



**CHURCH AND SOCIETY  
AND THE BICENTENARY  
OF CHRISTIANITY IN  
NEW ZEALAND**

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25 December 2014 marked the bicentenary of Christianity in New Zealand, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Samuel Marsden's first Christian sermon on New Zealand soil. In comparison with all the attention given by government and media to the centennial commemorations of Gallipoli, the Christian bicentenary appeared to be a relatively quiet affair. But was it really all that quiet? This article focuses on the diverse ways in which the milestone of two centuries of Christianity in New Zealand was recognised by Church, State, media, and academia, and also compares that with how the "Marsden Centenary" was recognised one hundred years earlier.

### WORLD WAR I, OR A SERMON?

It is not difficult to surmise some of the reasons why government and media should show such enthusiasm for commemorating World War I, and little or no interest in celebrating the Christian bicentenary. World War I is an action story. It was a series of tragic events with huge loss of life, which affected every New Zealand community. It is a drama full of pathos and human-interest, of ordinary people being caught up in unprecedented industrial-style killing, in suffering and death, and sometimes heroism. The experiences of World War I participants have been captured in countless diaries, letters, books, poems, songs, photos, paintings, films, and documentaries. World War I is part of the collective cultural memory. It is recent enough for there to remain family members who still feel connected, through the loss of forebears and other relatives. The war is sufficiently remote to have become fascinating to current generations, for whom the idea of extensive New Zealand involvement in a European ground war is unthinkable. A hundred years on, World War I is safely uncontroversial, with none of the complications of politics, religion, or Treaty issues. For politicians and media, publicly-funded armed services are available to salute, march, fire guns and provide poignant visual pageantry. War remembrances can invoke a sense of the sacred, even a dash of civic religion. Furthermore, memories of war provide opportunities to reiterate various myths of national identity. So, for both government and media, the centenary of World War I commemorations was no doubt a welcome thing.

By contrast, Government and media were understandably much more restrained about remembering Christian beginnings in New Zealand. For the general public, and the media,

a sermon two hundred years ago is not nearly as exciting as a world war. The media probably assumed that a commemoration of Christianity would be extremely boring. Also, religion is seen as divisive, and potentially controversial. If the State showed much interest in celebrating Christian beginnings, it would raise the hackles of secularists, and also leave itself open to being accused of favouring one religion over others. Both government and media, aware that Christian adherence is declining, may have felt that celebrations of Christian beginnings would only be of sectional interest, and no longer widely relevant.

### INVOLVEMENT BY STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE BICENTENARY

It is difficult to know how much the Government has spent on recent World War I remembrances (a few years ago the budgeted figure of 18 million dollars was sometimes touted), but all the indications

are that it has been vastly more than what was made available for the Christian bicentenary. Nevertheless, the State contributed indirectly to the bicentenary celebrations through

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helping to establish the Rangihoua Heritage Park. The Department of Conservation was one of the named partners in the founding of the park, which was initiated by the Marsden Cross Trust Board in co-operation with Ngāti Torehina, the Rangihoua Native Reserve Board, and the Department of Conservation. Both the Department of Conservation and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage were principal donors towards the Park, along with the Anglican Diocese of Auckland (The primary donor was the Presbyterian layman, Allan Hubbard, major donors included nineteen trusts, foundations and individuals, and there were donations from seven denominations, the Church Missionary Society, and many others).<sup>1</sup>

The original Anglican-led Marsden Trust Board had earlier written of its vision to develop a place of Christian pilgrimage, akin to Iona or Lindisfarne.<sup>2</sup> The vision had begun with the Rev. Patricia Bawden, who had also been inspired by such places as Lee Abbey and L'Abri. The Trust Board was restructured in 2007, when a Marsden Cross Churches Advisory Board was appointed, with members from the

<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Allan Davidson with respect to information about the Trust Board(s) and the Rangihoua Heritage Park, in this and the following paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Titus, "Pilgrimage Centre to honour New Zealand's national, spiritual roots", Touchstone, February 2006.



Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Four of the Advisory Board members served on the reconstituted Marsden Cross Trust Board, which was broadened, with additional people joining to help advance the Park project. The chairman of the reconstituted Trust Board was John King, a direct descendant of one of the three missionary families who arrived at Rangihoua in December 1814.

In 2014, the Park's promotional material appeared to be pitched with a religiously pluralistic society in view. It asserted that Rangihoua was important for all New Zealand society, in three ways: (1) as "A Place of Aotearoa New Zealand Beginnings", i.e. Rangihoua was the first Pākehā settlement, established alongside and under the protection of a Māori community, and several important "firsts" occurring there, such as the first European school, land sale, and birth; (2) as "A place of Christian Beginnings", i.e. the Rangihoua mission was made possible through the vision and hospitality of Marsden's host and friend Ruatara, established Christian values and perspectives as "part of our [New Zealand] belief systems and our history", and exemplified

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"the principles of partnership and bicultural development and the importance of keeping open all avenues leading to common ground"; (3) as "A Place of Accord", i.e. "The Māori and Pākehā partners aspired to a just society based on accord, as do we today". Rangihoua, it was declared, is "a place of pilgrimage, not as some unitary practice arising from a particular faith, but more diverse and all-encompassing, expressive of everything that reinforces our sense of New Zealand identity and shared humanity. It is a place for all New Zealanders." The elements of significance so claimed were thus historical, spiritual (in an inclusive sort of way), and cultural, and presented Rangihoua as an important part of New Zealand's national identity. The way in which the promotional material was couched suggested a strong awareness of secular, inter-faith and inter-cultural sensitivities in twentieth century New Zealand society. Such considerations had not been evident in 1914, or for that matter in 1964.<sup>3</sup>

The State was involved in the official opening of the park. It was opened by the Governor-General, Governor General Lieutenant Sir Jerry Mateparae. A speech was made by the Attorney-

General, the Honourable Christopher Finlayson.<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly the Attorney-General did not pick up the themes of societal or bi-cultural beginnings, or national identity, but instead only talked about Christianity. After describing Anglicanism as "arguably the gentlest form of Christianity", and Scots Presbyterians as "dour", he mentioned four other denominations, and four times the Catholics. He declared that the history of Christianity in New Zealand "is a rich and interesting story" that 'is not recounted enough', that the churches 'have worked pretty well together over the years', that Christianity emphasises the worth of every individual made in God's image, that it is a story of 'reconciliation and forgiveness', that the churches should be 'proud' of their message and 'hold fast to unchanging principles', and that this 'is a great day for New Zealand'. The gathering of about 500 included the Minister of Arts, Culture and Heritage, one other MP, and one ex-MP, both northern Māori. About

a third of the crowd were Māori, including many Ngāti Torehina.

Four days later, the Christmas Day service was essentially a church service.

There was a crowd of about 1200, but it was not clear that any politicians were present.

**NEW ZEALAND MEDIA AND THE CHRISTIAN BICENTENARY**

Media interest in the 2014 bicentenary was limited. Both the Rangihoua Heritage Park Opening and the Christmas Day Service were mentioned at least briefly, in most radio and Television news.<sup>5</sup> By far the most extensive coverage was on Christmas Day, by TV1, which had several film crews on site and which filmed and broadcast the whole service. Funding for the broadcast, however, came from the Anglican Church itself. A few months earlier, with an item on *Seven Sharp*, TV1 had featured the establishment of the Rangihoua Heritage Park, emphasising the significance of Rangihoua as a place of bi-cultural beginnings for New Zealand society; in December, *Seven Sharp* ran a shorter piece publicising the forthcoming park opening.<sup>6</sup> On December 21, *Radio New Zealand* aired the

<sup>3</sup> "Why is Rangihoua Heritage Park so important?" in "A place of Accord. Commemorating the Bicentennial 1814-2014", Marsden Cross Trust Board website, <http://www.rangihouaheritage.co.nz>.

<sup>4</sup> "Attorney-General commends NZ's Christian Heritage" (text of the speech), posted by Glyn Carpenter 13 May 2015, [www.nzchristiannetwork.org.nz](http://www.nzchristiannetwork.org.nz).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. [www.radionz.co.nz/news/.../service-marks-200-years-of-christian-worship](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/.../service-marks-200-years-of-christian-worship), updated at 8:22 am on 25 December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> "A Hidden Jewel", *Seven Sharp*, TV1, 17 December 2014.

Third Rutherford Lecture by Dame Anne Salmond, discussing Māori and missionary interaction.

Newspapers also carried some occasional pieces on the bicentenary. The *New Zealand Herald*, for instance, carried an article on 20 December by Peter Calder,<sup>7</sup> entitled “Nation’s first day mystery to most”. He suggested that, unlike Americans and Australians, New Zealanders do not know the day when their nations began. 25 December 1814, Calder wrote, was when “in every sense that matters... the country we live in today came into being”. It was “the beginning of the bicultural society”. Calder ended by asserting – in line with the thinking of Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins – that Ruatara would not have translated anything of the sermon’s real meaning to local Māori.<sup>8</sup>

On 3 December, the *New Zealand Herald* published an article by Paul Moon, “Why historical milestones should matter”.<sup>9</sup> Moon deplored the “noticeably scant attention” being given to the bicentenary, compared to what was done 50 years earlier, in 1964, and regretted New Zealand’s “national historical amnesia”. In addition, the *Herald* ran the customary pre-Christmas piece by Auckland church leaders, which explained the meaning of Marsden’s message.<sup>10</sup> There were also articles in various regional and local newspapers.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian bicentenary was addressed by the *New Zealand Listener*, with a fairly lengthy article by journalist Sally Blundell.<sup>12</sup> The piece was heavily dependent upon interviews, especially with Alison Jones, whom Blundell quoted extensively. The article took the view that, as the first planned European settlement in New Zealand, Rangihoua was very important in New Zealand’s national and bi-cultural history, and emphasised that the mission began at Māori invitation, on Māori terms, and under Māori

protection. Few could disagree with any of that. Blundell’s article had a definite polemical edge, however, and championed Jones’ theory that the theological content of Marsden’s sermon “would have made no sense” to Māori, and that, instead of translating or explaining anything in the sermon, Ruatara “would have” simply made “the political speech of his life”.

## THE BICENTENARY AND THE HISTORICAL ACADEMY

Most general historians gave the Bicentenary no attention. There was no series discussing it in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, for instance. Nevertheless, a number of historical projects, may have been timed – at least in part – to coincide with the bicentenary. These included Angela Middleton’s work on *Bay of Islands Missions and Māori, 1814 to 1845*,<sup>13</sup> Tony Ballantyne’s study of Missionaries and Māori (*Entanglements of Empire*),<sup>14</sup> and the opening

of the Hocken Library’s Marsden Online Archive.

A few years before, in 2011, educationists Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins had published *Words Between Us*, which included

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extensive discussion of the beginnings of the Rangihoua mission in 1814.<sup>15</sup>

Church-connected historians, however, have produced a number of academic publications related to the Bicentenary. Principally, there was the 2014 book arising out of the history conference held at Waitangi on New Zealand Christian beginnings: *Te Rongopai 1814 “Takoto te pai!”* This substantial volume, edited by Allan Davidson and others, included chapters reflecting on the nature of evangelical Protestant missions, the mission’s connections with Australia and the Pacific, mission historiography, the content of Marsden’s sermon (and whether Marsden may possibly have spoken in Māori), Māori oral traditions about Christian beginnings, the archaeological study of the Rangihoua settlement, the first Māori conversion, the

7 Peter Calder: “Nation’s first day mystery to most”, *New Zealand Herald* (20 December): A18.

8 Calder noted that his wife is one of the authors of Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, *He Kōrero – Words Between Us: First Māori-Pākehā Conversations on Paper* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011).

9 Paul Moon, “Why historical milestones should matter. The impending 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marsden’s first Christian service in New Zealand deserves recognition”, *New Zealand Herald* (22 December, 2014).

10 “Marsden’s Sermon of 200 years ago still relevant”. Signed by 26 church leaders. *New Zealand Herald* (20 December, 2014)

11 Marianne Kelly, “Defining Kiwi Christmas”, *Howick and Botany Times* (22 December 2014); Lorne Campbell, “200 years of Good News something to celebrate”, *Northern Advocate* (11 October 2014).

12 Sally Blundell, “Exploding the myths”, *New Zealand Listener* (19 June 2014).

13 Angela Middleton, *Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori, 1814 to 1845* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014).

14 Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Māori and the question of the Body* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014).

15 Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, *He Kōrero – Words Between Us: First Māori-Pākehā Conversations on Paper* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011): 79–88; James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Penguin, 2007): 143. Jones’ and Jenkins’ views about Marsden’s sermon are discussed in

message of peace, and much else.<sup>16</sup> The bicentenary also inspired a themed addition of *Stimulus*.<sup>17</sup> One of the articles in that issue includes a response to Jones' and Jenkin's views about Marsden's sermon.<sup>18</sup>

In 2014, Peter Lineham wrote an article for *History Compass* about the historiography of New Zealand Christianity.<sup>19</sup> A forthcoming book from Victoria University Press covers topics from across the history of Christianity in New Zealand, including two related to the missionary period.<sup>20</sup> There has also been some scholarly interest in the bicentenary from beyond New Zealand. A publication arose out of a conference at Moore College in Sydney: *Launching Marsden's Mission*.<sup>21</sup> From the northern hemisphere, Timothy Yates' study (*The Conversion of the Māori*) confirmed the great importance of Māori agency in the spread of Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

At a semi-popular level, there has been my DVD, *Te Rongopai: 200 Years of the Gospel in New Zealand, 1814–2014*.<sup>23</sup> There has also been Keith Newman's *Bible and Treaty*, published by Penguin in 2010, a passionate narrative-style apologia for missionaries and the Māori response to Christianity, and for the Christian humanitarian background of the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>24</sup> It has been very widely read within the Christian community.

16 Allan Davidson, Stuart Lange, Peter Lineham, and Adrienne Puckey (eds), *Te Rongopai 1814 "Takoto te pai!" Bicentenary reflections on Christian beginnings and developments in Aotearoa* (Auckland: General Synod Office, Tuia, 2014).

17 *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice*, 21, 2 (July 2014).

18 Stuart Lange, "Christian Beginnings in New Zealand: Some Historiographical Issues", *Stimulus* 21, 2 (July 2014): 4–13.

19 Peter J. Lineham, "Trends in Religious History in New Zealand: From Institutional to Social History", *History Compass*, 12, 4 (2014): 333–343.

20 Geoffrey Troughton and Stuart Lange (eds), *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016, forthcoming); Stuart Lange, "Admiring, Disdainful, or Somewhere in the Middle: Interpretations of Missionaries and Christian Beginnings among Māori" and Malcolm Falloon, "The Tārore Story: Sorting Fact from Fiction", in *ibid*.

21 Peter G. Bolt and David B. Pettett, eds, *Launching Marsden's Mission: The Beginnings of the Church Missionary Society in New Zealand, viewed from New South Wales* (London: Latimer Trust, 2014).

22 Timothy Yates, *The Conversion of the Māori: Years of Religious and Social Change, 1814–1842*. Studies in History of Christian Mission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

23 Stuart Lange, *Te Rongopai. 200 years of the Gospel in Aotearoa, 1814–2014* (Auckland: Glass Eye Productions, 2014).

24 Keith Newman, *Bible and Treaty: Missionaries among the Māori – A New Perspective* (Auckland, 2010), 7–8.

## THE CHURCHES AND THE BICENTENARY

Many denominations and churches did at least something to recognise the bicentenary. Some did a great amount to celebrate the bicentenary, through such things as combined public events, special church services, publications, websites, and resources.

Several catalysts and centres of activity can be identified. Among these was the Anglican Church. Such involvement reflected not only that Samuel Marsden and all the earliest missionaries to New Zealand were Anglicans, but also the bi-cultural commitments of contemporary Anglicanism. The Anglican Church led the 2014 Bicentenary Planning Group, oversaw the Christmas Day service, sponsored the historical conference and subsequent publication, and hosted the official 2014 website. Individuals such as Dr. Allan Davidson (St. John's College) and the Bishop of Taitokerau, Te Kitohi Pikaahu, worked hard to raise awareness of the bicentenary.

### MANY DENOMINATIONS AND CHURCHES DID AT LEAST SOMETHING TO RECOGNISE THE BICENTENARY.

The New Zealand Christian Network (NZCN) and its director Glyn Carpenter vigorously promoted 2014 issues.

The NZCN held various hui, to help co-ordinate plans for the bicentenary from across the Christian community, including para-church agencies. Bicentenary themes prominently featured at two NZCN National Congresses, both in 2011 and 2014.<sup>25</sup> NZCN became the distributor of the DVD, *Te Rongopai: 200 Years of the Gospel in New Zealand 1814–2014*. The DVD sold several thousand copies and was shown in hundreds of churches. The NZCN also sponsored a "Gospel Bicentenary Statement", authored by Samuel Carpenter, Alistair Reese, David Moko and Glyn Carpenter. The statement included an acknowledgement of historic colonial injustices against Māori, and emphasised a call to reconciliation.

The New Zealand Church Missionary Society (NZCMS) was especially focused on the bicentenary. NZCMS organised hui, encouraged pilgrimages to numerous Christian sites, arranged for Steve Maina and Mark Grace to speak in large numbers of churches, posted twenty-one Youtube videos (largely by Keith Newman) on its 2014 website, and published *Our Story: Aotearoa – The Story of mission in Aotearoa through the lens of the New*

25 In 2011, on the opening night, Stuart Lange, with Angela Goodman as co-presenter, gave a 90 minute presentation about the history of Christianity in New Zealand (the DVD *Te Rongopai* originated out of that), and in 2014 Allan Davidson gave an address on Christian mission among Māori.

*Zealand Church Missionary Society*.<sup>26</sup> The NZCMS also received over forty “reverse mission” people in teams from Kenya. In Dunedin, for instance, Kenyan visitors went to twelve different churches, followed by a combined service in the Town Hall. The NZCMS was one of several groups or denominations (including the NZCN and the Baptists) which held their annual conference at Waitangi, with a side trip to Rangihoua. At Marsden Cross, the director of NZCMS and two directors of CMS from England symbolically welcomed the Kendall family back into the CMS fold.<sup>27</sup>

In partnership, the Tertiary Student Christian Fellowship, Scripture Union, and the NZCMS published a new edition of Luke’s Gospel, *Te Rongopai a Ruka*. It featured various New Zealand touches, including a preface about the spread of the Gospel, bi- and multi-culturalism, and the story of Tārore. The bicentenary also inspired two extensive sets of children’s books: the *Chronicles of Paki* by Gina Taggart and Alison Condon, and *The Bicentennial Series*, by Amanda Neil.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, and beyond, David Mann has led the *Hope Project*, a nationwide evangelistic project, built in part around re-telling the stories of Christianity in New Zealand. Radio Rhema and Shine Television also publicised the bicentenary.

The Baptist Union showed considerable interest in the bicentenary. Keith Newman was invited to give a series of talks, at two successive Baptist Assemblies. All members of the 2014 Baptist Assembly were given a copy of the *Te Rongopai* DVD. David Moko and the Baptist Māori Ministries worked hard to raise understandings of the Treaty, of historical injustice, and of bi-culturalism. Many denominations ran pieces in their national publications and email bulletins, and had information on their websites about the coming the Gospel to New Zealand, resources and events. The Catholics, even though their primary bicentenary focus is 2038, gave notice on their national website of the December 2014 events at Rangihoua; they also reiterated the view that Catholic masses had probably occurred in New Zealand waters as early as 1769, on board a French ship.

26 Sophia Sinclair (ed), *Our Story: Aotearoa – The Story of mission in Aotearoa through the lens of the New Zealand Church Missionary Society* (Christchurch: NZCMS, 2014). Amanda Neil, *The Bicentennial Series: Aotearoa 1814–2014*.

27 Amanda Neil, email, 21 February 2016.

28 *Chronicles of Paki: New Zealand’s untold pioneer, missionary and Māori stories* (www.bigbookpublishing.co.nz); Amanda Neil, *The Bicentennial Series: Aotearoa 1814–2014*.

In the lead-up to 25 December 2014, there were numerous bicentenary events throughout New Zealand. In Auckland, for instance, several hundred pastors attended an interdenominational church leaders’ service in the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Parnell. Some Anglicans led worship, Baptists prayed, the Catholic bishop spoke, and a Pentecostal pastor preached. A combined service for Chinese churches was later held in the same venue. In Wellington, public events included those arranged by the Catholic Institute of Aotearoa New Zealand (a “Marsden Lecture” at the Cathedral of St. Paul) and the St Andrew’s Trust for the Study of Religion and Society.<sup>29</sup>

In Christchurch, 5,000 people gathered at the Horncastle Arena on 7 December, for an evening hosted by the inter-denominational Te Raranga network, to worship together and to recount the histories of New Zealand Christian churches, especially in Canterbury. Most denominations

were present, from Catholic to Pentecostal, Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventist.<sup>30</sup> The event included short videos telling the stories of various

churches, including the New Life movement, Spreydon Baptist, and C3 churches.<sup>31</sup>

Amanda Neil and her niece Laurel Gregory, descendants of missionaries Thomas and Jane Kendall, did multiple presentations around New Zealand of a dramatization, “Jane Kendall” in Waitangi at the Bicentennial CMS conference and later the New Zealand Justices of the Peace Bicentennial Conference, in Christchurch at the Horncastle Arena event, and over twenty times in various churches, schools, and community groups.<sup>32</sup> In December 1814, she arranged a week of festivities in and around Rangihoua, Paihia, and Waitangi for Ngā Puhī and over seventy descendants of the Marsden, Kendall, King, Hansen, and Williams missionary families. On 21 December fifty missionary descendants boarded the *R. Tucker Thompson*, as a stand-in *Active*, to sail to Rangihoua for the opening of the Heritage Park.<sup>33</sup> In 2014, Neil had published *The Kendall Conversations*, a novel-style narrative of over 600 pages.<sup>34</sup>

29 Geoffrey Troughton, email, 12 February 2016.

30 Anita Voisey, email, 12 February 2016; Ken Shelley, email, 12 February 2016.

31 <https://vimeo.com/teraranga/videos>.

32 Amanda Neil, email, 21 February 2016.

33 Amanda Neil, email, 21 February 2016.

34 Amanda Neil, *The Kendall Conversations* (Christchurch: self-published, 2014).



In March–April 2014, the Anglican bishop of Dunedin (the Revd. Dr. Kelvin Wright) led a 700 kilometre *hiko*i around the diocese, from Stewart Island to Kurow, with special events along the way. There were also some individual pilgrimages. Twizel beekeeper Craig Ryan carried a large wooden cross from Stewart Island to Rangihoua, a distance of 2,500 kilometres, over a period of three months. A vicar from the West Coast took a one-week personal pilgrimage to mission sites in the North Island, accompanied by a Māori parishioner. He went to the Bay of Islands sites, and also Hawkes Bay and the Waikato (where he visited Tārore's grave with a descendant of Ngakuku, Tārore's father).

In the Kāpiti area a group of Māori and Pākehā, led by Don Mathieson, arranged a mission *hiko*i for 31 August. They began at the pā site in Paraparaumu (where Octavius Hadfield had lived for some years), at Waikanae they celebrated early Māori evangelists and church life, and the Methodist mission to Kāpiti, at Ōtaki they recalled the early Catholic mission, and in the Rangiatea Church at Ōtaki they watched a re-enactment of Tārore's death and the subsequent events in the Kāpiti area.

They finished with a shared meal at the adjacent marae. All up, about 280 people were involved.

In Whangarei, St. Andrew's Church took a bus load of over fifty people on all-day trip to Marsden Cross, to Te Waimate mission, and to Henry and Marianne Williams' graves at Pakaraka. Commentary was by two Ngāpuhi Christians, Mike Norman and Laurie Anderson. At Marsden Cross, Māori and then Pākehā knelt and expressed sorrow for the sins of their forbears against the other. In the Bay of Islands, on Waitangi weekend in both 2014 and 2015, the Karuwha Trust featured Christian beginnings in its marquee at the Te Tii marae. It participated in a tour of the Paihia mission site, led by a descendant of Henry and Marianne Williams (Elisabeth Ludbrook), and Samuel Carpenter gave a public lecture on the history of the Henry Williams and family.

Whangarei churches held a special combined service in October 2014, to commemorate the bicentenary. It was attended by over 1,000 people, including the mayor. There was a historical narrative, preaching, a rousing haka, and a strong response to an evangelistic appeal. The offering was donated to a local emergency housing trust. In December, twenty-six members of the ministers' association met with the Council and presented

the mayor with a carved Māori paddle depicting the partnership of *tangata whenua* and the church; part of the inspiration for the gift was that the city includes Samuel Marsden as one of the two figures on its crest (the other is a generic Māori chief).

In the Bay of Plenty, there was a commemoration on 25 June 2014 of Henry William's first visit to Tauranga in June 1826, aboard the mission ship *Herald*, and his preaching of the Christian message to local Māori at Pilot Bay, Mt. Maunganui. Bishop Katene spoke about the impact of the Gospel on Māori, Revs Steve Maina and Pane Kawhia about the CMS, and Dr Alistair Reese about Williams. Reese, along with Dr. Cliff Simons from Gate Pā Church, had spoken in April at the 150<sup>th</sup> Gate Pā Anniversary, about the influence of Protestant and Catholic missions upon the Māori who were at war with the British Army at that time. Over in the Waikato, the CMS Kenyan mission group performed and spoke at the marae at Waharoa, gave copies of *Te Rongopai a Ruka* (Luke's Gospel) to Ngāti Haua school children, and participated in a service beside Tārore's grave.

There were many local re-enactments in 2014 of the events of Christmas

Day 1814. Samuel Marsden was seen coming ashore in numerous places around New Zealand, including Helensville and Titahi Bay. In a church in West Auckland, Marsden sailed into the auditorium in an impressive articulated cardboard sailing ship, the *Active*, which also had on board three missionary families, chiefs Ruatara, Korokoro and Hongi Hika, and a crew. Ruatara was enthusiastically greeted by his three wives. After Marsden had preached, and Ruatara had explained in Māori, Ruatara led the people in a mass rendition of the dance, *Te Hari o Ngāpuhi*.

The events mentioned above are indicative only, and are not intended as comprehensive list of New Zealand churches' 2014 bicentenary commemorations. Much else went on. In large numbers of churches, for instance, services on Christmas Day 2014 gave special attention to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marsden's sermon.

At the bicentenary Christmas service at Rangihoua itself, on the crowd was made up of people from a huge range of denominations, and included significant numbers of Māori. The service was sponsored and led by Anglicans, both Māori and Pākehā. Representatives of eight other denominations (Catholic, Elim, AOG, Baptist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Wesleyan Methodist,

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and Methodist) were assigned readings or prayers. The service was tightly scripted, and was largely Anglican in style, with robed bishops and clergy in the official party seated behind the dais. The Church Missionary Society did not appear to be included in the official party. Bishops Te Kitohi Pikaahu and Ross Bay spoke warmly about Ruatara and Marsden. Archbishop Philip Richardson spoke about Māori *manaakitanga* (hospitality), bi-cultural partnership, love, and caring for society's vulnerable. The Revd. Samuel Marsden (a great, great, great grandson of his famous namesake, and from Britain) brought lively personal greetings.

Some New Zealand churches appeared to give little or no attention to the 2014 Christian bicentenary. Within many churches, the bicentenary may largely have escaped the notice of ordinary church members. There is no doubt, however, that the 2014 bicentenary significantly helped raise the level of historical understanding and bicultural awareness among many New Zealand church leaders and members. To become excited by history is not typical New Zealand behaviour, either in or outside churches, but it could be argued that the trans-denominational interest in New Zealand Christian beginnings and in New Zealand church history which was shown in 2014 by churches across the country was unprecedented, especially among Pākehā. So, at least within the New Zealand churches, this was by no means a quiet bicentenary.

#### **PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE 2014 BICENTENARY**

So what did the general public think about the Christian bicentenary? Not much, if the on-line comments on the *Herald* articles by Peter Calder and Paul Moon are any indication. "Former exile" remarked: "I don't see how the arrival of a missionary constitutes our nation's first day...It might constitute an important date for people who subscribe to the religion Marsden was preaching, but not to the nation". "Illicit" declared: "Forget religion, most theologians in those days were in for the money anyway, but what's changed". "Kiwi Mac" pronounced: "It's a matter of supreme indifference". "Birkdale Basher" wrote: "Yawn". There were also some positive comments. It would be fair to say, though, that while the 2014 bicentenary had inspired many within the Christian community, its significance was not strongly affirmed by the wider New Zealand community.

#### **THE 1914 "MARSDEN CENTENARY"**

An interesting set of comparisons can be made between the 2014 bicentenary and what happened in 1914, a hundred years previously. In 1914, the centenary was referred to as the "Marsden Centenary". By 2014, the focus was much less on Samuel Marsden himself, and much more on themes of Gospel and bi-cultural beginnings. In 1914, as 2014, World War I had an effect of the Christian commemorations. In 1914, the centenary celebrations were significantly scaled back, because of overwhelming public preoccupation with the crisis of war. Fund-raising for the Marsden Centenary Fund had been suspended, and its main organiser had been re-assigned to patriotic welfare work. In 2014, travel to Rangihoua was relatively easy. In 1914, however, access to Marsden Cross was still primarily by sea, and land travel into and around Northland could still be quite arduous. In 1914, the service at Marsden Cross was entirely Anglican.

#### **WITHIN MANY CHURCHES, THE BICENTENARY MAY LARGELY HAVE ESCAPED THE NOTICE OF ORDINARY CHURCH MEMBERS.**

Ecumenical participation was not yet a consideration. Nor had the language and practice of bicultural partnership yet developed.

At the 1914 service,<sup>35</sup> Māori sang hymn verses separately, in Māori, while Pākehā listened.

In 1914, there were large numbers of Māori clergy and laity in attendance at the Christmas Day service. The northern Māori church was still strong. Averill noted that the greatest monument to Marsden was the Māori church. Bishop Averill spoke of how "only a fraction" of the number of Māori were left, but "the majority of them [are] Christians, [there are] 50 or 60 Māori clergy, hundreds of Māori lay readers... Māori churches everywhere, Māori schools, primary and secondary, four Māori members of Parliament, doctors and lawyers, and in camp 500 Māoris [sic]... being trained to take their place side by side with the Pākehā in the struggle to support the principles of justice, truth and honour".<sup>36</sup> The talk in 1914 was of how much Māori had progressed in 100 years, of how former pagans and savages had been transformed by both Christianity and civilisation. There was no thought expressed, as in 2014, that Māori had sometimes have suffered at the hands of British "civilisation".

Ten days earlier, over 1,000 people had attended a public meeting in the Auckland Town Hall. The mayor had spoken in eulogistic terms of Marsden.

<sup>35</sup> Church Gazette, 1 Sept 1914: 154.

<sup>36</sup> "Marsden Centenary", *Poverty Bay Herald*, XLI, 13572 (28 December 1914): 5. It appears the reporter was summarising the speakers, rather than quoting them.



Bishop Averill had compared Marsden to Pope Gregory I and Augustine of Canterbury, said Marsden had suffered much misrepresentation in Sydney, and praised Marsden's "perseverance in New Zealand in the establishment of Christianity and civilized life". Pākehā speakers spoke of colonialism as having brought nothing but progress. Marsden text was: "Behold I bring you glad tidings of Great Joy", and his hearers indeed had cause for celebration, because "the men Marsden had brought over had begun the colonisation of New Zealand".<sup>37</sup> One of the Māori speakers, Te Kiwi Amahou, took a very different line: he complained that the organising of the 1914 commemoration had not been done jointly with Māori leaders.

In 1914, some other denominations also took some interest in the "Marsden Centenary". But there was nothing like all the widespread activity which was evident across so many churches in 2014. In 1914, while there was some anxiety in churches about growing religious declension in society, there was as yet no widespread feeling that Christianity had been marginalised, or that it had been edited out of New Zealand's history. By 2014, however, churches appeared eager to reclaim at least a place within New Zealand's history and identity.

At the 1914 Presbyterian General Assembly, two lengthy orations about the Marsden Centenary were given by Isaac Jolly and W. Gray Dixon.<sup>38</sup> They both expressed great admiration of Marsden's foresight, courage, prayerfulness, energy, stamina, and heart-felt relationship with Māori. While they acknowledged that Marsden was Anglican, they made much more of the fact that Marsden was a true and well-connected Evangelical, someone characterised by what Jolly termed "unadulterated Evangelicalism".<sup>39</sup> They also emphasised that Marsden had great catholicity of spirit, and that he freely extended fellowship and generous help to Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists (they did not mention that his catholicity, like their own, did not extend to Catholics).

The main emphasis of Jolly and Dixon was on the coming of the Gospel to New Zealand.

37 "Marsden Centenary". *Waiapu Church Gazette*, V, 8 (1 February 1915): 95.

38 "The Rev. Samuel Marsden and his Work, An address given in First Church, Dunedin, at the Presbyterian General Assembly by the Rev Isaac Jolly, M.A.", *Outlook* (22 December 1914): 7-8, 26-29; 'Marsden's Legacy to New Zealand'. Rev. W. Grey Dixon, M.A.), *Outlook* (22 December 1914): 17-18.

39 Dixon, *ibid.*

This was similar to how most churches saw the 2014 bicentenary. But Jolly and Dixon also lauded civilisation and progress, and saw no tension between.

Christianisation and colonisation. Jolly asserted: "It has pleased God to Christianise New Zealand not chiefly through the evangelising of the heathen but through the colonising of it by Christian colonists".<sup>40</sup> Dixon declared that "Marsden's legacy to New Zealand was New Zealand herself. He was the founder of New Zealand. It is with him that New Zealand really begins."

Dixon's concept of New Zealand was "Christian New Zealand". He wrote of "New Zealand true to herself", which means "true" to Christ. By the "word of God", Marsden "spoke the nation into being". The glorious crimson of the pohutukawa anticipated the blood of the Lamb. As Marsden preached, "did not the pohutukawa understand, and bend the deeper in worship over the blue waters? ...The pohutukawa

bloomed and gave worship, while Marsden preached. That, brothers, was the foundation of our Dominion." Dixon's

Presbyterian vision was for not just a strong church, but for a godly society. He asked: "Are we ever mindful of the origin of our young nation, or sometimes do we defer to the voice of the tempter, assuring us that the State has nothing to do with religion, while as a matter of fact our State owes everything, its every being to religion and that religion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ". "O sons of New Zealand! It is at your peril that you forget for even a moment that at the fountain-head of the wide and beneficent streams of your national life there stands the Cross."

Such florid language was not heard in 2014. Also, by 2014 the New Zealand churches were aware of complexities and sensitivities that had not registered in 1914. Nevertheless, behind the deep interest of many Christian people in the 2014 bicentenary, was there still something of the same conviction, and yearning: the sense that, notwithstanding the indifference to Christianity of many secular New Zealanders, the foundations and future of New Zealand society remain interconnected with that of the Gospel?

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40 *Ibid.*