were set upon a revival.’¹⁶⁵ So, one of the greatest revivalists of the 19th century stressed prayer as an integral element in revival.

Back in 1949, two sisters on the island of Hebrides took it upon themselves to pray for revival.¹⁶⁶ One, aged 84, was blind, and the other one, crippled with arthritis, was 82. Both were deeply troubled by the state of their church, which at that time did not have a single young person in attendance. So, they began to pray for a move of God, for revival! One of them had a vision where she saw the church full young people. These women spent hours praying in their little cottage, sometimes for more than five hours from ten at night to early in the morning. After a while, some ministers would join them.

During one of their prayer sessions, God revealed to the women that a preacher called Duncan Campbell was coming to visit them, and that he would be used to bring the revival. Eventually Duncan came for his visit; though scheduled for two weeks, it was to last for about two years! In Duncan’s first meeting nothing much happened, but later that night about 30 people gathered at a cottage to pray.

Around three in the morning God turned up, ‘and about a dozen were laid prostrate upon the floor.’¹⁶⁷ As people left the meeting, they found three men lying beside the

¹⁶² Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 14.

¹⁶³ Hankins, Barry, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 137.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Charles Finney.’ *God in America*. PBS. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/godinamerica/people/charles-finney.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Finney, Charles G., ‘Lecture II: When a Revival is to be Expected,’ In *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, Bible Hub. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://biblehub.com/library/finney/lectures_on_revivals_of_religion/lecture_ii_when_a_revival.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Duncan Campbell, ‘Lewis Revival,’ *Ephrata Ministries*. Accessed July 6, 2024, <http://www.ephrataministries.org/remnant-2003-09-duncan-campbell-on-the-Lewis-revival.a5w?A5WSessionId=a6652761f3b44b0a8e8b3980079aea71>.

¹⁶⁷ ‘When God Came Down: The Hebrides Revival,’ *Christian Today Australia*. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.christiantoday.com.au/news/when-god-came-down-the-hebrides-revival.html>.

road, deeply convicted, crying out for God to have mercy on them. Then one hundred young people at a dance were suddenly overcome with the conviction of sin, and they made way to church.¹⁶⁸ They were joined by many others, who got out of bed and ran to the church. In the early hours, the church was packed with about 800 people. Many were weeping.

The Holy Spirit moved, the church was revived, and hundreds were saved. About three quarters of them were saved before they even got to the church or heard a sermon. Revival had come. God turned up and shook the little island of Hebrides. The revival lasted for two years, and apparently over 90% of the population was saved. The key: two old ladies, praying!

The Church owes everything to revivals, and revivals owe everything to prayer. Prayer really is the essential key for revival.

Revival as God's power

Acts 2:17 reads, quoting from Joel:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams...

In our Revival Prayer Meeting we regularly pray for faith, and power. Revival doesn't depend on programmes, polish, or policy! No! It depends on God's power, His passion for souls, and His manifest presence. We so need God's power. I feel so deeply for the many who come my church with desperate needs, sickness, severe trials, addictions, broken relationships, and mental health issues. They need miracles! One of my favourite verses in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 4:20: 'For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.'

Revival is in the DNA of Aotearoa New Zealand. Back in 1814, Samuel Marsden preached the first known sermon in this country. In the 1830s, revival broke out among Māori. By the 1850s it is estimated that about half of all Māori were attending weekly church services.¹⁶⁹ That was a revival of a proportion rarely, if ever, seen anywhere in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ "All Together," *Reconciling Māori and Pākehā in the Church*. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://alltogether.co.nz/reconcilingmaoripakehachurch/>.

world. This revival in Aotearoa New Zealand far exceeded even the Welsh revival for impact.

In 1881 a preacher named James Dickie powerfully shared the gospel in South Island's Gore.¹⁷⁰ Within three months 40 people were saved. The power of God fell on people at work, and they were convicted of sin. So many were saved that pubs and dance halls were shut down. It is said the revival lasted for 20 years. In the 1920s Gypsy Smith, a British evangelist,¹⁷¹ came to Aotearoa New Zealand. His preaching saw thousands saved. When asked the secret to getting a revival he said,

Go home. Lock yourself in your room. Kneel down in the middle of the floor, and with a piece of chalk draw a circle around yourself. There, on your knees, pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival within that chalk circle.¹⁷²

Let us all pray that prayer: *God, start revival. Start with me.*

We have a great history to look back on and a great future to look forward to. The history of the Church is a history of revivals. The Church owes everything to revivals, and revivals owe everything to prayer.

Our nation is facing great needs today. But over and above our overwhelming issues, I believe our greatest need is for revival. Clearly that must start with the Church, and it must be a work of God; it's not something we can produce. But we have a vital part to play. We must pray! Prayer has always preceded revival, as we see with the early Church in Acts 2.

Let's start now. The first step may well be to set up a prayer meeting in your home, or in your church. Seek God for revival, for ourselves, our community, our nation and beyond. Revival is not just churches full of people, it's people full of God. Let's all be one of these people!

¹⁷⁰ David Jull, "The Knapdale Revival (1881): Social Context and Religious Conviction in 19th Century New Zealand," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 2 (2023): 25-40. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/article/download/62/59?inline=1>.

¹⁷¹ "Gypsy Smith," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, last modified May 6, 2024. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gypsy_Smith.

¹⁷² Mark Batterson, *Draw the Circle: A 40-Day Prayer Challenge Study Guide* (ChristianBook, 2018), 10. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://g.christianbook.com/ns/pdf/201802/draw-the-circle-study-guide-094661_session1.pdf.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What hinders revival today, in Aotearoa New Zealand?
2. What might your small group or church do, now, to begin preparing for and encouraging revival? What part might you play?
3. Revival starts with each of us. What are the barriers in your life keeping you from revival? Consider repentance, prayer, and a burden for the lost in your response.

Author Profile:

Tak Bhana is Senior Pastor of Church Unlimited, a multicultural and multigenerational church with seven campuses across Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and Australia. Tak first encountered Jesus as a law and accountancy student at The University of Auckland. His life was radically changed when he made the decision to make Jesus Christ his Saviour.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

11. Renewing and re-gearing our churches for current and future contexts

Alan Vink

“One of my worries is that the Church in our part of the world has become so institutionalised that we can’t change our forms and structures as and when needed, or else we change them too late after we have lost much of the good that God is doing.”

Few would disagree that the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is in desperate need of a move of the Holy Spirit. Whether we call it a renewal, a refreshing, an awakening or even a revival matters little; regardless of the word we choose to use there is an acknowledgement that we need God to do something both sovereign and supernatural that goes beyond business as usual.

Renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not innovation, re-structuring, modernisation, or improvement. Each of these has a role to play in church development and are important, but these elements come *after* God has done His thing. In the context of this chapter, each of innovation, re-structuring, modernisation, and improvement, fall into the *re-gearing* of the Church and its ministries.

Tim Keller writes of the influence of revivals as agents of change:

Looking back in history, we see how revivals provided the spiritual momentum on which movements were built. One of the most well-documented was the Wesleyan revival, which led to the establishment of a major new world denomination—Methodism—which itself was originally built on the at-home small group system of the earliest awakening. That revival also led to a major awakening in the Church of England, the evangelical Anglicans. And out of those evangelical awakenings in Britain in the mid-18th century came many reforms in society, such as the passing of laws

against child labor [sic] by Lord Shaftesbury and the abolitionist movement led by William Wilberforce.¹⁷³

Closer to home was the Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM) of the 1960's and 1970's, which also influenced the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. This move of God serves as an excellent example of how God works to renew His Church. The CRM gave traditionally non-Pentecostal churches a taste of what became known as the charismatic experience, an awareness of the immediacy of God. It encompassed the baptism in the Spirit, the exercise of charismatic gifts particularly speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. The CRM brought with it new music, a participatory style of worship and a renewed emphasis on fellowship with the emergence of mid-week home group meetings. I have vivid and wonderful memories of this time when, as a teenager and on into young adult life, I witnessed the impact of this move of God on hundreds of churches and thousands upon thousands of Christians. It was incredibly powerful.

Elijah and the prophets of Baal: a contest

An important question when considering renewal movements is: is a renewal all God's doing, or is there a role for Christians? Many say there is nothing we can do, or even should do, to help bring about a renewal. Others believe there is much we can do, which will usually involve ministry in a prescribed way. If we pray more, evangelise more, hunger more, repent more, deny ourselves more, then revival will come.

The story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel in 1 Kings 18 may be helpful at this point. The 450 prophets of Baal proved to be impotent after their dramatic display seeking to bring down fire from the heavens. Elijah, on the other hand, simply prepared an altar. As part of his seeking fire, he had buckets of water tipped over the altar. Then, he prayed. And God brought the fire. Christians can and perhaps should build an altar, but only God can bring the fire. Only God can bring about a supernatural move of His Spirit.

We can be confident about this: at the very heart of Jesus' saving work, he makes *all* things new. God is in the renewing business; it is, so to speak, in His DNA. The New Testament is characterised by a new covenant,¹⁷⁴ a new command,¹⁷⁵ a new creation,¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Tim Keller, "The Decline and Renewal of the American Church: Part 3 – The Path to Renewal," *Life in the Gospel Quarterly*, accessed July 6, 2024,

<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/american-church-the-path-to-renewal/>.

¹⁷⁴ Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8, 13; 9:15.

¹⁷⁵ John 13:34; 1 John 2:7-8.

¹⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.

the new existence of life in the Spirit,¹⁷⁷ the new self,¹⁷⁸ a new heaven and new earth,¹⁷⁹ a new name,¹⁸⁰ the new Jerusalem,¹⁸¹ and a new song.¹⁸²

Let's never forget that Jesus started the greatest renewal movement in the history of the world, with no money, no organisation, and no strategic plan. Instead, he left behind a group of 'on fire' friends who 'caught the fire' and went about changing the world. It will take a community of friends once again to ask God to do the same in our generation.

Re-gearing the Church

Once we have experienced the renewing work of the Spirit, we will invariably be called upon to re-gear how we 'do' church. Business as usual is unlikely to cut it. We will need to look at our structures and the ways and means, systems and processes that we employ that may be found unsuitable, if not inappropriate. We will need to address those containers we are using to ensure that we do not lose the new wine (that is, life in the Spirit) that God is distributing through the local church.

I am reminded of this wonderful interaction Jesus had with John the Baptist's disciples:

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."¹⁸³

I was introduced to this most helpful idea by Dr Howard Snyder in the early 1980s in his widely acclaimed book, *The Problem of Wineskins - Church Structure in a Technological Age*.¹⁸⁴ The question at the heart of Snyder's book is, what kinds of church structures are most compatible with the Gospel in our modern, techno-urban society?

¹⁷⁷ Romans 6:4, 7:6.

¹⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:15, 4:24.

¹⁷⁹ 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1.

¹⁸⁰ Revelation 2:17, 3:12.

¹⁸¹ Revelation 3:12, 21:2.

¹⁸² Revelation 5:9, 14:3.

¹⁸³ Matthew 9:14-17.

¹⁸⁴ Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wine Skins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975).

In the passage from Matthew cited above, John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus quite confused. They ask Him, why don't your disciples fast like we and the Pharisees are required to do? In other words, we are doing things like we have always done as the law instructs. How come your disciples are flaunting the rules? What they fail to see is that Jesus is introducing a whole new era, a new movement and a new covenant and this new era needs a new container to contain this new wine.

So, Jesus uses a most interesting metaphor. A new wineskin.

A new wineskin was elastic, flexible and adaptable. Jesus is making a very important point: new wine, which represents the fullness of life in Christ, needs to be contained in structures that are both flexible and relevant to the times being lived in. The Gospel is unchanging, but the structures we adopt can, and must, change according to work the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst. One of my worries is that the Church in our part of the world has become so institutionalised that we can't change our forms and structures as and when needed, or else we change them too late after we have lost much of the good that God is doing.

What follows are six short vignettes from six different leaders around New Zealand, that point to a few ideas that may be helpful. These contributions speak about unity across different people; re-gearing toward a missional philosophy of ministry; the importance emotionally healthy leadership; a place for whānau; genuine community and a freshness of purpose; and a reallocation of resources. Each are important lessons for re-gearing.

Springs Community Church was birthed out of COVID-19 lockdowns and a desire to be a new church for those new to church. We are joyful, chaotic, and fragile. It's awesome.

Pre-launch we spent a lot of time and prayer in Census data, which showed us we live in the second highest income district in the nation, with one of the lowest divorce rates, and one of the highest levels of educational achievement. So, our strategy is about considering how the Gospel challenges the self-secure.

God has promised to build His Church and He is, for His glory in our time and place!

Praise God for his work in and through us.

Tim Hodge, Leader at Springs Community Church.

The Spirit is why we can experience the sociological impossibility of gathering in our difference. Differences can stem from our particularities, but also in our ideologies. We are not in the same family because we agree on everything but because we have the same firstborn brother, Jesus. If we believe that Jesus is Lord, then we are by nature children of grace, because of the Son. We can bear witness to the world especially in disagreement.

A metric of how well we are pressing into this witness is: How do we engage questions and contrary voices (especially to the dominant culture/view/positionality) in our congregations?

Christa McKirland, Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Carey College.

A huge challenge and opportunity for the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand at the moment is the trend of decline, ageing, and prevalence of not fit-for-purpose buildings in many of our congregations. At the same time, the capital resource tied up in the land and buildings of these congregations is immense.

The missional challenge and opportunity involve unlocking this resource for mission.

Doug Gay from Glasgow University talks about five strategic ways to use the resource:

1. *Close unsustainable churches.*
2. *Care for (some) declining churches which will not grow again, as they decline.*
3. *Help (some) declining churches to grow again.*
4. *Help (the very few) growing churches to keep growing.*
5. *Plant new churches, re-seed or re-start some closed churches.*

Is this also a good model for us as we go forward into the future?¹⁸⁵

Hamish Galloway, Immediate Past Moderator, The Presbyterian Church Aotearoa.

¹⁸⁵ Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk: The Future of the Church of Scotland* (London: SCM Press, 2017).

If we are to spark and sustain life-giving renewal in our churches in pressured times, we need leaders who are deeply formed. Yet, leadership development has too often neglected the depths of discipleship. Emotional health is one of the key aspects of Te Whare Tapa Whā,¹⁸⁶ which resonates with biblical conceptions of holistic health and demonstrates how the health of the whole is affected by health in one area. Is our house in good shape?

Across the churches we are seeing renewed attention to discipleship and emotional health that draws on the richness of the contemplative tradition. This is to be wholeheartedly embraced.

Maja Whittaker, Lecturer in Practical Theology at Laidlaw College.

What I see as a massive opportunity for the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is to provide a place for families and their cultures to be recognised, embraced, and supported. This would start with leaders encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to be mixing and growing together as disciples as one faith community where, from a young age, our children are encouraged to find God for themselves and to have genuine encounters with God and actively serve in the faith community.

Where, as parents and grandparents, we would be inspired to have a faith that those around us especially our children and those younger in the faith could see and imitate.

As churches we should be equipping our families, so they create spiritual, Christ-centred homes, which become the main place of spiritual formation and do not solely rely on children's church or main church on a Sunday.

Sam Tolley, Campus Pastor at Church Unlimited, Auckland.

¹⁸⁶ Kerry Pollock, "Māori health - Te Whare Tapa Whā model," *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, last modified July 7, 2019. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/diagram/31387/maori-health-te-whare-tapa-wha-model>.

*Jesus is restoring His Church to His ways.
Churches focused on embodied practices are experiencing renewal, but this requires making the lived pursuit of Jesus (discipleship) the centre of the Church.*

We must integrate three key elements of discipleship:

1. *Inviting the tangible presence of God to move in our church and community through a culture of prayer and worship,*
2. *Practicing counter formation by learning how to walk daily in the way of Jesus, and not in the ways of the world, so that we may become more deeply transformed disciples.*
3. *Living on sacrificial mission in bringing justice, compassion and mercy, and sharing the Gospel as we join God in the renewal of all things.*

Clint Usher, Senior Leader, The Well Church, Christchurch.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Is there a difference between renewing and re-gearing? If so, what strikes you as the means to both?
2. What do you discern the Spirit saying to your own church fellowship in terms of renewal and re-gearing?
3. Do you agree that church structures should be 'elastic' and relative? What does that say about the church structure you are part of?

Author Profile:

Alan Vink transitioned from secondary school teaching into pastoral leadership, leading across three Baptist churches over twenty-five years. He is currently a leadership and management consultant and teaching pastor at his home church in Hamilton.

Also contributing to this chapter are **Tim Hodge** (Leader at Springs Community Church), **Christa McKirland** (Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Carey College), **Hamish Galloway** (Immediate Past Moderator of The Presbyterian Church Aotearoa), **Maja Whittaker** (Lecturer in Practical Theology at Laidlaw College), **Sam Tolley** (Campus Pastor at Church Unlimited, Auckland), and **Clint Usher** (Senior Leader, The Well Church, Christchurch), who were members of the 'Re-gearing and renewing our churches for our current and future contexts' panel at the 2023 NZ Christian Leaders' Congress.

CHAPTER TWELVE

12. Missional home churches: the micro church movement

James Anson

“A house church is centred on making disciples. ... let go of the ‘church growth metric model’ that characterises many churches today. Consider the three ‘B’s of Bodies on seats, Bucks in the offering, and Buildings of brick and mortar...”

Frustration!

It was May 2020, and we were in the first of many Auckland lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeing the Church seemingly hamstrung in our city, with empty auditoriums and pastors scrambling to try and find ways of connecting to our congregations, was raising my blood pressure! Like many of my contemporaries, I was dazed and numb wondering where all this was heading. It caused me to come to God in desperation, seeking what He might be doing in the midst of this global pandemic.

Whilst reading the gospels at this time my attention was drawn to the gospel of John. As Jesus expressed an orchestrated vent of righteous anger on the merchants who were doing business in front of the temple entrance, turning tables over and declaring ‘My father’s house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves,’¹⁸⁷ I was suddenly confronted with the four words appearing in John’s account: ‘Take these things away.’¹⁸⁸ As these words reverberated in my spirit, God began to speak to me regarding five things He was about to shift in the body of Christ. These five shifts became the focus of my online preaching and disseminated into the life of our congregation.

Let me divert for a moment to explain a bit about this congregation.

In 2013, after having planted a multi-site campus in downtown Auckland several years earlier, God called my wife and I out into a major step of faith to begin a new church

¹⁸⁷ Matthew 21:13.

¹⁸⁸ John 2:16.

on the borders of West Auckland. This was a large step of faith. We both resigned from our former church with no promise of income and a large mortgage to pay. With a handful of people, we met in a home in West Auckland to worship, pray and share God's Word. Very soon we had our first convert: a PhD student who was formerly an atheist, who had a direct encounter with Jesus through a dream showing him how to do his thesis! He was subsequently water baptised in the bath at our house church venue. Soon our house church was burgeoning with life, and we reached the stage where we were trying to fit 70 people within the walls. It was time to make a decision.

Having at this point led churches for 25 years that were rooted in the attractional church growth model,¹⁸⁹ I reverted to finding a school hall where we could worship, start up a band, and have children's programmes. Things continued to bubble along quietly, and we were seeing a regular stream of people finding faith in Christ. However, I was seeing something emerge that had often troubled me across the four other churches I had led over three decades: God's people were showing great limitations in expressing their faith in the real world they encountered each day. At work, school, or in their community there was little happening in the personal arena of sharing their faith. Only a few members were actually discipling new believers. This had often troubled me as a pastor, particularly because I seemed to be overloaded doing most of the general discipling in the church.

Five key Shifts

Which brings me back to my 'take these things away' moment, in May 2020. God began to speak very clearly into my spirit as I wrote down these Five Shifts the Holy Spirit emphasised to me that day:

James, I'm about to move and shift the Western church in these five areas:

1. *My people are too distant from me - I want to draw them closer into intimacy with me.*
2. *I'm going to call them from being attenders to weekend church services into becoming disciple makers.*
3. *I want to shift them from being bearers only to becoming doers also. Many falsely think they are doing, simply because they have heard something from my Scriptures.*
4. *It's time for my people to shift from being 'copycats' to become 'innovators.'*

¹⁸⁹ The Church Growth Movement is known for its overly pragmatic approach to using methods to attract outsiders to event-based Christianity using contemporary means. The movement was very popular in the 1990s, with an emphasis on churches being 'seeker sensitive.' It is properly characterised through authors such as Carl F. George, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), and C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987).

5. *Shift from the attractional model to a missional model. From a 'come' to a 'go into all the world and make disciples.'*

As you could imagine, this word was like lightning in my spirit! It was challenging, because deep down in my heart I knew I was living and leading on the wrong side of these things. I was living in the 'from' side, and I desperately need to shift to the 'to' side of what God was asking.

As we continued through the COVID-19 lockdown we began to do all our online meetings on Zoom and break down our online audience into small discussion groups. This was our first step to building a bridge to what was about to come.

In January 2022 we had emerged through the global pandemic. The limits to officially meeting together in larger groups were removed; so, we had a large decision to make. Do we go back to business as usual, or do we take the plunge and pivot our model of church?

Shift #2 (*moving from being an attender to becoming a disciple maker*) had made a deep impression in my heart. I knew that if we went back to a seven-day cycle of simply gathering in a larger congregational setting we were not going to be able to pivot into obedience of implementing the Five Shifts. However, closing our regular congregational gathering each Sunday would have both financial and numerical consequences.

As a leadership we knew this was a pivotal moment for us. Nevertheless, we made the decision that we were no longer going to meet every Sunday in favour of a gathering once a month. The rest of the month we would be planting micro churches in homes, cafes, and wherever we had an open door. This news wasn't welcomed by all with open arms! Over the course of the next few months, we lost a third of our congregation. As might be imagined, I was feeling extremely nervous across this time.

Towards micro churches and evangelism

We settled into a new routine of raising up house church leaders, to whom we gave the title of Shepherds. Each house church would have two Shepherds to lead and guide their little flocks into becoming missional micro groups, reaching into their communities. This approach brings sustainability over the long haul, because one Shepherd can give the other a break from leading. It was slow going at first.

At this point I had a disturbing realisation: 80% of our people did not know how to share the Gospel! Their hearts were willing, but I would often hear Christians feel like bumbling fools because they do not know how to adequately tell people about the One they loved and adored. At this point we found out about a ministry called Wayfinders,

led ably by Brian and Stephanie Bullen.¹⁹⁰ We arranged a weekend with them and began to train our people how to instigate spiritual conversations with non-believers. The workshop focused on how Christians might share their testimonies and move into sharing the full Gospel message. This was very confidence building.

We have continued to plant micro churches in the Auckland area (we have planted 13 as I write this early 2024), and we are growing in our ability to implement the Five Shifts. For example, consider Shift #1 on *becoming more intimate with our walk with God*: we started training people on how to have consistent and disciplined daily devotions. I wrote a disciple manual, which explained proven approaches. Soon people were developing a daily habit of drawing close to God. This gave people so much more confidence in their walk with Christ, along with greater boldness.

Another example: one of the micro churches began to seek God and felt to focus on their local primary school to demonstrate God's love in a practical way. Soon, they had arranged to bless the whole staff with a fully catered morning tea several times a year. They also donated books to the school library. This was done in the name of the Lord who wants to encourage those who are educating our children. These activities softened hearts to the message of God's love and progressed onto raising funds to donate 250 pairs of pyjamas to Starship children's hospital in Auckland.

Supporting the Shepherds and discipleship

Each month I gather the Shepherds to talk about strategy, share our testimonies, and tell stories of what God is doing. We will often have a skill segment in this sharing time to keep equipping those who are equipping others.

These monthly meetings remind me of something else that God spoke to me amid this great pivot to the Five Shifts: *James, you are going to have to shift from being a weekly preacher to an equipper of God's people to help them function in the harvest fields*. This has been one of the major changes in my ministry as a church leader. It reminded me of what one of my good friends Richard Brunton asked me once: 'James, do you want to be a Star or a Star Maker?' No more words were needed to qualify this statement. I knew exactly what God was saying.

As our micro churches gather, we have also adopted a well-known tool used across Afro-Eurasia for making disciples: DBS (Discovery Bible Studies). It is a simple means to help believers to disciple and grow new believers. The DBS approach is highly reproducible and does not require formal theological education. It involves simply reading the text chosen for that day, which then becomes the focus of the rest of the

¹⁹⁰ Brian Bullen can be contacted at brian@bsb.net.nz.

meeting. We re-read the passage through another volunteer, then close our Bibles and ask some brave person to retell it in their own words. This aids to ‘ingesting’ the word of God. We then ask four questions of the text, a process that helps us to shift from being hearers only to doers also.

1. What captures your attention here about the nature of God, in terms of His character and His ways?
2. What do you see in the text about the nature of humankind?
3. What is God asking you to put into practice over the next week?
4. Who might you share this new information with this week?

These four questions bring lively discussion and insight. But note question three: it is the traction grabber. Verbalising what you are going to do about what you have learned brings accountability. One of the first questions we ask one another the following week is ‘What did you do with what you said you were going to do last week?’ This is shifting people from being ‘hearers only to doers also.’¹⁹¹

Aligning with the house church movement

A house church is centred on making disciples. To move to a disciple making model you must let go of the ‘church growth metric model’ that characterises many churches today. Consider the three ‘B’s of Bodies on seats, Bucks in the offering, and Buildings of brick and mortar; these will not progress God’s people into becoming disciple makers! The sort of metrics we need to refocus on are things like: ‘When was the last time you had a conversation that led to you sharing the Good News?’ Or ‘Do you know your neighbours by name and what challenges they are facing in their lives right now?’

Let’s face it: we have often ‘guilted’ our congregations into attending our well-meaning programmes as a way of keeping them actively involved with our church, such that they have no spare time to develop much needed relationships in their neighbourhoods. The world can only be won when *all* of God’s people become missional in heart and intent. We won’t win the world by simply inviting people to another Sunday service.

Jesus said, ‘As the Father has sent me so I am sending you.’¹⁹² So, we should be known not by our ‘seating capacity’ but our ‘sending capacity’! How many Christians are actively engaging people in their daily environments?

Activating each believer into a disciple making mindset is key to multiplying disciples. If we go by the consensus that many churches have 20% of their people doing 80% of the work (‘the few carry the crew’), we will never be able to sustain an ongoing influx of

¹⁹¹ James 1:22.

¹⁹² John 20:21.

new believers. Training and activating believers into their God-given calling of being disciple makers is crucial to us completing the task of taking the Gospel to every ethnic group on the planet. Jesus said He is not returning until this job is done.¹⁹³

Church leaders: copying successful church growth formulas as a template across your congregation will not cut it. God has an individual plan for your congregation: he wants to mobilise every believer to fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations.¹⁹⁴ You may not approach this exactly like we have, but if you are sitting on the ‘from’ side of the Five Shifts you need to innovate, and change ‘to’ be obedient to Christ and his call on your ministry.

To understand the micro church movement, you need to talk to practitioners who are actively pursuing this model. You will find resources from Nick and Sarah Fields from *The Way* helpful, as they had a similar experience of moving from the church growth model to the micro church model.¹⁹⁵ Other experts, like Tony Collis (who at the time of writing is pastoring a church in Levin) and Pastor Nick Klinkenberg (who champions the cause of the micro church worldwide) are also worth connecting with.¹⁹⁶

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Which of the Five Shifts most resonate from your Christian experience?
2. In what ways does your current congregation encourage you to grow as a disciple?
3. What are the benefits of the house church movement as expressed in this chapter? Does it sound close to the New Testament concept of Church?

Pray:

Father, we thank you for the cities, towns and neighbourhoods in our nation. We pray our hearts will be burdened to act on behalf of those who do not know you; our lives will reflect the goodness of the One who has called us to serve our nation; our hands will become soiled in the harvest fields of our neighbourhoods; and our mouths will become an instrument to declare the love and truth of the Gospel.

¹⁹³ Matthew 24:14.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁹⁵ The Way, “A Movement of Everyday Missionaries, a Collective of Home Churches,” *The Way*, last modified 2021. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.theway.co.nz/>.

¹⁹⁶ Nick Klinkenberg, “Church Planting and Growth,” *Nick Klinkenberg*, last modified 2020. Accessed July 6, 2024. <https://www.nickklinkenberg.com/>.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

13. Unity among churches for a flourishing city

Jonathan Dove and Phil Coates

“...true unity embraces the rich breadth of diversity, where we can honour each other for the uniqueness of our perspectives and have fellowship in our common beliefs, rather than argue with or avoid one another because of our differences.”

It’s commonly said that ‘we’re better together.’ But is that really the case? In this chapter, we will explore what the Bible teaches about Church unity, reveal its three essential ingredients, and provide a case study of churches practising unity within the Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Church Network.

A Biblical case for Church unity

Sadly, in the Western world, disunity of the Church has contributed to the lack of credibility of the Gospel. While many individual churches are doing some amazing Christian service both inside the walls of their church gatherings and outside in their communities, too frequently those serving remain content to minister in their own silo. Leaders frequently refuse to look beyond their tradition, denomination, or movement to work together with other leaders and churches for the greater blessing of their community. Thankfully, this picture is changing across New Zealand, as more and more Church unity initiatives are springing up in towns, suburbs, and cities.

Church unity is vitally important to Jesus. In His prayer for His followers, Jesus called all his followers to embrace unity and become as one:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in

them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”¹⁹⁷

We can see from Jesus’ words that Church unity is not only for the benefit of believers but, more importantly, for the sake of the world. Others see the love of the Father through our unity. Twice in the above passage, Jesus said ‘...that the world will know...’, linking this knowledge to belief and love. While our individual efforts in the demonstration and proclamation of the Gospel are powerful, greater still is the combined effort of God’s people through the many and varied expressions of the Church. Church unity is a demonstration of the power of the Gospel to unite people of all kinds into the Kingdom of God.

Consider this: how important is Church unity to you and to your local church? What effort are you willing to make to ensure this is your priority, just as it was for Jesus? The Apostle Paul wrote to the early Christian Church to ensure it would be ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’¹⁹⁸ The meaning of the phrase ‘eager to maintain’ contains the sense of diligence, devotion and being zealous.¹⁹⁹ It comes from a Greek root word that means ‘to use speed’, so it encourages us to be prompt, to not hold back or resist, but to willingly and eagerly embrace unity together. The Greek word ‘to maintain’ here²⁰⁰ is in a form encouraging us ‘to keep doing it.’ Unity is more than a one-off conference or outreach event; it’s what we need to always continue, at any cost.

We know that our unity comes from God’s indwelling Spirit in all of us. But how will the world see that unity and love if we don’t demonstrate it towards each other, and towards the world outside of our church building walls? The phrase ‘bonds of peace’ here implies a sense of harmony. In this sense we are encouraged to be willingly bound together by converging on what we agree about, rather than getting hung up on those points where we disagree. The Achilles’ heel of many efforts at Church unity in the past has simply been the wrong focus.

There are several places in the Bible where we see the power of unity. Leviticus tells us that ‘Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand’.²⁰¹ Jesus tells us, ‘if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.’²⁰² Unity in our prayer has an exponential impact across intercession and spiritual warfare. If we want our prayers to be more effective, then we need to pursue unity across the whole Body of Christ. If we want our mission to be more effective, we must pursue the unity of the Church.

¹⁹⁷ John 17:20-23.

¹⁹⁸ Ephesians 4:3.

¹⁹⁹ Greek, *σπουδαζω*.

²⁰⁰ Greek, *τηροω*.

²⁰¹ Leviticus 26:8.

²⁰² Matthew 18:19.

Unity is not unison, uniformity, or conformity. We don't all have to look and sound alike! In fact, true unity embraces the rich breadth of diversity, where we can honour each other for the uniqueness of our perspectives and have fellowship in our common beliefs, rather than argue with or avoid one another because of our differences. We come together in agreement, not necessarily agreeing with everything others say, but in agreement with what God says.

Unity is built on a commitment to love and serve each other and our communities, as we fix our eyes on Jesus together. He is the author and pioneer of our faith, and the One who ultimately unites us. As we stand together in Christ, the power of our unity will be strong enough to pull down strongholds, release the supernatural presence and power of God's Spirit, and impact our communities for Jesus. Our unity grows as we choose to draw near to God together; as we worship and pray in His presence together; as we declare His Gospel together; and as we seek to love and serve our communities together in His name.

In the Psalms, God promises to bless those who pursue unity: 'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [God's people] dwell in unity! ...For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.'²⁰³ That blessing is not only for followers of Jesus. It will also flow through us to impact everyone in our sphere of influence: our communities, cities, and nation. To God be the Glory!

Three essential ingredients for experiencing unity in shared mission

Knowing that there is a biblical basis for unity amongst churches, let's look at three common characteristics that are observable in healthy, unified Christian movements.

First, there is a generous and uncommon unity.

It's normal for people to gather with leaders from other churches who share common practices, traditions, and ideas. What's *uncommon* is to reach beyond the denominational familiarity, and the tribes and networks with which we feel most comfortable, to embrace churches with different traditions and practices.

Healthy unity movements are centred around a generous orthodoxy and practice. Theology matters, and so underpinning connected churches are traditional beliefs that date back to early historical orthodoxy. These beliefs are expressed through such statements as the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds. Churches unified in this way focus on what is indisputable to their shared faith, rather than those practices or beliefs that are not central tenets. This reveals a shared commitment to the mission of Jesus.

²⁰³ Psalm 133: 1, 3.

A healthy unity movement breaks out of the usual tribal groups and avoids labels such as ‘high church,’ ‘Pentecostal,’ or ‘evangelical.’ While such groups are not embarrassed by their distinctives, they are willing to embrace the differences of others to ensure there is room for everyone around the table. Diversity of ethnicities and generations are also embraced, as are stylistic and structural differences. There is room across their conversation to allow difference of thought and practice, built upon the bedrock of shared faith. Christians united in this way come to appreciate the differences between them and seek to learn from each other.

Recently, we observed a willingness of Pentecostal leaders to practice both contemplative prayer led by Catholic priests, and devotions led by evangelicals using the Anglican Common Prayer Book. Everyone present was enriched through this uncommon experience in the spirit of unity. Such experiences exemplify the unity Paul spoke of when insisting:

‘There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.’²⁰⁴

It is tenacious unity that best showcases our Triune God.

Second, there is a posture of humility.

It’s no surprise that Paul introduces our being ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,’²⁰⁵ with the words ‘with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...’²⁰⁶ Unity movements require humility, gentleness, and patience with each other.

Practically, unity movements work best when church and leadership names are considered inconsequential. The fastest way to harm unity is for a church to put its own logo or minister’s name on the programme! Jesus and His cause need to be front and centre.

Unity movements are fostered by leaders comfortable with boasting loudly about what *other* churches are doing in the city. They are fuelled by churches who pray for other churches in the same area. Recently, we heard of one church that prayed publicly for another church in their city. The following Sunday, that church reciprocated, with the congregation turning to face the direction of that church to pray a blessing over them.

²⁰⁴ Ephesians 4:4-6.

²⁰⁵ Ephesians 4:2.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Both congregations were helped to see that they were part of something bigger. Such actions require humility, but they catalyse unity.

Finally, experiencing unity in shared mission is based on collaboration.

Churches need to come together to explore what they might do, together, to better serve the city they are in. Pastor A. R. Bernard sums it up well:

if we want to see gospel change in our cities, it's going to take more than one leader or one organization to bring it about. It's going to take all leaders and all organizations doing their parts. It's going to take training, development, deployment, and ongoing support.²⁰⁷

Many times, collaboration requires simple tweaks in what churches are already doing. For example, many churches already have a group that meets sometime during the day each week, for the lonely or elderly to connect. Churches could coordinate the various days and let local community services know when they are on. In this way a group of local churches can provide a daily opportunity for the lonely in their city, without requiring more effort in what they are already doing! Together, we serve more effectively. Another example: rather, than five different churches running food pantries, why not *collectively* respond using a more collaborative approach that will have a more effective reach? You can see in these examples the development of a healthy service ecosystem.

A case study: Auckland Church Network

The Auckland Church Network is a city-wide grouping of churches formally established in 2021, with the stated vision ‘to bring flourishing to Tāmaki Makaurau.’²⁰⁸ It’s a new entity that includes churches across thirty movements including Pentecostal, Catholic, Māori Anglican, and various evangelical fellowships; a variety of ethnic networks including Chinese and Pacifica; groups including the Salvation Army; and congregations large and small.

The Network began with a handful of church leaders musing on the concept of ‘being better together,’ who considered how those musings might become a reality in their

²⁰⁷ A.R. Bernard, in Mac Pier, *New York Disrupted: Bridging the Gospel to 2030* (New York: New York Disrupted, 2023), xix-xx. The book is freely available from the website, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.newyorkdisrupted.com/>.

²⁰⁸ Auckland Church Network, “Auckland Church Network,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.aucklandchurchnetwork.nz/>.

city. These leaders were inspired by two successful overseas city movements, LEAD.NYC²⁰⁹ and TogetherPDX.²¹⁰

This initial group of church leaders gathered a dozen others across Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland for an overnight retreat to pray, dream, and share how a vision for the city might come together. Out of that retreat came five pillars and a plan around each one.²¹¹

1. *Pray.* We pray for our city at the annual Auckland Prayer Breakfast and at weekly pastor gatherings. We believe prayer is powerful, and we invite others to join us at an event, or from wherever they may be.
2. *Connect.* We connect pastors together across the city via geographic-based pastors' networks and through relationships with Auckland Council and Auckland-based Members of Parliament.
3. *Support.* We support the Church and its leaders through casting vision and building relationships with church planting movements, professional coaching and supervision. and disciple-building cultures and frameworks.
4. *Declare.* We declare the name of Jesus across our city; uphold the mana and values of the Church; and provide a voice for Auckland churches in the media.
5. *Inspire.* We inspire the Church to unite to serve our city and its people, particularly the poor and vulnerable.

Two full-time staff have now been employed to respond to the increasing opportunities in this growing movement. Though this network is still in its early days, we are already seeing fruit across a range of activities including:

- *The Daily*,²¹² short video devotions provided through Lent, filmed in partnership with Rhema Media. These devotions showcase the diversity of the Church across the city and point people towards Jesus.
- Our church planting learning community. This sees twelve denominations or churches meeting across a two-year timeframe, sharing lessons about church planting with the shared goal to see multiplication movements, not just in Auckland but throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.
- A shared event with MPs across five political parties and pastors, all speaking about what it looks like to work together toward a flourishing city.
- Disaster Response efforts, including a training event with five aid development agencies, with attendees from the breadth of the Church.

²⁰⁹ LEAD.NYC, "LEAD.NYC," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://lead.nyc/>.

²¹⁰ TogetherPDX, "TogetherPDX," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.togetherpdx.org/>.

²¹¹ Auckland Church Network, "What We Do," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.aucklandchurchnetwork.nz/what-we-do>.

²¹² Auckland Church Network, "The Daily," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.aucklandchurchnetwork.nz/the-daily>.

- Initiating conversations around disability, poverty relief, well-being, and coaching.
- A Prayer Festival month long initiative, which finished with a inter-denominational gathering filling a local church, and encompassing the Auckland Prayer Breakfast at Eden Park.
- A North Shore Leaders network, meeting regularly to build friendship, and actively working to serve their communities together.

While a unity movement will express itself differently in each city, town, and region, it is clear that we are, indeed, ‘better together.’ Unity leads to healthy discussions and facilitates action that leads to our city flourishing.

The prayer for the Church across each city and region is best expressed in the words of the Apostle Paul:

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.²¹³

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What is an example of something that has enhanced your worship, formation, or mission, that you learned outside of your particular church affiliation?
2. How might your own church gatherings help people realise they are part of something bigger in their area (as an example, praying for other churches on a monthly basis)?
3. How might your church collaborate with other local churches for more effective and fruitful mission?

Pray:

- For the raising up of network facilitators, who can bring Christian leaders together in towns, regions, and cities across Aotearoa New Zealand.
- For healthy collaboration across church fellowships, leading to effective and fruitful mission.
- For the Church to see itself as One Body under Jesus, focusing on common core beliefs. You may want to add the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds to your prayers.

²¹³ Romans 15:5-7.

Author Profiles:

Pastor **Phil Coates** has been Senior Pastor at Gateway Baptist in Miramar for the last 21 years and is married to Kim for 31 years. They have three adult children. He is the Chair of the Council of Wellington Churches and is passionate about Church unity as a demonstration of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Pastor **Jonathan Dove** (or 'JD') is Senior Pastor of Gracecity Church. He is married to Robyn for more than 25 years, with four beautiful children. JD is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Theology degree, and is the executive chair of the Auckland Church Network.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

14. On (Aotearoa) earth as it is in heaven

Paul Windsor

“Seeing that multitude at the end brings evangelism into focus now. This is the only way there can be a multitude. It involves bringing people to Jesus, one by one, as we live the Gospel and explain it so that its transforming power can be experienced.”

Ngā mihi ki a koe i te ingoa o Īhu Karaiti.
Ma apko Yeshu Masih kay naam may namaskar kartha hun.
I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus takes John on an overseas trip. After sightseeing through some churches in Türkiye, John is taken right into heaven where he encounters the Church at its best, at the end. Revelation 7:9-17 provides us with one slice of this vision of heaven:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

We come to this text with two questions on our minds: What does John see, and how do we respond to what John sees?

What does John see?

The first thing John sees is a *multitude* (7:9a). In John's time the Church in Western Türkiye is tiny, as it is today. There were a few thousand believers among a few million people back then, and today there are still a few thousand believers, now among closer to one hundred million people. And yet, John sees 'a great multitude that no one could count.' My imagination takes me atop Coronet Peak, looking over the Wakatipu Basin, with that vast space crammed with people, standing shoulder-to-shoulder.

John sees a *diversity* (7:9b). Back on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, people gathered from north, west, south, east and were later scattered home. By the time of John's OE, those people still had not scattered that far. And yet, here John sees people 'from every nation, tribe, people and language'. When the number four is used in apocalyptic literature, as in here with four descriptions, things are more symbolic than they are statistical. Think of four as in the four winds, or the four corners of the earth; 'four' conveys all of creation, and so here we have all peoples in the world, only a few of which John would have recognised.

Third, there is a visible *worship* (7:9c-12, 15). In John's time the worship of the people of God was a hushed whisper next to the worship of emperors and the many gods of Rome. And yet here we find open, noisy, and expressive worship. Notice how people are worshipping: 'crying out with a loud voice' (v. 10); 'fell on their faces' (v. 11); 'worshipped' (v. 12); and 'serve him day and night' (v. 15). Notice also why they worship; it is because there is a rescue: 'Salvation belongs to our God' (v. 10). Just imagine that Wakatipu Basin filled with this song! Then notice what they worship. It is the living God, offering him 'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might' (v. 12). Seven is like that number four; it is a symbol, not a statistic. This collection of seven offerings in worship John sees here conveys perfection, or fullness.

Next John sees a *victory* (7:9, 13-14). John is living in a time when the Church is being persecuted. This is not just physical persecution, which might include harassment, abuse, or even death; it is also a case of being pushed down and pushed out in society, simply because those of the Church are devoted to Jesus. And yet consider the imagery and the colours in these verses. Again, like numbers, these colours are symbolic. Being 'clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands' (v. 9) is the imagery of victory, not defeat. This is how things looked when the emperor returned from conquest. And the little story in verses 13 and 14 makes it clear that this victory is not just over the great tribulation, but the victory over sin, through the blood of the Lamb.

Finally, John sees a *protection* (7:15-17). In John's time the people of God were troubled. And yet, look at the care they receive in these verses! First, consider what is *present*. God 'will shelter them with his presence' (v. 15). Jesus, 'the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd' (v. 17). How good is *that* protection! A shelter over them provided by God, and a shepherd alongside them in the person of Jesus! Next, consider what is *absent*. The difficult things will be over, forever: corruption, injustice, sickness, harassment, persecution and pain. Indeed, a day is coming when 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat', (v. 16) because 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (v. 16).

These are the five things which John sees in his sightseeing trip with Jesus into heaven. Did you notice how in each of my descriptions the phrase 'and yet' appears? This is because what John sees each time, given that he is in prison on Patmos in the late first century, must have been so hard for him to believe.

How do we respond to what John sees?

So, what should be our response? To answer this question, it helps first to hear what the New Testament scholar, Richard Bauckham, affirms about the connection between Revelation and the Lord's Prayer: 'The whole of Revelation can be regarded as a vision of the fulfilment of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.'²¹⁴ The world in which John lived, and in which we live, is a world where God's name is not hallowed, and His will is not done. And yet, here in Revelation's vision of heaven, they are. And the prayer of Jesus is that it be 'on earth as it is in heaven.'²¹⁵ This is as if to say, 'Here is what God's will, God's kingdom, looks like in heaven. Now, my prayer is that this happens on earth as well.'

So, what John sees here is where God is taking us and his world. As someone expressed it, 'Revelation 7 is what God is up to in the world.' And like those old posters on the wall at the cinema, the people of God today are to be a 'preview' of these 'coming attractions.' Our life together is to glimpse, to taste and to echo what is to come, namely, the full vision, the full buffet and the full sound of the kingdom fully come! We are to be so heavenly-minded that we are some earthly good!

So, what does this look like as we respond to this slice of heaven in Revelation 7? It brings five things into focus: evangelism, friendship, idolatry, suffering, and solidarity.

Seeing that multitude at the end brings *evangelism* into focus now. This is the only way there can be a multitude. It involves bringing people to Jesus, one by one, as we live the

²¹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

²¹⁵ Matthew 6:10.

Gospel and explain it so that its transforming power can be experienced. That is evangelism. This is not the time to be shy and embarrassed, or uncertain and awkward. There is a Gospel to live and to speak, with kindness and boldness.

Imagine that mission is represented by a big cathedral with multiple doors by which people enter. The doorway through which you enter represents that which is of primary concern to you, from climate change to fair trade to racial injustice and much more. There are plenty of doors. However, what needs to be recognised is that such mission, in a New Testament understanding, remains incomplete until we travel forward to the altar, pausing at the lectern to collect the words that explain what is happening at the table and at the cross at the front, and believing those words at the heart of the Gospel to be true and transformative.

Seeing that diversity at the end brings *friendship* into focus now. Here we must start by looking in the mirror, scanning each of our responses in the Census form and turning in friendship towards those unlike ourselves, as barriers are broken, and reconciliation becomes real. After all, unless the Church becomes a ‘sociological impossibility,’²¹⁶ what witness to the power of the cross can there be? This is a friendship that goes deeper than partnership. It involves mutuality, giving-and-receiving reciprocity, closer to a 100:100 relationship than a 50:50 one.

While this is an issue of unity, it is also one of truth. We need each other to understand the fullness of the Gospel. We cannot get there on our own, or only with our own. As the Lausanne Covenant expressed 50 years ago, ‘(The Spirit) illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole church ever more of the many-coloured wisdom of God.’²¹⁷

Seeing that worship at the end brings *idolatry* into focus now. To be human is to worship. All people everywhere ascribe those seven descriptors, praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honour, power and strength, to something or someone. We may sing, ‘We place you in the highest place,’ but the question to ask is ‘Is what we sing, how we live?’ Maybe we need to be like a lawyer and keep track of our lives in 15-minute blocks! Then as we watch and listen to ourselves, monitoring our affections and appetites, draw conclusions about what receives the most time, thereby becoming the occupier of that ‘highest place.’

The human heart has always been an ‘idol factory.’ The worship of other gods alongside the worship of the living God has always been a problem. This is the rut in which those

²¹⁶ A phrase attributed to the Dutch missiologist, J. C. Hoekendijk (see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York, Orbis Books, 1991), 48).

²¹⁷ See Section 2, ‘The Authority and Power of the Bible’, in the Lausanne Covenant; The Lausanne Covenant, “Lausanne Movement,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://lausanne.org/statement/lausanne-covenant>.

whistle-blowing prophets in the Old Testament were stuck. And yet when was the last time we spoke, even confessed, our idolatries to another person? While the consumer mentality has us adding things to make our lives better, worship is made better by subtracting things. After all, Jesus is not looking to be significant in our lives, but supreme in them. If he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.

Seeing that victory at the end brings *suffering* into focus now. Victory means so little without suffering. We see this in our sports and our studies. If we want to be victorious, we expect to suffer. While Peter may write ‘Do not be surprised at the fiery trial,’²¹⁸ the fact is that we are surprised. We forget that it is the way to victory. This can be seen in the way we lean in mission, more comfortable with mixing in as the salt, than standing out as the light, and more focused on fitting in, than being distinctive with distinction. And yet, as Michael Goheen observes, suffering is ‘the price to be paid for living distinctively.’²¹⁹

Many decades ago, here in Aotearoa, two young Māori men were killed, no, *martyred*, because of their faithfulness to Jesus and the Gospel. Their graveside in Tokaanu remains a place of pilgrimage. It is good to go and stand there, remembering their names, Te Manihera and Kereopa, and remembering that verse written under their names, ‘They loved not their lives unto death.’²²⁰

Seeing that protection at the end brings *solidarity* into focus now. Recently I had the privilege of attending the four yearly gathering of all the TSCF (Tertiary Student Christian Fellowship) groups around the world. A highlight for me was the welcoming of new member countries, with one coming from a Middle Eastern country. Even way over here, at the edge of the world, the name of the country cannot be uttered. They are too unprotected as followers of Jesus. I was sitting at the back of the cavernous room. Their four delegates came onto the stage, and the place just went off. Nine hundred people from one hundred and thirty countries rose to their feet, cheering and clapping on and on.

What was happening in that room? It was solidarity. That was the global Church standing with the unprotected, wanting to join with them. That was one part of the Body that might feel weaker, unprotected, less honourable, or just plain forgotten being treated as indispensable and with special honour. That was knowing that witness involves *witness*, whether it be up the street or across the world.

Friends, what was so hard for John to believe in his time is made easier to believe in our time by the Church, no, by local churches, holding their nerve and being so heavenly

²¹⁸ 1 Peter 4:12.

²¹⁹ Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 94.

²²⁰ Revelation 12:11. See also Paul Windsor, ‘Māori Martyrs,’ *Paul Windsor* (blog), May 2015, <https://paulwindsorblog.com/2015/05/maori-martyrs/>.

minded that they are some earthly good as they take seriously solidarity, suffering, idolatry, friendship and evangelism.

Mā Ihowā koe e manaaki e tiaki.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. How would you describe the meaning of the phrase ‘sociological impossibility’ to a 15-year-old? In what ways is your local Christian community such an ‘impossibility’ already, and where do the challenges for you remain?
2. ‘So heavenly-minded that we are some earthly good.’ Really? Isn’t the instinct to embrace the opposite? What is the danger in not being *heavenly* minded enough?
3. Think of a person or people within the people of God, drawing on both local and global examples, who run the risk of being forgotten or unprotected. What does solidarity with them look like for you?

Some prayers:

- *‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’*²²¹ *‘Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever!’*²²²
- *Loving God, give us the strength to step into a distinctive life in our society, with both the grace to live it with distinction and the courage to face the suffering that is its consequence. Along with all the passions that draw us into your mission, grant us a greater confidence in the true and transforming word of the Gospel.*
- *Spirit of the living God, help me to discern my own idolatry more clearly, to confess it more fully and to move on from it more completely with you empowering me to live a godly life of holy habits.*

Author Profile:

Paul Windsor is the Programme Director of Langham Preaching. He was raised in a missionary family in India. After completing theological study in the USA, he returned to

²²¹ Matthew 6:10.

²²² Revelation 7:12.

Aotearoa New Zealand to serve as a pastor in Invercargill, a lecturer at Laidlaw College, and then as principal of Carey Baptist College.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

15. The contemporary pulse of the global Church

Jay Mātenga

“The Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is right to lament the loss of influence and decline of adberence across our settler-established churches... But we can become woefully myopic in our assumption that the mission of God is somehow hindered by this. It is not.”

Kia ora koutou katoa. Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Life and wellbeing to you all. I bring you greetings, three times I respectfully acknowledge all readers.

He iti noa tāku kōrero, nā, me iti noa ōku mihi.
Conversation space is limited and so must be my greetings.

I roto i te poto, ko āku whakapapa iwi: kō Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, kō Ngāti Porou, Kō Ngāi Tahu ōku iwi.
To keep it short, I have just identified my three primary Māori tribes from my father’s heritage (I also benefit from my mother’s English heritage).

Kō Jay Mātenga tōku ingoa.
My name is Jay Mātenga.

With the many challenges facing the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand today it can be encouraging to consider the growth of the global Church. My perspective of World Christianity has developed over more than 30 years’ service to global missions, which I continue, at the time of writing, as Director of Missions Interlink (formerly the New Zealand Evangelical Missionary Alliance), the association of missions and outreach ministries of Aotearoa New Zealand.²²³ In addition, since 2020, Missions Interlink has seconded me for 50% of my time to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), of which the New Zealand Christian Network is a voting member.²²⁴ The WEA is the recognised representative of over 640 million evangelicals to political and religious leaders around the world as well as global institutions like the United

²²³ “Missions Interlink New Zealand,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://missions.org.nz/>.

²²⁴ World Evangelical Alliance, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://worlddea.org/>.

Nations. Within the WEA I serve as Executive Director of the Mission Commission.²²⁵

Pulses in historical context

In his magisterial overview of Christian history, American historian Kenneth Scott Latourette observed seasons of recession and resurgence in the growth of the global Church. This tide-like ebb and flow of the Church's expansion around the world is detectible through the ages, resembling long pulses through time and space, whereby the Church withers in one place only to flourish in another. Each time, the growth seems to become more significant and expansive in each new context.

We need only consider places like the Middle East, North Africa, and Türkiye, where the early Church once flourished and then gave way to Islam, to confirm this phenomenon. From the once flourishing European centre of Christianity (including the European diaspora in the Americas and more recent colonies), the Gospel continues to move westward and south. As it recedes in what is commonly known as 'the West,' it is now thriving in new centres in Africa, South and Central America, Oceania, and Asia creating new centres of theological influence with different priorities for the Church.

Confirming a recession

Service in missions and outreach ministries can reasonably be considered a key indicator of the vitality of evangelical churches in any given context. Missions service can be considered a litmus test to the confidence we have in the Gospel and its power to transform lives and communities.

In the early 1990's Patrick Johnstone, author of the world prayer guide *Operation World*, considered New Zealand as one of the best contributors to missions per capita compared with other Western Nations.²²⁶ In 1999 David Jenkins, a former leader of Missions Interlink, put our deployed missionary population at around 1,700 cross-cultural servants.²²⁷ By the time I started a Missions Interlink annual census in 2016, that number had dropped to around 1,200. Across a decade and a

²²⁵ World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://weamc.global/>.

²²⁶ Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 81.

²²⁷ David Jenkins, "New Zealand," in *Starting and Strengthening National Mission Movements*, World Evangelical Fellowship (now called the World Evangelical Alliance), 1999.

half, we had lost 500 personnel. In 2023 that number fell further, to around 700 workers in missions.

In a little over two decades, our missionary population decreased by 1,000 foreign workers. I cannot help but correlate this with the decline of peoples' involvement in Christian institutions across the board, the most common form of which is the local church. In addition to official census information, reports like the *McCrimdle Faith and Belief in New Zealand Report*²²⁸ confirm a recession of adherence to Christian beliefs compared with 40 years ago. Similarly, research internal to the churches of Aotearoa New Zealand confirms a concerning rate of decline.²²⁹

As pointed out above, however, a recession in one place will usually overlap with resurgence in another. Is this happening? Global Christianity demographers agree that it is, but it is better described as a 'new-surgence' than a 'resurgence.' As Christianity declines in the UK, Europe and lands like ours that are dominated by diaspora that originated there, it is no exaggeration to say that Christianity is metaphorically 'exploding' in what we in missions call the 'Majority world' (so named because the majority of the world's population lives there, in contrast to what is commonly known as the 'Western world'). Furthermore, most Christians are now found in the Majority world, and it is here that the Church continues to grow.

Validating a (re)surgence

Demographers of global Christianity have established that the average Christian today is likely to be a dark-skinned woman in an impoverished context within Africa, South America, Oceania or Asia.²³⁰ Yet, most of the attention on Christianity outside the Western world remains focused on the type of Christianity exported from the European diaspora (including North America), supported by Western denominations and theologies. This 'Eurocentric' Christianity does not represent the growth reality of World Christianity. Even in the Majority world, the forms of Christianity constrained by Eurocentric influences are struggling.

In contrast, the kind of Christianity that is flourishing is influenced by indigenous perspectives, particularly of a Pentecostal persuasion. In these expressions the good news of Jesus is born out of local experience of God in Christ, and it is from this

²²⁸ McCrimdle, "Faith and Belief in New Zealand," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://mccrimdle.com.au/article/topic/demographics/faith-and-belief-in-new-zealand/>.

²²⁹ Church Life Survey New Zealand, "Church Life NZ," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://clsnz.org/>.

²³⁰ Recently, Dr Gina Zurlo of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity in Boston reaffirmed the claim. Dr Gina Zurlo, "The World as 100 Christians," *Gordon Connell* (blog), accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.gordonconnell.edu/blog/100christians/>.

that local questions find biblically faithful answers. Such Christianity becomes deeply relevant to its context, not as the moral judge of societal dysfunction, but as a lived example of what a more just and righteous community can look like. So, we see local churches serving as witnesses to the New Creation that Jesus has instituted, living and holy examples of the reality to come in fulness on His return.

Converts from another dominant religion now represent the leading growth area of the global Church. These converts are primarily from Muslim backgrounds, but as I write there is also a significant movement among Sikhs in the Punjab, and in addition a few Hindu movements (and at least one Buddhist) are taking place. The Sikh conversion rate is so alarming today that in my WEA role I am having to answer letters from the global legal counsel for the United Sikhs complaining about the number of Sikhs converting to Christianity!

Missions demographer Justin Long keeps meticulous records of people coming to faith from other religious backgrounds. From his well-validated research, we learn that these new movements contain over 114 million believers and are rapidly approaching 2% of the global population (by this I am not referring to the global Christian population, but rather the entire global population of around 8 billion people). We are rapidly approaching 160 million new believers converting from another majority religion, and this largely over the past two decades.

God in new contexts

My friends Sebastian and Kirsteen Kim, World Christianity scholars at Fuller Seminary, make the solidly researched claim that the Church in any context grows fastest and remains longest *when it is thoroughly indigenous*. That is, the Church thrives when its theology emerges from within (rather than imposed upon it from without), and when its behaviour reflects the best aspirations of the culture that surrounds it. To seed an indigenous Gospel and nurture it to flourish locally takes time. I now regularly encourage the global missions community to ‘centre the local.’ By that, I mean local believers must be recognised and honoured as the guardians of the Gospel for their contexts; we must allow them to be the *kaitiaki* (guardians) of the faith for their people, if you will. In *te ao Māori* (Māori world) terminology, this is something like a theological *mana motuhake* (self-determination).

To avoid drifting into heresy, I argue that followers of Jesus must remain biblically faithful and in conversation with the global Church, including the historic Church. But I caution that an indigenous understanding of the faith is likely to look very different to that of Western Protestantism. It is for this reason that I am very excited about decolonial conversations now taking place among many of my *Īhu Karaiti whānau* (family in Jesus Christ) who are Māori. We are seeking answers to questions

that European followers of Jesus are not asking. We are looking for fresh ways to express our faith that remain authentic to the cultural values of our *tipuna* (forebears). Along the way, we are finding new ways of understanding the Gospel, and new ways of understanding what Jesus has achieved for and made available to us. *Mauri ora!* Life generates life.

Certain hope for the future

The Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is right to lament the loss of influence and decline of adherence across our settler-established churches, with our Euro-centric theologies, in our relatively young and highly secularised colonially influenced nation. But we can become woefully myopic in our assumption that the mission of God is somehow hindered by this. It is not. As noted above, the Spirit is moving powerfully among the nations. In accordance with the pulses of Christian history, the Gospel continues to spread like seed from the proverbial Sower, who in our day is more likely to be an insider to the local context. Furthermore, the Gospel is finding fertile soil to flourish in the most unexpected and hostile of places.

So, brothers and sisters, let us be spurred on to love and good deeds in our own contexts by the faith being found and nurtured in others. They have no political influence. They have no power or privilege. They are often the poorest of the poor, and physically and economically persecuted. Yet, as Scriptures declare, they are eternally safe²³¹ and they are rich in Christ.²³² I implore all believers to consider the vitality of such faith before presuming to cast judgement on the contextualised theologies that emerge from their walk with the Lord. We will have much to learn from their relationship with the Holy Three in the days to come.

So, we must learn to embrace differences for the sake of our harmony in Christ. Harmony is not found in the resolving of tension, but in the wise tuning of it. The Holy Spirit tunes us as we learn from one another's experiences of God and perspectives of Scripture within our different contexts. When we learn together, we are mutually transformed.

A final encouragement

In our context here in Aotearoa New Zealand I occasionally hear a narrative being promoted that the Church is 'under attack.' This is usually meant from a socio-political standpoint. With due respect to influential Christian leaders who sincerely

²³¹ Romans 10:13.

²³² Revelation 2:9.

believe this, our society and Government are not out to get us. Yes, our society has moved away from a Victorian-era morality, and the Church has lost the political influence it used to have in the halls of power during the age of Christendom. But that does not constitute an attack. Our population is just moving on, following a progressive secular agenda that many cultural observers (Christian and non-Christian) believe is ushering in the end of Western civilisation. If you want to see what ‘under attack’ *is* like for followers of Jesus, look to northern Nigeria, to Pakistan, Azerbaijan, or India.

A positive relationship with worldly power is an anomaly, not the Church’s biblical mandate or entitlement. If we are no longer afforded a position of privilege in society, we are merely placed back into line with what the Church has always meant to be in this world: a prophetic example of a Kingdom that is not of this world. In that sense the Church has always been under attack, by unseen principalities and powers that continually seek to destroy God’s purposes in the world.

We should be encouraged by (re)surgent Christianity in other contexts, but also realise that we now live in a context very different from 40 years ago. We require a different response to the different questions now being asked from within a different type of society with a different morality. The Gospel is unchanging, but the contexts in which it grows shape it in different ways because it represents a *living* way. We urgently need to learn what this living way looks like for the Aotearoa New Zealand of today and tomorrow if we are to stem the recession of the faith here—and that will require much grace, wisdom, and patience from us all.

Mā te Atua tātou e tiaki e manaaki i ngā wa katoa. Āmine.

May the Lord bless and keep us at all times. Amen.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What do you understand by the term ‘Gospel’? What does it mean to you, and how do you think it relates to society around you (in other words, how is Jesus ‘good news’ for your culture)?
2. Think about a particular belief you have about being a Christian. How does the Bible articulate that belief? Is there a possibility that the interpretation you have might be a cultural one, different from that of the original biblical context?
3. The massive turning to Christ from other religions has been attributed to Christians *praying* more than Christians *going*. When was the last time you prayed for people from another religious background to come to know Christ? Might there be people in your neighbourhood from another religious and/or cultural background that you can befriend and share the love of Jesus with?

Pray:

- For Christian leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand: for strength as they lead in a complex and rapidly changing context; for courage to explore new ways to understand and articulate our faith; and for grace to accept that other followers of Jesus might have a different perspective that is just as biblically faithful.
- For every Jesus-honouring congregation to envision afresh what it means for them to co-create New Creation as a witness to the world around them of a radically different way to live, faithful to Scripture, and enabled by the Spirit of God.
- For all followers of Jesus to be bold in sharing the hope that they have, in culturally sensitive ways, inviting non-believers to ‘taste and see that the Lord is good.’²³³

Author Profile:

Dr **Jay Mātenga** is a Māori contextual theologian with over 30 years of experience serving cross-cultural missions. In his current leadership roles, he is helping the local and global missions community navigate change in our understanding of global missions in light of a maturing world Christianity.

²³³ Psalm 34:8.

Section Four:

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

16. The clash of ideas and threats to Christian belief

Alex Penk

“Let’s be realistic: Christians are a cultural minority, and many ordinary Christian views aren’t popular. We should respond with hope, courage, and creativity.”

Anecdotally, many Christians are uncomfortable telling other people what they believe. Christians are not alone. Many New Zealanders are just as wary, as February 2024 polling revealed. Kiwis were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that, ‘Society should have more tolerance for people expressing differing beliefs even if they are unpopular or about sensitive issues like sex and gender identity, the Treaty of Waitangi, hate speech, or religion.’ A majority of 59% agreed that we need to be more tolerant than we are, while just 11% disagreed.²³⁴ This is the water we’re all swimming in, and it exemplifies one of the threats to Christian belief that I’ll describe in this chapter, what I’ll call ‘indirect threats.’ I will also discuss two types of *direct* threats: cultural hostility, and self-inflicted wounds. Together with indirect threats, these contribute to a social and cultural context where Christians increasingly find it challenging to live out their faith in contemporary New Zealand.

After exploring the threats in more detail I’ll illustrate them in practice, then suggest how Christians might engage in complex issues more constructively. Talking about addressing ‘threats’ frames things negatively, and I think it’s important not to let that be our overall narrative in thinking about our circumstances. Nor should we overstate the challenges we face or adopt a defensive or an aggressive posture as we engage. We should be realistic, while at the same time striving to let the hope we have within us characterise our response.

With that combination of hope and realism in mind, let’s consider three threats to living out Christian faith.

²³⁴ Alex Penk, “Most New Zealanders Want More Tolerance for Differing Beliefs,” Ethos Alliance New Zealand, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.ethosalliance.nz/articles/most-new-zealanders-want-more-tolerance-for-differing-beliefs>.

Indirect threats to Christian belief

Indirect threats are challenges that aren't directed at Christians or Christianity specifically. Instead, they are part of an environment that negatively affects everyone, whatever their beliefs. Our society seems increasingly polarised and less able to tolerate, let alone understand, differences of opinion. That's the sentiment revealed in the polling I quoted earlier, which cut across multiple issues. Other trends, including the fragmentation of the media landscape and increasingly shallow public discourse, affect everyone's ability to encounter meaningful ideas and their appetite for thoughtful engagement when they do.

Indirect threats to Christian belief also arise simply because we're at cultural cross-purposes. Orthodox Christian ideas are still part of the cultural mainstream in many areas. Take, for example, the belief that every person has equal and fundamental dignity whether they are male or female, rich or poor. As historian Tom Holland has shown, this is a quintessentially Christian belief, one that wasn't shared across the pre-Christian world.²³⁵ Today such values are taken for granted, reflected in our laws and our social discourse.

But in other areas, ordinary Christian beliefs are just out of step with dominant views. That's not because of any hostility to our faith; it's more because of a lack of understanding, or a lack of shared assumptions. These differences run deep. In all our social, political, and cultural debates, there's a basic divide between two ways of looking at the world: one says that there's a moral architecture or some sort of givenness about the world, and our job is to discover that order which exists outside us, and try to live in accordance with it; the other, that we create order and meaning ourselves, and our job is to be true to what's inside us.

The first idea is the Christian one: that God says what matters and we obey, because we trust He loves us and wants what's good for us. But the second idea is the one that's culturally dominant: that I decide what matters for me, and others must accept and affirm my choices. These ideas contradict each other, such that when one of them gets embodied in cultural norms or in law, a clash inevitably follows. We see, then, that the clash of ideas isn't because those opposing our views want to take down religion; it's just that their ways of seeing the world are so foundationally different.

²³⁵ Tom Holland, "Why I Was Wrong About Christianity," *New Statesman*, September 2016, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2016/09/tom-holland-why-i-was-wrong-about-christianity>. See also Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

To be clear, indirect threats can still have real consequences for faith. But, if we recognise that they're not motivated by hostility or contempt, and if we can diagnose their causes accurately, we can respond helpfully and proportionately.

Cultural hostility

Not all threats are indirect. Sometimes there is direct opposition and even hostility to Christian beliefs and to Christians living out their faith. Direct challenges are easier to identify than indirect ones and are also easier to explain.

We see cultural hostility when activists claim religious freedom is a mask for bigotry, as critics did after some Christian players with the Manly Sea Eagles refused to play in a pride-themed jersey in 2022.²³⁶ In situations such as this there is no tolerance for good faith disagreement or for openness to exploring different beliefs, just a stamping out of different opinions.

Currently, direct challenges to Christian beliefs arise most often around issues like gender identity, sexuality and marriage, and bioethical issues like the beginning and end of life. But they don't stop there. For example, the Secular Education Network campaigned long and hard against 'religious instruction ... led by evangelical Christians' in state schools.²³⁷ Their 2020 petition, 'Say no to bible [sic] classes in school time,' gained over 10,000 signatures.²³⁸ To be fair, those behind the petition are apparently supportive of 'religious education' centred on a range of religions, but militantly opposed to Christian 'religious instruction' even though children can only receive that instruction if their parents have given written consent.²³⁹

More recently, the Briefing to the Incoming Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector identified that 'stakeholders' want a review of whether 'advancement of religion,' recognised as a charitable purpose for centuries, should continue to be treated as

²³⁶ Shanel Lal, "Manly players pick and choose when it suits them to be Christian-like," *New Zealand Herald*, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/shanel-lal-manly-players-pick-and-choose-when-it-suits-them-to-be-christian-like/EWLHWWZUQTWQAIPCNEFAEF2ZCA/>.

²³⁷ Teach Not Preach, "What We Do," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://teachnotpreach.org.nz/what-we-do/>.

²³⁸ Change.org, "Say No to Bible Classes in School Time," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.change.org/p/minister-of-education-hon-chris-hipkins-say-no-to-bible-classes-in-school-time>.

²³⁹ New Zealand Government, *Education and Training Act 2020*, s. 58, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/LMS177675.html#LMS177675>.

such.²⁴⁰ Regardless of the tax implications, this kind of advocacy reveals at the least indifference, and potentially hostility, to religions such as Christianity.

Self-inflicted wounds

A more awkward threat to Christian freedom of belief is how some Christians speak and act. We might refer to these direct threats as self-inflicted wounds. Clearly, I'm using broad brushstrokes here and I don't intend to paint all Christians at once. It's just that we sometimes get it wrong and make things harder for ourselves.

I've seen self-inflicted damage take place in two main ways.

First, there is the difficulty some Christians have in finding an appropriate posture in the face of incomprehension or hostility. Positioning can be hard at the best of times, and as Christians we should be known for our respect, compassion and generosity of spirit. However, we must not shy away from conflict when it comes, as it inevitably will. Too often Christians seem to lack courage in their convictions, even when the stakes are high, and to be satisfied with taking only those positions that the cultural majority deems appropriate. At the same time, this is not a licence to be strident and confrontational, a stance that can do more harm than good.

As always, the task is to imitate Jesus' example and understand His teaching. For example, Bishop Robert Barron, writing about Jesus' teaching to 'turn the other cheek,' argues this does not mean we should submit to an aggressor. Rather, he writes, 'Jesus is recommending neither fighting back nor fleeing, but rather standing one's ground.'²⁴¹ This, he adds, 'is not to run or to acquiesce, but rather to signal to the aggressor that you refuse to accept the set of assumptions that have made his aggression possible. It is to show that you are occupying a different moral space.'²⁴²

Second, Christians often fail to read the signs of the times. We don't seem to be very good at thinking deeply about where we've come from and where we're going, which makes us liable to attempt jumping aboard ships that have already sailed. As an example, consider the environmental movement. Christians are environmentalists now, too, but only after everyone else went there first. As we try to play catch-up with what's already gone, we seem blind to emerging trends like transhumanism and the technological changes that are forcing us into increasingly disembodied lives. A wise friend said to me

²⁴⁰ Department of Internal Affairs New Zealand, *Briefing to Incoming Minister October 2023*, accessed July 6, 2024, [https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Briefing-to-Incoming-Minister-October-2023/\\$file/BIM-2023-October-Minister-for-Community-and-Voluntary-Sector_Redacted.pdf](https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Briefing-to-Incoming-Minister-October-2023/$file/BIM-2023-October-Minister-for-Community-and-Voluntary-Sector_Redacted.pdf).

²⁴¹ Robert Barron, *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* (New York: Image Books, 2011), 50.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

recently, ‘The question for the Church in the twenty-first century is, what does it mean to be human?’ I’m not sure most of us have a compelling answer or have even recognised the question.

An example: the Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Act 2022

Let’s look at an example that brings these threats together.

Parliament has prohibited ‘conversion practices,’ that is, ‘any practice, sustained effort, or treatment’ that is ‘directed towards an individual’ and ‘done with the intention of changing or suppressing the individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.’²⁴³ In context, the mere expression of a ‘belief or religious principle made to an individual’ is not a conversion practice so long as it is ‘not intended to change or suppress the individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.’ The Act also says that ‘facilitating an individual’s coping skills, development, or identity exploration’ is not a conversion practice.²⁴⁴

Someone who commits or arranges a conversion practice could be the subject of a proceeding in the Human Rights Review Tribunal,²⁴⁵ where remedies include a damages award of up to \$350,000.²⁴⁶ Offenders could also be subject to a criminal prosecution with a maximum penalty of three years’ imprisonment in relation to under 18s, or five-years’ imprisonment where ‘serious harm’ results, if the Attorney-General consents to the prosecution.²⁴⁷

No-one should be coerced into any kind of conversion attempt, and there are awful accounts of where this has been done that I don’t defend. But the law doesn’t just capture those scenarios. While the Act doesn’t require automatic and uncritical adoption of an affirming approach,²⁴⁸ it gives examples of conversion practices that include,

²⁴³ New Zealand Government, *Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Act 2022*, s. 5, accessed July 10, 2024,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0001/latest/whole.html#LMS487215>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 5(2)(f).

²⁴⁵ New Zealand Government, *Human Rights Act 1993*, s. 63A, accessed July 6, 2024,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0082/latest/LMS738902.html>.

²⁴⁶ *Human Rights Act 1993*, s. 92I,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0082/latest/DLM304940.html>, and s92Q,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0082/latest/DLM304965.html>.

²⁴⁷ *Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Act 2022*, s. 8(2),

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0001/latest/LMS487630.html>, s. 9(2),

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0001/latest/LMS487635.html>, and s. 12,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0001/latest/LMS494268.html>.

²⁴⁸ Nicolette Levy KC, “Genspect - Countering Hate Speech Aotearoa Complaints to RNZCPG and Others,” Free Speech Union, October 30, 2023. Accessed July 6, 2024,

‘carrying out a prayer-based practice ... intending to change or suppress an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.’ Whether the individual involved consented to the conversion practice is not a defence.²⁴⁹ Now, hypothetically, imagine a 17-year-old struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction or gender incongruence who asks their youth pastor for prayer to help them resist those feelings. That pastor can mitigate their legal risk in various ways, but there’s an obvious risk here that what they might regard as a straightforward orthodox Christian response might run counter to the intent of the Act.

So, there are difficult questions heightened by the relative newness of this law. Key concepts are also yet to be tested in court, and the actual meanings and scope are not yet clarified. Rather than try to resolve those questions now, I just want to point out that this law is typical of the current threats to living out Christian beliefs. First, the new legislation involves an indirect threat because it reflects an increasingly widespread cultural assumption that it’s up to each of us to determine who we are in accordance with some internal sense that only we can define, and that our physical reality including our bodies can be manipulated to match. This isn’t anti-Christian per se, though it is an update on the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.²⁵⁰

The new law also demonstrates direct (potential) threats because the legislation was promoted by some highly committed activists unlikely to take kindly to anyone with conflicting beliefs. Behind them looms the shadow of the law’s sanctions, not to mention the broader cultural message that laws like this send, implying that historic, orthodox Christian belief is out of step with the cultural powers of today. That conclusion has troubling implications for those of us who hold those beliefs.

So, how can we respond?

If I had to sum up a recommended response to these threats in one word, I’d say: *creativity*. We can’t just sit back and complain about these threats, and we can’t just critique what’s going on. We must be generative.

Creativity starts with an honest appraisal of our current position. Let’s be realistic: Christians are a cultural minority, and many ordinary Christian views aren’t popular. We should respond with hope, courage, and creativity. Threats don’t necessarily arise because people oppose us, but because they don’t understand us. We can change that.

<https://www.fsu.nz/genspect-countering-hate-speech-aotearoa-complaints-to-rnzcp-and-others>.

²⁴⁹ *Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Act 2022*, s. 10,

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0001/latest/LMS487634.html>.

²⁵⁰ Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” *First Things*, December 2016. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/gnostic-liberalism>.

Let's consider the example of God's people in exile. I owe this idea to Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the UK, who suggested that Christians should find inspiration in the words of Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles: '...seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'²⁵¹ Rabbi Sacks put it like this:

What Jeremiah was saying was that it is possible to survive in exile with your identity intact, your appetite for life undiminished, while contributing to the wider society and praying to God on its behalf. Jeremiah was introducing into history a highly consequential idea: the idea of a creative minority.²⁵²

And later:

So you can be a minority, living in a country whose religion, culture, and legal system are not your own, and yet sustain your identity, live your faith, and contribute to the common good, exactly as Jeremiah said. It isn't easy. It demands a complex finessing of identities. It involves a willingness to live in a state of cognitive dissonance. It isn't for the fainthearted. But it is creative.²⁵³

As Sacks suggests, being creative will require courage. That's most obvious when we think about cultural hostility to Christian faith, but the alternative is to simply drift with the mainstream. GK Chesterton once said, 'A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.'²⁵⁴

We will need to think anew about how we maintain a living and vital faith in the age we inhabit, the kind of faith that enables us to be creative and courageous, to respond to threats with grace and hope, and to seek the common good of all our neighbours.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for Christians to be able to live out their faith? Which ones have you experienced personally?
2. Being a creative minority 'starts with being realistic about our current position.' In what areas do you think Christians are too optimistic or too cynical about our current cultural challenges?

²⁵¹ Jeremiah 29:7.

²⁵² Jonathan Sacks, "On Creative Minorities," *First Things*, January 2014. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/01/on-creative-minorities>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ See G.K. Chesterton, "Essential Chesterton," The Society of G.K. Chesterton, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.chesterton.org/quotations/essential-chesterton/>.

3. If it's true that we need to be creative and generative to maintain a living faith in the face of threats to Christian belief, how could you begin doing this?

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

17. The voice of a remnant: Christian speech and public theology

Jonathan Ayling

“...many Christians think we have a binary option: either to present the truth of our offensive message offensively or make our message palatable to present an inoffensive message inoffensively. But we are called to both grace and truth.”

As Christians, we believe that all of creation came into being through the spoken word of God.²⁵⁵ We also believe that, at the end of time itself, our new home will be announced by ‘a loud voice from the throne.’²⁵⁶ Even in this time in between these times, Christ himself, ‘The Word’,²⁵⁷ gave voice to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

Words are clearly important! We should also note that the Scriptures also state that ‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue,’²⁵⁸ so there is more to words than simply speaking kindly to one another. Clearly, Christians and the Church would do well to pay careful attention to the words and language used when engaging with society.

The author of Hebrews categorises the Church as wanderers and sojourners in this land, ‘sojourners and exiles,’²⁵⁹ a people of whom the world is not worthy. We form part of the ‘remnant’ which God preserves.²⁶⁰ This remnant gives voice to public theology, whereby we prophetically speak the things of God in a context where we, along with our voice and message, are usually unwelcome. The remnant speaks into a world where the Kingdom of God is not yet fully established. Public theology is how we seek to expand the intentions of our King.

²⁵⁵ Genesis 1:3.

²⁵⁶ Revelation 21:3.

²⁵⁷ John 1:14.

²⁵⁸ Proverbs 18:21; see also James 3:6.

²⁵⁹ Hebrews 11:13-14.

²⁶⁰ See, for example, Isaiah 10:20-23; Jeremiah 23:3; Micah 5:7-9.

In support of this activity there are three core pillars we must keep in mind: presence, translation, and gift.

Presence

Aotearoa New Zealand does not pursue the path intended or it by God because of the weakness of our Christian light and witness. Our nation pursues the path it is currently set on, characterised by humanism, because far too much of the light intended to shine before others²⁶¹ has abdicated its responsibility. Most of us could name one-hundred-and-one things wrong with the direction we are taking as a society. But what are we doing to change that? There is a great need for the people of God to be stirred from disengaged indifference, and to instead rekindle a blazing light in our communities. This will require much effort and much sacrifice, but we must be at the table.

My parents worked as missionaries for almost 20 years in rural Mozambique. They went knowing that they were not the best missionaries; but if they didn't go, who would? They were not the best preachers, but if they didn't speak, who would? Edmund Burke claimed, 'Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.'²⁶² Being passive is not an option for the children of God. Our motivation is the example of Christ, who urges us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,²⁶³ and asking that the will of God be established in every part of our nation.²⁶⁴

If we are to bring the light of life into contemporary debates, we must be at the table. We must be present the first of our three pillars. And when we are present at the table, we must speak intelligibly, which requires us to translate our meaning so that it connects with our audience.

Translation

The second pillar upon which public theology rests is translation. Unless the Church can communicate in the vernacular of the age, its presence is worthless. Translation is vital to public theology, primarily to avoid exclusivity and the construction of walls which can easily result from the language we use. Unless we translate, our presence is meaningless.

²⁶¹ Matthew 5:16.

²⁶² "Edmund Burke Quotes," BrainyQuote, accessed July 6, 2024, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/edmund_burke_100421.

²⁶³ Matthew 5:33.

²⁶⁴ Matthew 6:10.

Importantly, the need for translation is not to say that the unique claims of our faith are in any way invalid. Instead, it is to suggest that the way we communicate Christian values must be as consumable as possible, even if those we are trying to persuade do not share them. Our ideas may be considered foreign, which calls for a type of bilingualism.

Because of the increasingly diminished position of Christianity within society, we must be increasingly aware of the language we use. Acts 2 highlights the significance of translation and its role within public theology; when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples at Pentecost, those in Jerusalem heard ‘them telling on our own tongues the mighty works of God.’²⁶⁵ Some 3,000 souls were added to the number of disciples on that day,²⁶⁶ a considerable proportional increase! Another example of this important feature is seen in Acts 17, where the Apostle Paul, in discourse with the Athenians, refers to the ‘unknown God’ within their Pantheon.²⁶⁷

The need for translation in public theology is more vital now than ever, as the gulf between ‘the remnant’ and ‘the world’ widens. Paul did not demand that society accept the authority of the Bible or the validity of his claims concerning Christ, but he did reason with their representatives in their own terms, with reference to their own gods. We, too, must speak in terms that ‘the world’ can receive. This requires a great deal of humility from us.

I believe that there is nothing more powerful than the Word of God. The ‘sword of the Spirit’²⁶⁸ is indispensable if our light is to shine across Aotearoa New Zealand, but let us use the Bible as a scalpel, in the sense of surgically attending to our nation’s critical wounds, and not as a club as a means of pummelling it to our point of view.

Gift

As a final pillar, a public theology seeking to have a faithful presence toward translating its claims into contemporary language must also offer its value and service *as a gift*. Jesus’s instruction to his twelve disciples when sending them out, as recorded in Matthew 10, was, ‘You received without paying; give without pay.’²⁶⁹ This command comes in the context of an early and confronting public theology where Jesus sends the disciples to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (verse 6). His further instructions were also confronting; they were to say, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (verse 7). But,

²⁶⁵ Acts 2:12.

²⁶⁶ Acts 2:41.

²⁶⁷ See Acts 17:23.

²⁶⁸ Hebrews 4:12.

²⁶⁹ Matthew 10:8.

alongside this, they were to give the gifts modelled by Jesus himself: ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers’ (verse 7).

We are recipients of such gifts from God; as recipients, it would be entirely against the nature of a true public theology to then not humbly pass these gifts on. James states that ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights....’²⁷⁰ Whatever value lies within the message of public theology did not originate within the Church.

The supernatural grace of God is the ultimate blessing, the ultimate gift, which public theology seeks to impart. So public theology must seek to be present in the world it seeks to bless. It is, ultimately, a response to our call to be a blessing to the world around us, passing on the blessing from God we ourselves have received. Our challenge is to translate the terminology of the blessing we have received and present it as a gift.

C.S. Lewis poignantly wrote, ‘The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.’²⁷¹ Our message brings transformation to individuals, through which life and light will come into our nation. We are not the author of this transformation, but we are called to be its conduit. Our message will bring life and light into our nation. We are not the author of this life, but we are called to be its conduit.

Fragility of witness without the three pillars

Before starting work as the Chief Executive of the Free Speech Union, I worked as an advisor in the Beehive and in Parliament. There, I worked on key conscience issues like abortion reform and euthanasia. On both issues, I was part of a team representing a Christian view of legislation later passed by a matter of a handful of votes.

I was struck during the debates taking place on both these issues when I noticed that those in favour and those opposed were often talking entirely past each other. Those in favour of abortion reform and euthanasia spoke of bodily autonomy, personal freedom, and dignity. Who doesn’t agree with that? Those opposed talked about valuing life, care in suffering, and a slippery slope; who could disagree? Both sides spoke of compassion but were assigning very different meanings to the word and taking very different perspectives on it.

I remember the moment I realised that we would lose both these fights. I was sitting in the Speaker’s Gallery above Parliament while one of the debates went on below. I

²⁷⁰ James 1:17.

²⁷¹ “Quotes by C.S. Lewis,” QuoteFancy, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://quotefancy.com/clive-staples-lewis-quotes>.

realised that neither side was speaking to the other side at all. Both sides were just banging their fists on the table, repeating lines on issues that, in isolation, everyone agreed with yet were failing to engage the other side with anything resembling persuasion. That's why we lost.

In these debates it wasn't that we weren't right, eloquent, or thorough. It was simply that we were not speaking in a manner that engaged the other side. Without a robust public theology, the voice of 'the remnant' will always be like this. We may be right, but unless we are at the table (with presence), speaking in terms others can receive (through translation), and humble in our delivery (offering gift), our voice will lack persuasiveness. Today the Church is relegated to the periphery of public discussion. So, if the Church fails to use its language to engage persuasively in battles of ideas, our Christian influence will be undermined by speech the world does not value. Before long, our right to speak out at all will be threatened.

To illustrate the pillars, I had an interesting conversation recently when I was in Washington DC for a meeting with other human rights activists from around the world. I spoke with a woman whose organisation works in North Korea. One of their tactics for supporting human rights is to send helium balloons across the border from South Korea to North Korea, with objects attached such as some cash or food, but they can also include cultural content, such as music and films on USBs.

When talking with a young North Korean woman who had escaped from the North to the South via China, the colleagues of this human rights leader I was speaking with asked the refugee, 'What made you want to flee North Korea? According to your leaders, you lived in a workers' paradise. Why would you want to leave that?' She replied by saying that she had found one of the USBs the organisation had sent over. On it, she had found the film *Titanic*. She said, 'I had never imagined a love like that between Jack and Rose could exist; a love where someone would lay themselves down for someone else.'

When I heard this story, my heart broke. It is tragic that a political ideology has so comprehensively extinguished the very idea of sacrificial love. The great hope of this world, for all humanity, is found in the truth that there is a love so great it led Someone to lay themselves down for us. But the reality is, for many even in the West, this idea is entirely foreign and perhaps even inconceivable. The degree to which this claim is true is the degree to which the Church is failing in its crucial role of engaging in public theology, through presence, translation, and gift, and speaking as the remnant of the people of God to a needy world.

Gaining our voice

Christian witness is, by its very nature, offensive to ‘the world.’ We must acknowledge, and even embrace, this truth. We must also develop and unashamedly use those tools and techniques that enable us to present our ‘offensive’ message in manners as winsome and gracious as possible. Unfortunately, many Christians think we have a binary option: either to present the truth of our offensive message offensively or make our message palatable to present an inoffensive message inoffensively. But we are called to both grace and truth. Until we are confident that, equipped by the Holy Spirit, we can speak with both grace and truth into a situation, I think we are best to be silent.

To gain our voice, we must:

1. Be willing to step beyond the comfort of those who agree with us and take the ‘light of the Gospel of the glory of God’²⁷² to a darkened (and increasingly darker) world.
2. Understand the values that are being referenced by those in conversation. There is a saying that free speech first presupposes *free listening*. To fail to listen carefully at the outset leads to a failure in persuasion later.
3. Serve in humility, as ‘slaves of righteousness’,²⁷³ offering the gift we have received to others, with thankfulness and grace. Here, we are to follow the example of ‘he who humbled himself by being obedient’,²⁷⁴ who ‘was rich, but for our sake became poor’,²⁷⁵ and who washed the feet of his disciples.²⁷⁶

Across the world, the speech rights of dissenters are generally under threat. This is also true for Christians. If we are to effectively witness truth in a time of near-universal error, we must acknowledge that eloquence or correctness are not usually enough. Through presence, translation, and gift, the voice of the remnant of God will speak on behalf of he who ‘calls into existence the things that do not exist’,²⁷⁷ and we will tell the story of a sacrificial love beyond the imagination of our dying world, which will captivate the lost and draw them in.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What public space do we have access to in which we can speak words of life to a dead world?

²⁷² 1 Timothy 1:11.

²⁷³ Romans 6:17-18.

²⁷⁴ Philippians 2:8.

²⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

²⁷⁶ John 13:1-16.

²⁷⁷ Romans 4:17.

2. What language must we learn, to be able to communicate the Gospel in a way the listeners understand?
3. What does humility look like, as we serve in this space?

Pray:

- That Christ's presence in our own lives would lead us to be the very presence of Christ in the lives of those who don't know him, and in those places he is not loved.
- That the Holy Spirit would anoint our tongues again, so that our cities would hear the Gospel in their own language.
- That our Lord's example of humility and love would compel us to graciously offer ourselves as a gift to those around us.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

18. 'Disharmonious speech' and Christianity

Paul Moon

"...there is no such precision in any of the proposals relating to what constitutes disharmonious or hateful speech, and neither is there any clarity as to where exactly the threshold of criminal speech lies."

The opening proclamation in the Gospel of John, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God',²⁷⁸ is one of the most profound passages not only in the Bible, but in any literature. Of course, it is plain that the 'Word' is a metaphor for Christ, but there is much more to this term than its function as a rhetorical device. The 'Word' is a translation of 'Logos' in Greek. In this context, Logos refers to God being revealed in the world, but elsewhere in the New Testament, it is used for 'speech,' 'message,' or 'word.' Speech and words carry enormous importance in the Bible. Think of blasphemy, prayer, commandments, rebukes; these are all examples of speech at work, for various purposes.

Speech has remained important to Christians from the outset. In *Paradise Lost*, the seventeenth-century poet John Milton depicted Satan boasting to the other fallen angels of his success in corrupting Creation in the Garden of Eden. The Devil then waited for 'universal shout and high applause,'²⁷⁹ for his accomplishment, but instead was shocked when he instead he heard:

On all sides, from innumerable tongues
A dismal universal hiss, the sound
Of public scorn.²⁸⁰

God had punished the fallen angels by a fate Milton regarded as particularly damaging: removing their ability to speak. For Milton, the liberty to speak and to argue freely was 'above all liberties'²⁸¹ and was a central element of his faith.

²⁷⁸ John 1:1.

²⁷⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, line 505.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 507 - 509.

²⁸¹ John Milton, *Areopagitica*, para. 93.

The potency of speech was brought to the fore again in New Zealand following the terrorist attack on Christchurch mosques in March 2019. In the wake of that eruption of evil, some media outlets decided not to mention the terrorist's name, in an effort to avoid giving him even the scantest of recognition. This power of words was addressed more comprehensively at the close of 2020, when the Royal Commission's report on the attack tackled the issue of speech in relation to extremism. The Commission recommended that the Crimes Act 1961 be amended to include a provision covering the incitement of racial or religious disharmony. It proposed that it would be a criminal offence for a person who 'says or otherwise publishes or communicates, any words or material that explicitly or implicitly call for violence against or is otherwise, threatening, abusive, or insulting to such group of persons.'²⁸²

This recommendation was in keeping with the sentiment of a suggestion from 2017, contained in a report from the Human Rights Commission, which urged the Government to address and punish 'hateful and disharmonious speech targeted at the religion and beliefs of ethnic minority communities.'²⁸³

Clarifying hate

Violence, threats, and abuse are antithetical to the message of the Gospel, and so Christians might be expected to sympathise with the sentiments of these proposed changes. However, when it comes to 'insulting' language, hate speech, and so-called 'disharmonious speech,' there is certainly something of the devil in the detail, and for several reasons.

Firstly, the suggestion of criminalising 'hate,' although superficially appealing, is beset by a critical problem. For most other categories of crime dealt with by legislation, such as drink-driving, theft, assault, or fraud, the law is very clear on how these are defined. However, it is crucial to note that there is no such precision in any of the proposals

²⁸² Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, *Ko tō tātou kāinga tēnei: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*, 2020, hate speech and hate crime related legislation, S. 51 b), 33, companion report to *Report: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/assets/Publications/Hate-speech-and-hate-crime-related-legislation-Companion-legal-paper.pdf>.

²⁸³ Human Rights Commission Te Kāhui Tika Tangata, *Appendix to Submission of New Zealand Human Rights Commission 21st and 22nd Periodic Review of New Zealand under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, 2017, recommendation 2 (a), 1, accessed July 6, 2024, https://hrc-nz-resources.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/files/8215/0171/9491/Appendix_to_NZHRC_CERD_Submission_2017_-_Summary_of_Recommendations.pdf.

relating to what constitutes disharmonious or hateful speech, and neither is there any clarity as to where exactly the threshold of criminal speech lies.

The implications of this are chilling. The suggestion that a category of crime could be manufactured where the exact definition of what constitutes that crime is not spelt out, where offences would be judged on a case-by-case basis rather than against any specific, predetermined criteria, and where the accused would ultimately only find out if they are guilty of breaking the law at the moment that they are convicted, goes against many of the principles of natural justice.

It is also important to bear in mind that no jurisdiction in any country has yet delivered an unambiguous definition of hate speech. Instead, the potential will be for 'hate speech' to be defined in the same way that obscenity was categorised by the United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in 1964, with his pithy and wholly inadequate definition: 'I know it when I see it.' The vagaries of judicial intuition hardly seem like a solid basis on which to convict New Zealanders.

Secondly, as overseas experience has amply demonstrated, once put into legislation, speech offences can lead to egregious breaches of personal liberties. Comments that are not illegal can still be investigated by the police. There are many documented incidents in the United Kingdom, for example, where individuals have been apprehended by the police and had their electronic devices seized, and homes searched for expressing aspects of their religious faith in public.²⁸⁴ And although convictions may not always follow, the sheer effect of being apprehended, questioned, and having one's personal belongings examined simply for expressing an honestly-held religious belief can have the effect of suppressing the extent to which those beliefs are heard in public.

One of the specific categories that has been mentioned in the discussion on the proposed changes to the law to target 'hate speech' or 'disharmonious speech' is hate directed at particular religious beliefs. Again, on the surface, this hardly seems objectionable, but there would be critical implications for Christians if such measures were legislated for in New Zealand. The so-called 'Great Commission,' that injunction in Matthew 28, to 'go and make disciples of all nations',²⁸⁵ could come crashing against the brick wall of statute. Spreading the Christian message might be regarded (as it already has in overseas examples) as a form of disharmonious speech, and therefore those who undertake this activity could face legal consequences.

In addition, more generally, such a restriction would stifle opinions, curtail discussion, and potentially increase misunderstandings about people's faiths. Instead of honest

²⁸⁴ See, for example, Carrie Clark, "The Urgent Need to Teach the Police About Free Speech," *Free Speech Union*, March 2023, 8-12. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://freespeechunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Urgent-Need-to-Teach-the-Police-About-Free-Speech.pdf>.

²⁸⁵ Matthew 28:19.

examinations of religious beliefs, the ensuing climate of caution would merely prop up and perpetuate creedal caricatures, with only the brave or unwise few prepared to probe and challenge them. There is something fundamentally infantile in trying to build a legislative wall around a belief system, as a means of shielding it from criticism.

Testing the truth

Milton warned about this protective approach to religious beliefs. He condemned the sort of ‘cloistered virtues’ that were never put to the test. When did the truth ever suffer as a consequence of facing ‘a free and open encounter?’ he asked.²⁸⁶ Of course, the answer has to be ‘never,’ because if a belief was dismantled through discussion, then it was not the truth it was purported to be in the first place.

Another consideration that the threat of hate speech or disharmonious speech laws does not allow for is the possibility that the tenets of some religions might *deserve* ridicule or contempt. Should we be free, for example, to direct our strong condemnation towards those followers of the Celtic religion who carried out human sacrifice? Or would such criticism be an incitement of religious disharmony? And what if a religion preaches some form of racism? Surely, stirring up contempt for such beliefs should almost be obligatory rather than prohibited? The proposed speech laws that would ban hate speech or disharmonious speech are (unsurprisingly) mute when it comes to such dilemmas. This betrays a simplistic appreciation of the issues involved in free speech.

One of the most crucial deficiencies with the notion of disharmonious speech is that it would not, strictly speaking, address the *content* of what is said, but rather the *reaction* to what is said. A statement would be deemed disharmonious by virtue of the fact that it resulted in disharmony, rather than specifically what was said. It therefore follows that a disharmonious reaction to a statement would be an effective means of shutting down the person making that statement. This empowers an opponent of certain speech by giving them the opportunity to criminalise those making comments that they do not like, rather than confronting the alleged deficiencies in those comments through reasoned arguments. Such measures would end up rewarding those throwing the tantrum rather than encouraging them to contest in a mature way the views that they find disagreeable.

Yet another deficiency with proposed laws against hate speech or disharmonious speech is the naivety on which such proposals are based. The suggestion that ‘hate’ (however it is defined) can somehow be reduced through legislation goes against all experience. Instead of hateful views being extinguished by statute, history shows that, on the contrary, prohibitions are far more likely to have the effect of driving hate underground,

²⁸⁶ *Areopagitica*, para. 95.

where it festers before re-emerging in newly codified forms that camouflage the hateful core, and consequently make it much harder to tackle.

Furthermore, there are numerous historical examples where what would be classified as categories of disharmonious speech have led to social improvement. The abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa are all cases where disharmonious speech directed at systems of belief led to millions of people's lives being improved. Indeed, Christianity itself emerged in an environment which was hostile to its tenets, and since its inception, innumerable of its adherents have been persecuted and killed for expressing their beliefs.

Challenges ahead

From all these examples, it ought to be self-evident that any plans to criminalise honestly expressed speech that has no ill intention, and to judge it according to a definition of disharmonious speech that no jurist has ever defined with sufficient precision, are deeply troubling. It is just as concerning that the measure of disharmonious speech would not be the content of that speech, per se, but the reaction to it by the offended party; an aspect of disharmonious speech that effectively encourages disharmonious reactions rather than reasoned responses to comments. And if what's past is prologue, such changes to the law regulating speech would have a suffocating effect on the free expression of honestly held views and would have the potential to debilitate efforts to spread the Christian faith in any jurisdiction where there are individuals or groups who are prepared to act disharmoniously to its message.

What can we do? The questions below will help you consider a response.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. What aspects of Christianity have you noticed have become unpopular to talk about over the past few decades?
2. Are there environments where you feel it would be unwise to discuss all aspects of your faith?
3. What examples are there in the New Testament of people sharing their faith in hostile environments?

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several of the country's significant historical figures. Popular titles include *The Rise and Fall of James Busby* and *A Draught of the South Land*.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

19. How can we speak well to our current context?

Phil Guyan

“From my observation, if there is one thing we must learn if we seek to persuade anyone of God’s love, it is that we must elevate relationship above dogma. Put relationship above doctrine. Above theological differences.”

Once upon a time, in the mid-twentieth century, it was assumed that New Zealand was a ‘Christian country’, built on Christian values.

Or so we like to imagine.

Irrespective of whether that was ever the case, we know that times have changed. The Christian voice is no longer the majority (if it ever was); we are now a minority voice.

This is an uncomfortable place for some. We are no longer driving cultural values. We do not hold political power. Our morals are no longer the dominant, and nor are our assumed values held in public institutes, such as schools.

When we read or watch the news, written and produced by people who do not necessarily align with our way of thinking, it can look dreadfully un-Christian. Which is ironic because that’s exactly how many of those same people *view us*. David Kinnaman, CEO of a research company called Barna Group, surveyed and inter-viewed thousands of young adults, then wrote a book called *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and why it matters*. His conclusion was that young adults have an idea of what Christianity should look like, and then, essentially, say that Christians are the opposite.

He writes:

As you interact with your friends, the labels “hypocritical,” “conversion-happy,” “antihomosexual,” “sheltered,” “too political,” and “judgmental” are welded to what

many people think about you. You do not have to like this, but it's a fact of our complex world.²⁸⁷

Kinnaman concludes that attitudes towards Christianity are not only negative but have become increasingly hostile.

There have always been societal divisions around ideological issues. Over the last thirty years or so there have been impassioned debates over abortion, civil unions, gay marriage, smacking, and so on. It feels like now every week there's a new hot topic to divide us.

People seem angrier and more polarised. And, while we see it play out on TV, on radio, in the news and in our political debates, it plays out most virulently on social media. Interestingly, the most viral content on social channels occurs in negative posts, particularly when you diss an enemy.²⁸⁸ Jesus, though, said to *love* your enemy,²⁸⁹ but social media rewards deriding your enemy. As I write, the United States is entering another election cycle.

Biden supporters love a funny meme or video clip making Trump look like a narcissist.

Equally, Trump supporters love a funny meme or video making Biden look like a doddering old fool.

These are the sort of social posts that go viral. We've become increasingly tribal, and we love to diss our opponents. Unfortunately, many Christians, too, enjoy and join these tribal dissing matches, especially in social media comment threads.

Opportunities for divisiveness

Here is a quick list of things that people today are divided over:

- Transgender v women's rights
- Gender reassignment surgery for children
- Conversion therapy
- Hate speech
- Freedom of speech
- Israel/Palestine
- Transgender athletes in sport
- Climate change
- Co-governance
- Bible in schools
- White privilege

²⁸⁷ David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons, and George Barna, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).

²⁸⁸ Stephen Dubner, "Why Is U.S. Media So Negative?," *Freakonomics Radio*, October 6, 2021. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/why-is-u-s-media-so-negative/>.

²⁸⁹ Matthew 5:43-48.

- Cancel culture
- Housing affordability
- Capital gains taxes
- Boot-camps for ram raiders
- Race-based politics
- Religion
- Gender pro-nouns
- Colonialism
- Trust, or distrust, of traditional media
- Fake news
- Male privilege

I could go on. This is a quarter of my original list. I hasten to add that this list is not intended to indicate these issues as those on which Christians should be taking a particular side; I list them only because they are, in fact, divisive.

When your kids, grandkids, and church members are scrolling on TikTok, this is the world they are exposed to. Never-ending divisiveness. It's profoundly stressful. These issues are causing a lot of anxiety in young people and a corresponding loss of hope.

It's not just the friction that divisive polarising issues present in themselves, it's the damage these arguments cause to relationships. We all experienced, over recent years during COVID times, the arguments surrounding vaccines, mandates, mask-wearing, social distancing, lockdowns, and government policy regarding New Zealanders re-entering the country. These all caused all sorts of family and relational rifts.

Some refer to these divisive issues as Culture Wars. We will not win these, if indeed there is a 'Christian' side to win! And, when we try, we will not be leading people to Jesus.

In my experience, people considering divisive issues are most won over by the person who is the most likable, most humble, the funniest, the most compassionate, and the most reasonable sounding. Sadly, particularly on social media, that is seldom the Christian.

The research in the book *unChristian*, which I recommend, reveals that trying to win the culture wars will drive more people away from Jesus.

When was the last time you saw a trans-advocate on social media say, 'Oh, thank you for pointing out that my insistence that you use my preferred pronouns is stupid. Please introduce me to your Jesus. He sounds great.' From my observation, if there is one thing we must learn if we seek to persuade anyone of God's love, it is that we must elevate relationship above dogma. Put relationship above doctrine. Above theological differences.

We must elevate love of the person we hope to reach, above trying to change them. Let God change them (if He so wishes!)

One of the saddest conversations I ever had was with a Christian dad of a gay son, who began the conversation by proudly telling me how he'd stood his ground. But, by the end of the conversation, he was in tears over the fact that he'd not spoken with his beloved son for three years.

Christian author Rachel Held Evans said, 'One of the most destructive mistakes we Christians make is to prioritise shared beliefs over shared relationship, which is deeply ironic considering we worship a God who would rather die than lose relationship with us.'²⁹⁰ She is right. When we think of all of these issues which divide, it is valuable to ask ourselves this question: 'Can I love and build relationship with the other, if they sit on the other side of this ideological, political, or theological divide?'

We can have all the right opinions, the purest doctrine, and the best biblical literacy. But, if we do not have love, we are 'a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.'²⁹¹ Indeed,

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.²⁹²

We can be confident in our faith. And, if what we believe as Christians about Jesus is true, if it is real, we don't need to feel threatened or offended by other ways of thinking.

We must learn to speak and conduct ourselves as a minority. In a pluralistic society, we are one of many voices. Yes, we want a seat at the table, but we do not *own* the table. We must learn to be respectful to the others seated at the table with us. We must learn to speak as a minority, without trying to regain a sense of power that was never ours.

Seeking power and influence is the antithesis of the Gospel message. Let's remember Philippians 2 verses 5-8:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

²⁹⁰ Patrick K. Phillips, "10 Rachel Held Evans Quotes I Hope Aren't Forgotten," *Patrick's Place* (blog), last modified 8 December, 2019. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.patrickkphillips.com/faith/10-rachel-held-evans-quotes-i-hope-arent-forgotten/>.

²⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

²⁹² 1 Corinthians 13:4-13.

We are not called upon to seek after power and influence. We are called to wash feet, to bless, love and serve.

There are seven guiding principles that guide Good Mahi²⁹³ in its work, as it seeks to help organisations communicate faithfully and effectively in the public domain, and in this cultural moment.

1. *The First Shall be Last (Set the Right Objectives).*
 2. *The Truth Will Set You Free (Illuminate the Truth).*
 3. *Go to the Cross Believing in the Resurrection (Ensure Good Tone & Posture).*
 4. *Blessed are the Pure in Heart (Act with Integrity & Good Faith).*
 5. *Sort Wheat From Chaff (Demonstrate Nuance).*
 6. *Discern the Times & Seasons (Know Your Audience).*
 7. *Get a Gold Coin From a Fish's Mouth (Be Creative & Surprising).*
- John Watson, Founding Director of Good Mahi.
-

The opportunities available to us

So, let me leave you with a big, bright ray of light. Amidst all this division and despair are myriad opportunities to bless, love and serve.

I live in East Auckland, and we have a local Facebook group, the ‘East Auckland Grapevine.’ A trend I’ve noticed recently is people posting that they are lonely. ‘Will someone please be my friend?’ ‘Where can I meet people?’ It’s fascinating because it sits among all the angry culture war division. The vulnerability of these posts stands out, because I suspect many people, especially young people, have culture war fatigue. Interestingly, if you read down through the comments in these vulnerable threads, people respond with wonderful warmth and empathy, and offers of friendship and hospitality.

In contrast, on the very first night of the Congress that is the inspiration of this book, someone shared that she’d visited more than one hundred churches over three years and had experienced very little hospitality. She had never been lonelier. That is a devastating indictment on the Church. We cannot blame ‘culture wars’ for that. We can’t blame the media, or politicians, or trans-activists, or the rainbow community, or colon-ialism, or TikTok. That is on us.

Let me finish with a story. It was ‘Pride Week’ 2018, in Austin, Texas. There was an LGBTQIA+ parade. While some religious groups went along to protest, one particular church group had something very different in mind.

They were there to give out hugs. They set up a tent and printed T-shirts.

²⁹³ “Good Mahi,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.goodmahi.co.nz/>.

One woman from the church wrote this account:

My beloved little church went downtown to the #AustinPrideParade and gave out Free Mom Hugs, Free Dad Hugs, Free Grana Hugs, and Free Pastor Hugs like it was our paying jobs. And when I say hugs, I mean THE KIND A MAMA GIVES HER BELOVED KID.

Our arms were never empty. We ‘happy hugged’ a ton of folks, but dozens of times, I’d spot someone in the parade look our way, squint at our shirts and posters, and RACE into our arms. These were the dear hearts who said:

‘I miss this.’

‘My mum doesn’t love me anymore.’

‘My Dad hasn’t spoken to me in three years.’

‘Please just one more hug.’

You can only imagine what “Pastor Hugs” did to folks. 🙏 So we told them over and over that they were impossibly loved and needed and precious. And we hugged until our arms fell off. This is what we are doing here, what we are here for.²⁹⁴

The article on Instagram is accompanied by a photo of the smiling woman’s face covered in glitter, sweat and tears.

On the first night of the 2023 Christian Congress, about twenty people were invited to share in under sixty seconds what they felt was the single biggest issue facing the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. A disturbing number of them painted a picture of the Church under attack. I’m not sure I heard the word ‘love’ mentioned.

Imagine if, instead of having a tribal siege mentality, our churches were a place of loving embrace. A community of hope. A place where everyone is welcome. A refuge from the culture wars. A sanctuary, away from the madness. A loving community that embodies the One who transcends the culture wars.

A place where Jesus’s words resonate:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,

²⁹⁴ Jen Hatmaker, Instagram post, August 13, 2018. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BmXy5z7g5zL/>.

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.²⁹⁵

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Have you ever found yourself caught in a divisive argument over cultural or political issues? Share an experience and discuss how you might approach similar situations differently by prioritising relationship and love over winning the argument.
2. How can we as Christians ensure that our communications, whether in person, online, or in social media, are rooted in love even when we strongly disagree with others? What practical steps can we take to reflect Christ's love in our conversation?
3. How genuinely hospitable is our church? If a random person from our local community was asked for their impression of our church, what would they say? If a stranger turned up at our church, what would that experience be like for them?

Pray:

- Seek the humility to approach divisive issues with a spirit of understanding, curiosity and love rather than confrontation. Ask God to help Christians embody the humility and servant-hearted nature of Christ, especially in interactions on social media and in public debates.
- Pray for those who feel isolated and lonely in today's society, especially those marginalised by ongoing cultural wars. Ask God to comfort them and to inspire believers to reach out with genuine love and hospitality.
- Ask that Christians can find fresh ways to serve and bless their communities, especially those who are hurting or in need. Ask for opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ through acts of service, moving beyond words and dogma to impactful actions that reflect the Gospel.

Author Profiles:

Phil Guyan has been CEO of CBA (Christian Broadcasting Association) since 1995. The mission of CBA is to share the heart of the Christian faith in mainstream media.

Also contributing to this chapter is **John Watson** (Founding Director of Good Mahi, a communications consultancy for organisations contributing to the common good).

²⁹⁵ Luke 4:18-19.

Section Five:

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

CHAPTER TWENTY

20. Improving governance for faith-based organisations

Steven Moe

“Many people operate in governance roles when they do not truly understand what is required. Many are arguably not the right people for the role but have been asked to do it and feel obligated...”

We don’t talk much about governance for the Church and faith-based organisations, but we should. Governance is a critical skill for Christian leaders to cultivate to keep our churches and ministries safe.

We must start by considering what governance *is*.

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.²⁹⁶

Jesus’s words here capture a key aspect of governance: it involves being entrusted to look after something for someone else. In other words, Board members are *fiduciaries*. They have a responsibility to act in the best interests of those who benefit from the governance.

It is vital that governance is not confused for day-to-day management. Consider the analogy of a ship.

Someone is tasked with looking after the ship. Others ensure the sails are in good repair, that leaking holes are fixed, and that all the provisions are in place; these are responsible for managing the details. The people *in* the ship are the management. Now imagine a helicopter *above* that ship. The people in the helicopter can’t see the details; they’re too far off to notice a rip in the sails or any other repairs that may be needed. However, they can see things from their vantage point that the management on the ship cannot, like the iceberg in the distance!

²⁹⁶ Matthew 25:14.

The people in the helicopter are involved in *governance*. Their role is to oversee the big picture and to relay likely course changes to management. This is often called *strategy*. A common issue for those in governance is that they may be tempted, and sometimes even expected, to focus on day-to-day management matters. Instead, their eye must continuously maintain a strategic focus with gaze firmly set to the future.

Those in governance are known by different terms such as directors, trustees, or committee members depending on the legal structure they are governing. The critical point is, they are all in *governance* roles.

Faith-based governance is a special case

In our profession we have seen numerous issues, and occasionally *crises*, arise in faith-based entities because of inappropriate governance. Rarely is this attributable to poor intentions, as most people involved are motivated by the best intentions of their heart. Difficulties almost always arise when people are simply stuck in governance roles without having the right tools and knowledge in place; after all, ‘someone has to do it.’ There is another dynamic unique to faith-based entities: spiritual leadership will usually sit with a pastor or minister, who can significantly influence those with governance responsibilities.

Many people operate in governance roles who do not truly understand what their roles require. Many are arguably not the right people for the responsibilities required of them but have been asked to do it and feel obligated. Often there is little, if any, support and training available to assist them. Some may be hovering in the helicopter of governance from time to time while also cleaning the deck of the ship as volunteers in management.

It should be remembered also that faith-based organisations are not the same as companies or even other charities. So how can we improve faith-based governance when faith-based organisations are often operating for a higher purpose and calling?

Tips on improving governance at your church or ministry

Based on many years supporting hundreds of faith-based organisations across Aotearoa, here are our top eleven pieces of advice for enabling good governance in faith-based organisations.

- 1. Govern, don’t manage.**

Like those in the helicopter, those involved with governance need to be strategic. While some consideration of the past is needed for context, leaders need to prioritise the future, focusing on overall goals, aspirations, risks, and

opportunities. Of course, management is still necessary; but it is not the focus for those in governance roles.

2. **Know your entity type and purpose.**

We are contacted often by people who do not know what type of entity they are involved with. If you don't know, find out. You might be operating as an association, or a charitable trust, or as an incorporated society; the differences matter, because different rules apply to each structure. Importantly, your founding document will likely need a refresh to stay current, especially if yours was written with a typewriter!

3. **Know your legal duties.**

Yes, we all follow a higher calling. We must also all follow the laws of the land. The good news is that the governance duties as defined by law are well-intentioned. They aim to ensure governors are operating appropriately.

As an example, the *Trusts Act 2019* states that all trustees have a duty to know and act in accordance with the terms of the trust.²⁹⁷ If you are in governance, be honest: How well do you know the terms of your governance documents? Another *mandatory* duty is to act honestly and in good faith.²⁹⁸ There is also a duty to exercise powers for proper purposes.²⁹⁹

Additionally, there is a range of *default* duties, such as the duty to avoid conflicts of interest,³⁰⁰ the duty to invest prudently,³⁰¹ and the duty to be impartial,³⁰² to name a few. These can be modified by your trust deed.

Those in governance can be held liable for breaches of their duties, and ignorance is not a defence. Knowing your legal duties is as important as knowing and conducting your moral duties.

²⁹⁷ New Zealand Government, *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 23, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382902.html>; *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 24, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382903.html>.

²⁹⁸ *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 25, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382904.html>.

²⁹⁹ *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 27, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382906.html>.

³⁰⁰ *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 34, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382913.html>.

³⁰¹ *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 30, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382909.html>.

³⁰² *Trusts Act 2019*, s. 35, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0038/latest/DLM7382914.html>.

4. **Keep good records.**

This sounds obvious, but we often become involved in situations where this hasn't happened. Follow the processes set out in your governance documents and keep your governance documents up to date. In recent years the *Trusts Act 2019*, the *Charities Act 2005* and the *Incorporated Societies Act 2022* have all been updated, and this has implications for governance documents. In fact, from 2023 you are required to formally review your rules every three years.

Keeping good records is also very important for those new to governance. When new members come on board, make sure they are given the information and documents they need to get up to speed, and so they can see what decisions have been previously made and why.

5. **Keep learning.**

Commit to keep learning because what constitutes 'good governance' changes over time. It is fair to say that expectations are ever increasing! This might even involve investing in formal training so that you feel comfortable with the role.

There are many excellent free resources to be found online. There are also bodies such as the Institute of Directors³⁰³ and Community Governance Aotearoa³⁰⁴ that offer short courses, including financial literacy and governance. We also run regular events and training that allows you to meet and get to know others.³⁰⁵

6. **Accept what you do not know.**

Finances are often tight, so those in governance sometimes loath to use experts for advice and rely on a member of the parish instead. However, if you are embarking on a major project, you *need* experts. You cannot expect the tax lawyer in your congregation to also know about employment law.

³⁰³ Institute of Directors, "Welcome to the Institute of Directors, the Professional Body for Directors in New Zealand," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.iod.org.nz/>.

³⁰⁴ Community Governance, "Community Governance," accessed July 6, 2024, <https://communitygovernance.org.nz/>.

³⁰⁵ The best way to find out about these is to join our 'Impact Email List,' which goes to around 1,000, sharing upcoming events. You can sign up for our newsletter at <https://www.parryfield.com/>, bottom of page.

For those in governance, the buck stops with you. Our elders, trustees and officers are ultimately responsible for the health of our churches and charities and therefore play a critical role. However, governance is not well-understood and is even more complex in the space where general governance overlaps with spiritual matters. The future health of the New Zealand church and its activities will be partly dependent on how those in governance stay well informed, are proactive, and confidently keep their entities (and leaders) accountable to their mission. We encourage governors to be informed of their core legal duties so that they appreciate the responsibility they carry for the success of their entity.

Dan Mazengarb, CEO of Christian Savings.

7. **Make the hard decisions.**

Relationships and bonds form the glue at the heart of faith-based organisations. But, simply inviting family members or people you know to act in governance is not always wise and is, arguably, unfair to others who might be just as (or even more) capable. Bonds can also lead to *groupthink*, which describes when people are more focussed on maintaining loyalty and community than being willing to constructively challenge one another to ensure a decision is the *best* decision.

Also, avoid over-large governance groups because they are rarely effective. The rule of thumb would be five to seven members. While involving more people might seem like a great idea for strengthening community, it does not necessarily lead to good governance.

8. **Support your spiritual leaders.**

Spiritual leaders can end up with a disproportionate amount of responsibility, including taking on governance roles simply because no one else is prepared to. This works against attracting new people into spiritual leadership positions; besides, we all need to look after our leaders.

Furthermore, having spiritual leaders in governance can create challenges for group dynamics. Others in governance might be too nervous to speak up or challenge the position a spiritual leader may take. This places an unfair burden onto the spiritual leader; governance responsibility works best when it is shared and subject to critique. This point is part of a wider question about how your organisation or church is structured as there are different models, including apostolic, member-led, and denomination-led.

9. **Be intentional about succession.**

Don't leave succession to chance, because chances are it will be difficult to find people well-suited to immediately step into governance roles. Involve people as observers, particularly young people; what better way to pique their interest and set them up for success! Understand the skill sets that are missing

across the governance group and seek people who can fill the gaps; doing a Board Skills Matrix³⁰⁶ can help with this.

10. Embrace diversity.

Best practice governance embraces diversity. Diversity of perspectives helps to ensure ideas are constructively challenged and that new and different ideas can be included. Diversity of thought and experience helps to ensure a Board keeps pace with the world around them.

Cultural backgrounds can colour how people approach their role in governance, especially if someone is new to New Zealand. In my experience the governance in some Asian churches in New Zealand is influenced by two things. First, Asian churches often have a strong commitment to collectivism, wanting harmony and community. Second, hierarchy is often very important. These factors can make it hard for those in governance to feel comfortable speaking up. They may not want to 'rock the boat' by expressing a different view from the other board members, and they may think it is disrespectful to express a view that differs from a spiritual leader. Yet being free to speak up is important in governance. We need to be aware of how cultural backgrounds and how they can affect the way we govern.

Doris Tu, Partner, Parry Field Lawyers.

11. Be open to new ways.

We must carefully look after our assets, but that doesn't mean we should simply lock up funds in a bank to keep them safe. Currently billions of dollars are invested by trusts in bank accounts where they are only benefiting banks and those with shares in the banks. The money is 'safe,' but it is also being 'lazy.' Financial returns are typically modest. An alternative is to consider 'impact investing,' where funds are invested for impact *as well as* a financial return.

Be encouraged!

It is a privilege for anyone to be in governance. It is also a sizeable responsibility. Even when those in governance are volunteers, they must still exercise diligence, otherwise they are not fulfilling what they have been entrusted with.

Fortunately, we are not alone. If we are called to govern, then we will do so with the Grace of God and will strive to continuously learn and improve our governance capabilities. At the end of the parable that started this chapter, the servant is praised for

³⁰⁶ See, for example, the Director competency framework at Institute of Directors in New Zealand, "New Zealand Director Competency Framework," accessed July 6 2024, <https://www.iod.org.nz/resources-and-insights/guides-and-resources/director-competency-framework/#>.

being a good steward of what they were given. I hope the same will be said for each of us in governance of the Church and its ministries.

Small group questions

1. Are you involved in governance? If so, how did you get involved? If not, are you interested? How might you get started?
2. If you are in governance, when did you last look at the rules regarding your responsibilities? Are you aware of your legal duties? If not, do you know where to find the governance rules related to a charity or society you support?
3. In what ways is governance at your organisation (one you are either involved in governance for, or else support) different to others?

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Also contributing to this chapter are **Doris Tu** (also a partner at Parry Field Lawyers) and **Dan Mazengarb**, CEO of Christian Savings. Their combined experience and strong Christian faith make them ideally suited to advise on this topic.

Thanks are also given to Annemarie Mora, who reviewed the video clip that served as the basis for this chapter to ensure all points were covered.

Resources

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

21. Praying for Aotearoa New Zealand

Sam Harvey and Dale Campbell

“God’s presence is what marks us as distinctive, and His presence is enough. Prayer is simply what a church does when they want His presence at the centre.”

Kia ora koutou! It’s our privilege to share some of our joint heart for prayer. In a world and nation where prayer is more and more contested, the invitation of God to go deeper is more and more urgent. In this chapter we’ll begin by addressing some of the challenges to prayer, then move on to what we sense God is up to in our nation and around the world.

Prayer is a contested priority

The Bible is clear in its exhortation for us to be a praying people. Jesus, as he cleared the temple, expressed his desire that it would be a ‘house of prayer for all nations.’³⁰⁷ Jesus told his disciples to pray and not give up.³⁰⁸ Jesus ‘...often withdrew to desolate places and pray.’³⁰⁹ The book of Acts could be called a commentary between prayer meetings,³¹⁰ with Paul often encouraging his churches to ‘Continue steadfastly in prayer....’³¹¹

God has given us all we need for a life prioritised by prayer. On the one hand, the Spirit of God leads us in prayer. If we belong to God we have the Spirit, and therefore even the faintest, most inconsistent desire to pray is evidence of the Spirit’s provocation within us. The Spirit, amazingly, is not only the Person who gets us started in prayer, but also the personal presence of the One whose face we seek in prayer.

³⁰⁷ Matthew 21:13.

³⁰⁸ Luke 18:1-8.

³⁰⁹ Luke 5:6.

³¹⁰ Tim White, “Prayer in the Book of Acts,” *Dr. Tim White* (blog), July 7, 2021. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.drwhite.net/blog/2021/7/7/prayer-in-the-book-of-acts>.

³¹¹ Colossians 4:2.

On the other hand, we have the Word of God (the Scriptures). They are themselves a product of the inspiration of the Spirit. They are a God-breathed,³¹² God-given resource to inspire and direct our prayers. Sometimes, the Scriptures provide words which we can literally make our own in prayer. The Lord's Prayer,³¹³ the Psalms, and so many other prayers can be recited from on our own lips. We also get to learn from the example of others at prayer. We learn how to worship God with prayers of praise, to confess our sin, to ask for everything we need, to bring our laments and questions to our Father who understands all things, and ultimately to wrap all aspects of our lives in gratitude for the grace of God in creating and redeeming us.

There's really no debate about whether we should be a people of prayer. The more pressing and revealing question is: are we? Ronnie Floyd in his book *How to Pray* observes that 'prayer occurs when you depend on God. Prayerlessness occurs when you depend on yourself.'³¹⁴

In recent history, the Church has had an incredible volume of human methodology and technique directed at running church well, more than ever before. We've had remarkable personalities, productions, and programs across our churches recently, and yet we are witnessing a time of great decline in the Western church. Perhaps we have been relying on ourselves a little too much? The COVID-19 years have shaken us; perhaps God is inviting us to restore prayer to its rightful place in our church. If we are genuinely seeking a fresh missional zeal, desiring a renewing of the Church, and seeing the Kingdom of God advance, we first need to contend for a deep culture of prayer. This culture will reflect the priority we see given to prayer by Jesus and the early Church. Prayer is upstream from everything we long to see.

But this isn't going to happen without a fight; prayer is one of the most contested spiritual disciplines.

Consider this: we have a trillion-dollar industry working to entertain and distract us in our 'attention economy.' This is an industry so pervasive that the Apostle Paul would likely call this industry a 'principality' or 'power'! The introduction of the iPhone in 2007 has shaped our culture and let's admit, also impacted prayer. Both personal and corporate prayer now need a new degree of intentionality that they didn't need in the past.

It goes much deeper. The most troubling challenge for leaders across the Church is that, deep down, we can carry an inner agnostic that whispers scepticism into our hearts. We're not convinced that God hears and answers prayer, that He 'rewards those

³¹² 2 Timothy 3:16.

³¹³ Matthew 6:9-13; see also Luke 11:2-4.

³¹⁴ Ronnie W. Floyd, *How to Pray: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 20.

who seek Him.³¹⁵ We may give mental assent to the idea, but if you look at how churches spend time and money, prayer does not seem to be a high priority focus.

This inner agnostic is nurtured by the steady advance of secularism. As Jon Tyson puts it in the highly commendable podcast *The Awaken Network*,³¹⁶ secular culture is performing a kind of ‘reverse exorcism.’³¹⁷ Society is looking for any place where God is and driving him out in the name of Humanism. Our culture, armed only with the indifferent quantities and facts offered by naturalistic science, leaves its citizens grasping for meaning in a downward spiral of meaninglessness. Just about everything in our lives is being deconstructed, not least our convictions around prayer, the wellspring of our spiritual lives.

This was brought home to me shortly after Cyclone Gabrielle devastated my hometown of Napier. Before this, for many years we had fought hard to build a prayer culture in our church that I thought was robust. We had well attended and frequent corporate prayer meetings, and a strong discipleship culture that was seeing incredible fruit in restoring ‘quiet time’ activities across the members of our church.

But during the aftermath of the cyclone, with churches uniting to serve the community, I sensed God speak to me as clearly as I hear Him:

Sam, what the church is doing is beautiful, and it is so right that it responds in this way. But the reality is that in the long term, you believe you can do more for this region with a shovel than you can on your knees.

My inner agnostic was exposed. I repented and re-committed to building a culture of prayer that reflects a deep conviction that God bears and answers prayer.

Sam Harvey, co-author.

Pete Greig, the founder of *24-7 Prayer*,³¹⁸ spoke at a conference in Melbourne recently. He unpacked 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, an easy Scripture to preach, but a difficult one to live:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my

³¹⁵ Hebrews 11:6.

³¹⁶ Awaken Network, YouTube Channel, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/@AwakenNetwork>.

³¹⁷ Awaken Network, “The Impact of a Single Decision,” YouTube video, *Awaken Network*, September 12, 2023. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_P_70jlkwc.

³¹⁸ Pete Greig, “Who We Are,” 24-7 Prayer, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.24-7prayer.com/team/pete-greig/>.

name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

As Pete noted, we easily relate to the diagnosis of verse 13. It feels like we now are in a time with no rain, locusts, and plagues. We love the hopeful prognosis of God hearing, forgiving and healing the land; bring it on! But there is the giant ‘if’ in the middle of the passage, that challenges us. Will we call on the Name of the Lord, humble ourselves amidst an incredibly proud culture, repent of our sin, and seek the face of God in prayer? Pete challenged us by saying ‘It’s not that this passage has been tested and found wanting. It’s been desperately wanted but found very testing!’³¹⁹

Revival and unified prayer

At the same time Cyclone Gabrielle hit the Hawkes Bay, a renewal movement was happening in Asbury, a Christian university in Wilmore, Kentucky.³²⁰ What began as a simple unextraordinary chapel service turned into weeks of worship, repentance, and consecration among young people. There was no big production, little technology, and no big names. Any ‘Christian celebrities’ who came were told to simply pray along with everyone else. Yet, the Holy Spirit was experienced in a very tangible way. Many reflected that it seemed God was saying, ‘give me back my Church from personality, technique and programs.’ God’s presence is what marks us as distinctive, and His presence is enough. Prayer is simply what a church does when they want His presence at the centre.

The invitation of this moment for the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand is to make prayer a priority like it never has before, to have a heart like David who put the presence of God at the centre of Jerusalem again:

...let us bring again the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul.³²¹

If we are to *pray* like never before, we need to *unify* like never before. God has not only given us the Spirit of God and the Word of God, but also the People of God to lean on and learn from in prayer. Unified Prayer is like spiritual breathing. We vitally need one another! Two are better than one. Even Jesus asked his friends to pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane.³²² In the three-fold cord that we call confession, we weave ourselves as individuals, those with us, and God as we admit our wrongs.

³¹⁹ “2023 National Gathering Audio,” 24-7 Prayer Australia, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://24-7prayer.com.au/2023-national-gathering-audio/>.

³²⁰ “2023 Asbury Revival,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, last modified February 10, 2024. Accessed July 6, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Asbury_revival.

³²¹ 1 Chronicles 13:3.

³²² Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:37-38; Luke 22:40, 46.

We can also benefit richly from Christians from other denominations, other cultures, and even other epochs of history. We can pray along with St Francis of Assisi: ‘Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace....’³²³ We can learn from our Korean sisters and brothers how we might pray with unified passion and uplifted voices. We can all learn from one another in prayer, drawing together young and old, formal and informal, Catholics and Pentecostals, denominational and independent, large church or small church.

This need for unified prayer is threaded through our nation’s history. Long before European settlement or Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840, God seemed to have a plan for Māori and Pākehā uniting under the Gospel. The prophet Toiroa spoke of the new God to come, Tama-Irorokutia (*the Son who was killed*). God later orchestrated a friendship between Ngāpuhi rangatira (*chief*) Ruatara³²⁴ and missionary Samuel Marsden. Both shared a keen interest in agriculture leading to the introduction of seed wheat to Aotearoa New Zealand, and their spiritual conversations eventually led to the famous Christmas service in 1814 at Oihi Bay (arguably including the first public expression of Christian prayer in this land). Sadly, these seeds of unity were later infested by the weeds of war, land-confiscation, and many forms of injustice. As we approach 200 years following the signing of Te Tiriti, many of us pray for the Church to fully play its prophetic and peace-making part to see reconciliation, restitution, and mutual love between Māori and Pākehā.

The lyrics of our National Anthem take the form of a profound prayer for God’s protection, guidance, and flourishing. Let’s keep singing and praying that prayer! We need to pray not only for real-world change in the direction of justice, but for a holy combination of merciful patience and bold courage. These will inspire us to speak to and listen to one another, as we pursue God’s agenda in unity. If we pray and work well, God may well do a work in this land that would inspire others globally.

Pray for the grace to see the opportunities and invitations that can lay hidden within the challenges we face. We follow a Saviour who knows his way out of the grave. The more secularism spreads its emptiness and darkness, the more distinctly bright and fulfilling is the loving light of the Gospel. Learned historians, leading thinkers, and earnest seekers all around the world, as seen in Tom Holland’s book *Dominion*,³²⁵ are waking up to the reality that modern Western values like equal human rights, love, and compassion rest entirely on the heritage and claims of Christianity.

³²³ “Peace Prayer,” Loyola Press, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/peace-prayer-of-saint-francis/>.

³²⁴ “Ruatara,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1r19/ruatara/>.

³²⁵ Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Modern Mind* (London: Little, Brown, 2019).

God is up to something

There is renewed hunger in our country for prayer. Mark Sayers recently interviewed Dr Stuart Piggin, a church historian with a particular focus on renewal moments in church history.³²⁶ Dr Piggin notes that preceding moments of renewal in the Church there are three common things that begin to happen:

1. There is a commitment to extraordinary prayer.
2. An unexpected unity forms amongst the churches.
3. Emerging from 1 and 2 above is a heightened expectation about what God will and can do in their midst.

There are signs of life in the Aotearoa New Zealand church across these three dynamics. To mention just two examples among many, churches are gathering to pray together in arenas and town halls across the country under the ‘Open Heaven’ umbrella.³²⁷ Churches are uniting to pray into the day of Pentecost by setting up night and day prayer rooms across the country in partnership with *24-7 Prayer NZ*.³²⁸ Let’s celebrate this! Let’s lean in! Let’s pray with renewed faith across this nation:

Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.³²⁹

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. Consider how much time, money, or physical space is given to prayer in your life and in your church; consider, too, your personal social media and smart-phone use, and the ‘inner agnostic.’ What do these reveal about the priority of prayer?
2. How do you relate to Christians in other denominations? Do you have opportunities to pray together? Have you used them?
3. Read through and discuss each of the verses to the National Anthem.

³²⁶ “Stuart Piggin Interview Excerpt,” YouTube video, *24-7 Prayer Australia*, October 19, 2023.

Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y-gM4fNMOs>.

³²⁷ “Open Heaven,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://openheaven.nz/>.

³²⁸ “24-7 Prayer NZ,” accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.24-7prayer.nz/>.

³²⁹ Matthew 6:10.

Pray:

- Thank God for giving us the Spirit and the Word to help us pray, and ask for courage to prioritise prayer more in our calendars, churches and spaces.
- Pray for the Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to pursue just and reconciled relationships between Māori and Pākehā, and ultimately between all peoples.
- Ask God to open your eyes to how he is moving in this nation, and the grace to join him, starting with wherever you start from.

Author Profiles:

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Dale Campbell is Prayer Leader at Auckland Church Network, and Auckland Coordinator for 24-7 Prayer Aotearoa New Zealand. He's married to Diane, father to Thomas, loves woodworking, *Star Wars* and country music.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

22. Worship through songs: hands out of pockets, all on the stage

Grant Norsworthy

“Originally, the word ‘worship’ was a verb that meant ‘to show the worth of.’ How did we allow it to become an overused adjective (or an ineffective noun), linked so closely to the use of songs and music in the Christian Church? Isn’t the worship of God a full life response?”

‘Would you lead worship?’

If you’re at least a competent vocalist/musician within Christian Church circles, this might seem to be a rather innocuous, frequently asked and easily answered question. If I’m asked that question, I generally have a pretty good idea what the person means: there’s a church service, or some other gathering of Christians, coming up. I’m being asked to choose some appropriate ‘worship songs,’ assemble a ‘worship team,’ prepare them vocally, instrumentally, and technically; and then invite those who gather to worship God through those songs.

Whenever I’m asked the ‘Would you lead worship?’ question, initially I feel honoured and excited to say ‘yes.’ To have the opportunity and the responsibility of leading a group of people to worship Almighty God through songs is one of the most joy-filled things I get to do in my life. But soon after that initial warm glow has faded, especially if I will be filling this role in an unfamiliar setting, I gather information and realise that the task will have its challenges.

I was privileged to be asked the ‘Would you lead worship?’ question for the New Zealand Christian Leaders Congress a few months before its September 2023 schedule. I said ‘yes.’ But I did so realising that the challenges before me would be especially demanding in this particularly ecumenical situation.

What do you mean, ‘lead worship’?

The people at the Congress would be pastors and other church leaders from all over Aotearoa New Zealand. Well over half would be men. Most would be aged over 40, or perhaps even 50. They’d represent a wide variety of different denominations, Christian flavours, gathering styles, musical preferences, and theological emphases.

While I could assume that everyone in the room would agree on the fundamental, core tenets of faith in Jesus as the Christ, I could also expect some significant differences in how each of them might understand what ‘leading worship’ would, or even should, mean. That understanding would usually match their home congregation experiences.

Experience has taught me that, even though Church leaders talk a lot about Church unity, there are significant differences in our views, language, and practices about the worship of God and the role of music within our ‘worship gatherings.’ We might hope that these differences are purely stylistic, peripheral, and simply a reflection of personal, congregational, or denominational theological emphases. Perhaps the differences are simply like preferred flavours of ice cream. But you may have heard, or maybe even spoken, statements like these:

‘That was *not* worship!’

‘We can’t worship if you do *that* song.’

‘I can’t worship if *she’s* leading.’

‘It’s only real worship if we are singing *to* God, not just *about* God or to each other!’

‘They’re just frivolous ‘Jesus is my boyfriend’ songs! That’s not *genuine* worship!’

‘You were just leading communal singing. That’s *not* worship leading.’

I could go on, but you get the drift from this brief sample. I’ve heard these and many other criticisms from people in response to someone’s effort to lead sung worship. A couple of these were said to me about my own efforts. They are tough to hear, for sure.

Who is worship for?

It troubles me when I hear statements like those above. Not only do they show a tragic reduction of worship to merely the musical *expression* of worship, they also indicate that many Christians think that *worship is for them*. It’s as if, in a mindset of hyper-consumerism, we’ve turned even the worship of God into a commodity! But isn’t the worship of God for God? Isn’t the worship of God solely from the created, to the Creator?

Originally, the word ‘worship’ was a verb that meant ‘to show the worth of.’ How did we allow it to become an overused adjective (or an ineffective noun), linked so closely

to the use of songs and music in the Christian Church? Isn't the worship of God a full life response?

Consider Paul's exhortation in Romans: 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'³³⁰ Yes, songs and singing provide one of the ways we show the worth of and ascribe value to the cross of Christ. But we all know that the worship of God doesn't start with the first song, nor end when we leave the auditorium. Every moment of every day offers me a chance to either worship God or be an idolater. Followers of Jesus should be worshipping God as living sacrifices on a 24/7/365 basis (366 on a leap year!).

Furthermore, isn't God the only One who gets to decide if our human worship is acceptable? Surely, that's not the role of us worshippers. People thinking that we can definitively measure how 'worshipful' or otherwise human worship is, in my opinion, a symptom of the Fall, an expression of our sinful nature. We can see the results of this in the tragic, violent story of Cain and Abel in Genesis.³³¹

If we reduce the worship of God to just what we are doing or experiencing during the music in our gatherings we are at risk of crafting a 'worship' of our own design. We will not be worshipping God on his terms, but on ours. This begs the question: If humans only offer to God the 'worship' that is acceptable to us, is it true worship or simply idolatry?

I can't please everyone

If I'm asked to 'lead worship' for a mixed congregation of the kind present at the New Zealand Christian Leaders Congress, it is simply impossible to please everybody no matter what I do.

'Too many new songs,' 'Too many old songs,' 'Too structured,' 'Too loose,' 'Too many 'I' songs,' 'Too many 'He' songs that should be 'You' songs,' 'Too wordy,' 'Too shallow,' 'Not Spirit-led,' 'Not biblical...'. . .

So, I just try to please God first³³² and, secondly, get everyone in the room, yes *everyone*, singing the same songs together. Some songs will be old, some new, some wordy, some not, some structured, some more free, some 'I,' some 'we,' some 'He,' some 'You,' but all pointing us towards the immeasurable value of the cross of Jesus the Christ, representing the beautiful free gift that, paradoxically, costs everything.

³³⁰ Romans 12:1.

³³¹ Genesis 4.

³³² Colossians 3:23-24.

Some worshippers prefer sung worship to be entirely ‘vertical,’ to God. Others prefer it to be ‘horizontal,’ the congregation encouraging one another. It’s both! I am encouraged that the main New Testament verse encouraging the Church to sing reinforces this: ‘...addressing *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody *to the Lord* with your heart...’³³³

I try to recognise the rich diversity within the Christian Church and consider how those differences relate to the various preferences of those I am asked to lead in sung worship. I don’t try to find the right balance point or the superior way to worship God through songs; instead, I embrace the differences. I don’t try to create unity or get us all to agree. Only God can do that. I just try to find some songs, songs that are prayers, offer praise, and that declare my best understanding of God’s truth, that we can sing together. Then we can all see what God wants to do with us from there.

What I’ve described above was my approach in producing *The Blessing | Aotearoa/New Zealand* song and video during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 22.1). Those who contributed would not have agreed on everything about God, how the Holy Spirit operates today, every facet of biblical interpretation, whether certain people are suitable for Church leadership roles, what worship really is... But I don’t know for sure. I never asked them. I just got us all to sing together!



Figure 22.1: Cover image for *The Blessing | Aotearoa/New Zealand*³³⁴

³³³ Ephesians 5:19.

³³⁴ View the video at “The Blessing | Aotearoa/New Zealand Churches join together to sing “The Blessing”,” YouTube video, *More Than Music Mentor*, August 20, 2020. Accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZQPifs2kjo>.

We set aside our differences and just sang God's words of truth together. I watch that video and I see Church unity. Do you?

Please don't call me a 'worship leader'

I don't think of myself as a 'worship leader' as such. I lead *sung worship*, that is, congregational singing, as *an expression* of worship. I hope and believe that doing so is worshipful to God, but I'll leave it to Him to decide on that for certain. I try to lead sung worship in a way that reminds us that the worship of God must continue after the songs have faded, as we leave the auditorium.

Worship does not switch on and switch off. We are all *constantly* worshipping. So, we should constantly be asking: Who or what are we worshipping?

I don't believe that I can *lead* another person to worship God, or that any human can. Only God can! I believe that it's only an encounter with God that can convince someone to worship Him. In that sense, it helps for me to think of Jesus as being our One and only Worship Leader.

From time to time during sung worship I become more tangibly aware of God's presence. But I also believe that God is omnipresent,³³⁵ and that every true Believer has received God's indwelling Holy Spirit;³³⁶ that the true Church is a new priesthood,³³⁷ and that Jesus is our High Priest;³³⁸ that our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit,³³⁹ and that Jesus is the cornerstone of that temple in which God dwells.³⁴⁰

God's presence does not depend on me choosing the right songs and singing them in the right way. He is *always* present, with me and with you. I am becoming more and more aware of Him. I am learning to live *coram Deo*.³⁴¹ Sometimes music can help me to be more aware of God's presence. It seems that that's the case for many others too.

Hands out of pockets, all on the stage

So, with all that as background, I've been asked to tell you about two things I did while leading sung worship at Congress. I didn't plan to do either of them ahead of time. I

³³⁵ Psalm 139:7-10.

³³⁶ Ephesians 1:13-14.

³³⁷ 1 Peter 2:9.

³³⁸ Hebrews 4:14-16.

³³⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16.

³⁴⁰ Ephesians 2:19-22.

³⁴¹ A Latin phrase used often by the 16th century early Christian Reformers that means 'in the presence of, or before the face of, God.' They taught that all believers should live *coram Deo*.

sometimes feel like I live somewhere between serendipity, careful planning and being Spirit-led. These two things sprung from my core belief in the omnipresence of God, while personally highly valuing experiences of the manifest presence of God.

I confess that I struggle to fully embrace in my mind, body, and soul, that I truly am in God's presence. If I *really* knew that I was, that I *am*, there's no way I'd have my hands in my pockets. Would you? But I have found that changes in my body posture can help lower my defences and drag me towards the truth that I am in God's presence. If I want to be more focused on and aware of God, I'll take my hands out of my pockets. I might even raise them above my head in the body posture of surrender and adoration.

I shared these 'pockets and presence' thoughts from the platform at Congress. I asked us all to take our hands out of our pockets to help us recognise God's presence. I might have even pointed out a person or two who I thought should comply. That's not something I usually do, nor something anyone in my role should do! It could have gone badly, but it got the laugh I was hoping for, and I think it went okay.

The 'all on the stage' moment came from somewhere different. Being on a raised platform equipped with a microphone and musical instruments and being bathed in light with a congregation in front and below me, with a sound system either side pointing outward strikes me as kind of a weird position from which to lead sung worship. There are things about that set up that suggest I am doing some kind of concert performance, a gig for a crowd. It can mess with my head. Also, I think the congregation, at least subconsciously, can easily think of themselves as being an audience. A subtle, subliminal, 'Okay, impress me!' might creep into their minds.

But leading sung worship should not be like fronting a concert performance. My hope is that the distinction between the congregation and the musicians on the platform will dissolve, that we would become one group of worshippers recognising God as the 'audience.'

So, near the close of Congress, on the final afternoon, I was about to lead the closing songs. I'm pretty sure the final song was the old classic *Be Still for the Presence of The Lord*. The stage was big enough, my team small enough, and enough people had had to leave Congress early to make this possible: I invited the congregation to come up onto the stage, to turn, face the empty room, and sing towards the open space. In doing so, we wanted to remind ourselves that sung worship is not a cover band singalong, not some kind of Christian-ese karaoke. Instead, we sing these songs as an expression of the worth of an Almighty and very present God, who is present everywhere and all the time, present in the empty room, present within us, His Church.

Thankfully, the Congress delegates complied. We became one choir and sang together, with one, unified voice showing that God is indeed worthy to be praised.

Conversation questions for small groups:

1. When you hear or use the word ‘worship,’ what is most commonly being referred to?
2. Read Matthew 12:36-37, Matthew 15:10-11 and James 1:26. What issues arise with the way the word ‘worship’ is most commonly used within Christian culture today?
3. What is your understanding and experience of the omnipresence and manifest presence of God?

Pray:

- *Adoration: We praise You God for who You are. Your worth is beyond measure.*
- *Confession: We admit that we fall short as worshippers. Some of our idolatry we are aware of, some we are not. We know we indulge in idolatry, and we are sorry.*
- *Thanksgiving: We are grateful for God’s mercy to forgive us and His provision through Jesus the Christ and His Holy Spirit that allows us to continue this worshipper’s journey.*
- *Supplication (Requests): Please show us what it means to live Coram Deo, in your presence in every moment of every day. Open our eyes, minds, and spirits to any of our idolatry. Transforms us into the worshippers that you require.*

Amen.

Author Profile:

Grant Norsworthy is a speaker, musician and advocate for children living in poverty. With *More Than Music Mentor*, Grant provides online and onsite training for the heart and the art of worshipping musicians. An Aussie/US dual citizen, Grant, his Kiwi wife and their three sons call Upper Moutere home. See <https://GrantNorsworthy.com> and <https://MoreThanMusicMentor.com>.

Close:

TO THE SAINTS OF AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND

Close: To the Saints of Aotearoa New Zealand

Stuart Lange

To the 'saints,'³⁴² the Christian people of Aotearoa New Zealand, those called by living God, forgiven through Christ, and set apart by the Holy Spirit to love and in both words and actions to serve God and show God's love to all.

What do we believe the Spirit of God is saying at this time in history to the Christian people of this land?

As I went through the chapters of this book again, recalled things said at the Congress, and reflected on recent developments such as the report of the Royal Commission and the just-released 2023 Census results, I saw something of a consensus. It seems to me that many leaders within the Church in New Zealand are largely of one mind in how we perceive our present situation, and in how we sense the Spirit of God wants us to move forward. We all see and emphasise matters a little differently, but in our own way we share many perceptions. Here are some of those.

- 1. We recognise that, increasingly, the secular thinking and values of Western culture are pervasively influencing people within New Zealand society.**

While many New Zealand people retain at least some awareness of God, according to the very recent 2023 census results, over half of New Zealanders (51.6%) now identify as having 'no religion'. That alone is evidence of the very pervasive influence of the ideological assumptions of contemporary Western culture, including scepticism, secularism, and the loss of belief in God, Christianity, and the Bible; epistemological and moral relativism; the primacy of self, individual identity, and personal happiness and choice; and materialism and consumerism. Public media, social media, entertainment, advertisements,

³⁴² The editor of this book helpfully chose the title of this chapter, to echo the way many New Testament epistles begin.

and everyday conversations all constantly demonstrate that such ways thinking and behaving are now normative in New Zealand.

Christian understandings of life, meaning, and ethics have been largely pushed to the periphery. In the mass market of ideas, Christianity in New Zealand has lost much its previous currency. Instead of Christian truths and values being the default setting for many New Zealanders, they are increasingly seen as questionable, outmoded, and no longer relevant. To think and live like a Christian is becoming counter cultural.

2. We recognise that Christians are a minority within New Zealand society

In the 2018 census, 36.5% of New Zealanders identified as Christian. By 2023, that was down to 32.3%. A compounding sociological and generational dynamic is at work here: as the Church diminishes, so does its capacity to generate and socialise new Christians. Previous and older generations were generally more likely to be Christian, or at least have some very basic familiarity with Christian teaching and values. This happened through parents, churches, Sunday Schools, youth groups, and Bible in Schools. But most people in younger generations are no longer significantly exposed to Christian influences and are instead constantly exposed to more secular worldviews and values, often with anti-Christian polemics. As largely secularised generations bring up their children, most raise them with secular values. All this is very serious.

We do well, though, to remember that the Church began as a very tiny minority indeed and was brutally persecuted. But, by the power of God, the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire and subsequently to the ends of the earth. The principle of growth and expansion is part of the very DNA of the Kingdom of God.³⁴³ As Jay Mātenga reminds us in his chapter, Christianity is currently receding in the West but is growing rapidly in several other parts of the world. We in New Zealand see what is happening here, but God alone sees the fullest picture.

3. We recognise that as a minority in a secularising society, Christians must still speak up, but in a different way.

Numbers count. Minorities generally have less influence, unless they are extremely motivated and committed, and able to compellingly communicate their vision. As a minority in a secularising society, Christians cannot expect

³⁴³ See, for example, Zechariah 9:10; Matthew 13:31-33; Luke 24:47.

society to give particular attention to what we say or believe. Those with power in Parliament, media, big business, and education will usually listen most to the majority, and prioritise votes, audience, and financial returns.

It is not just the numbers, though. It is also about how we are perceived. In the past, Christianity provided many of the truths and values that inspired and shaped Western society. But now, many powerful forces in society see Christianity as outmoded, even as impeding social progress. Our deep convictions and appeals for biblical truth and righteousness are often disregarded.

As Christians, regardless of our context, we continue to have a responsibility to be salt and light, and to speak up for God's truth and values, both publicly and in our own spheres. As followers of Christ, we must speak up for God with insight, compassion, humility, respect, and wisdom, and with a full measure of both grace and truth. Simplistic, uninformed claims by Christians do not commend the Christian faith. Nor does anything said with an angry, hostile, demanding, or threatening posture.

4. We recognise that secular thinking and values have also been affecting and weakening the Church.

Secular thinking and values have obviously had a great influence on New Zealand society. It must be acknowledged that the same cultural ideas have also affected most Christians and churches in New Zealand. For example, post-Enlightenment scepticism appears to have weakened the faith and expectations of some Christian people, making them less sure about the veracity and authority of the Bible. Post-modern relativism seems to have influenced many to hold less firmly to the uniqueness of the Christian faith and to such teachings as universal sinfulness, the need for salvation, God's judgement, and the importance of evangelism. In an age which prioritises individual choice and personal happiness, many Christians appear to waver in their commitment to live by biblical values. A consumeristic mindset also affects church attendance, and willingness to serve.

The pressures of secular culture have been a key factor in the loss of faith and commitment by so many Christians. Many have drifted away from the Church, and from Christian faith. We note the research finding reported in Chapter Two, that for every person in this country who converts to faith, some five others disengage from faith.

5. We recognise the need for Christians to strengthen their confidence in God's word and in the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus.

The Christian Church will not become stronger by submitting to secular thinking. A diminished Christian faith results in diminished spiritual life and impact. A diluted Gospel has little to offer to a humanity alienated from God and self-destructing. If in effect we deny the transforming power of the Gospel, we become less relevant in the purposes of God.

Some New Zealand churches may need to regain a wholehearted faith in God, and to rekindle their conviction and passion for the biblical Gospel. Surely the Church must remain true to its calling in God, to new life in Christ, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Church must strive to be a fellowship of confident faith, deep devotion and prayer, genuine welcome and love, faithful and clear Bible teaching, discipleship, much evangelism and equipping, and a strong Gospel-focused mission focus.

6. We recognise that among the Christians and churches of this country there is a deep neglect of evangelism, and a scarcity of evangelism that is effective.

From the very beginning, there has been resistance to God and the Gospel. Prevailing cultural influences have made an increasing number of New Zealand people indifferent or hostile to the Gospel. The Spirit of God, however, can turn any heart, and there remain many people in New Zealand who are still very reachable with the Gospel, including many younger people. They are generally not being evangelised.

Many New Zealand churches and Christians have de-emphasised or shied away from evangelism, at the very time when it is most needed. What evangelism is occurring can sometimes be awkward or insensitive, or too tentative and vague. Evangelism needs to be somewhere at the top of every church's agenda and every Christian's priorities. Led by the Holy Spirit, we need to get out there among non-Christian people, engage with them, discern what they are thinking and feeling, and communicate Jesus to them with love, clarity, and spiritual power.

7. We recognise that in the face of prevailing societal and ideological influences, our churches are also failing in discipleship.

The secular pressures on our people are relentless. This situation calls not for less discipleship in the Church, but for more and better and intentional discipleship.

8. We recognise that the Church must ensure its own house is in order.

In our society, a high value is placed on robust and transparent systems. So, churches and charities are required to operate in compliance with a myriad of legal obligations, including keeping good records. In addition to all that Christ and the Bible tell us, the increasingly stringent public scrutiny of churches gives us yet another reason to make sure that our treatment of attenders and members, children and youth, staff and volunteers is unquestionably beyond reproach, and marked by very high degree of integrity, kindness, fairness, and respect.

The horrors of what was revealed in the recent report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based care have strongly underlined how churches in Aotearoa New Zealand must do everything they possibly can to keep people in churches safe from all sexual, emotional, physical, and spiritual harm. Very few Christians would knowingly let abuse happen or excuse it. But whenever the unthinkable happens, and abuse takes place in some church space, it does terrible harm to both victims and many others. It is a scandalous breach of Christian principles.

9. We recognise that in some new laws and proposed laws, and in some educational and institutional frameworks, there are growing potential risks to freedoms of Christian faith, expression, and practice.

This is an area we need to keep a watch on.

10. We recognise that in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Church must model what it means to be a people of reconciliation and oneness between Māori and Pākehā, and among all people of all cultures and ethnicities.

Of all people, Christians should be agents of reconciliation and warm inter-cultural friendship. Among Christian people, our spiritual unity in Christ transcends our cultural and ethnic differences. We respect those differences. We are pleased when our churches become more culturally and ethnically diverse. In Christ, we are called to show love, kindness and respect to everyone.

As Christians, we honour the Treaty of Waitangi not as a matter of politics, but as a matter of Christian good faith.

- 11. We recognise that we need a fresh move of God's Spirit upon this land, bringing spiritual renewal to the Church, and a spiritual re-awakening within wider society; repentance and serious prayer must be part of that.**

It is easy to discern the secular trajectory of New Zealand society, and the serious effect on the Church. But several writers in this book have rightly pointed to a potential great move of God's Spirit, by which much of the Church in this country shall experience powerful spiritual renewal, which then flows over into wider society. Such revivals have happened before, in many countries, and have done much good, with effects that have sometimes lasted for several decades. Revivals are the surprising and sovereign work of God. God has often sent revival when it most desperately needed. And part of what both always precedes and characterises revival is a deep spirit of humility, repentance and prayer before God. A genuine, deep spiritual renewal, by the power of God alone, would no doubt be the best way of all to strengthen the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- 12. We recognise that our ultimate hope is not in this or any other society, but in the triumphant coming of the Lord, who will judge the living and the dead, banish all evil, and establish the new heaven and earth, and his people shall live for ever in the presence of the eternal God.**

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.”³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Revelation 22:20-21.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.

The unity of Christian faith demonstrated in the development of this book, along with the depth of reflection contained within each chapter, will be a valuable contribution to the Church as we seek to grow God's kingdom together here in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Hilary Hague, National Director Scripture Union

This is a very timely book, full of wisdom, from some of New Zealand's trusted Christian voices, about how we must work together to build and strengthen our precious Church in these challenging times. I will be encouraging all our leaders to read this book.

*David MacGregor, National Director Vineyard Churches Aotearoa New Zealand,
Pastor Grace Vineyard Church, Christchurch*

This important book addresses some of the major challenges facing the church in Aotearoa today, while offering practical insights for growth and renewal. Honest yet hopeful, it's a valuable read for any NZ church leader longing to see the church flourish.

Steve Maina, Bishop of Nelson

This collection of articles from key current Christian thinkers and practitioners in our nation is superb! It helps us 'see' our context clearer and discern what is needed next for the sake of the Gospel in this land.

Dave Mann, Shining Lights Trust

Strengthening the Church is an important contribution to how we restore the good standing of the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand society. It acknowledges past mistakes and does not shy away from the challenges ahead. The book offers hope for all who love the Church in their service to Jesus.

Chris Clarke, CEO Wilberforce Foundation

New Zealand 
**CHRISTIAN
NETWORK**
— Ka mahi tahi, ka ora —

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