MAORI and ANCESTRY

In the year 2000 the Government department in charge of childrens’ affairs determined that my wife and I were ineligible to apply to adopt a child. We had no children. But in 2005 a Maori family, within our wider whanau, asked us to take their soon to be born child. On 11 September 2005 at Auckland airport an eleven week old baby girl was placed in our arms by her birth mother. We legally adopted Hana one year later. This was the hand of God to make possible what had not been possible on a human level. We have the divine privilege of raising a *wahine tamariki*, a *tangata whenua*. Our lives and destiny would then be forever linked to the Maori people. We are left to wonder what are the purposes of God for us and for the Maori people.

From 6 February 1840 our two peoples have lived in Aotearoa under a sacred treaty granting equality and protection for both people under the Crown. Sadly, many land rights were not honoured. Maori land wars claimed lives. For 135 years the Treaty lay dormant in the affairs of New Zealand. In 1975 a hikoi led by Dame Whina Cooper (85) drew the attention of all New Zealanders to the need to address Maori rights under the Treaty. A lengthy process of claims and settlements continues to this day. Meanwhile many Maori weakened their ties to their tribe, their people, their land, language and culture. Many have not competed well in a Pakeha dominated society. Many Maori hold grievances about these injustices and understandably so.

As a pakeha I may well be in the line of fire for these grievances, probably not to my face but possibly in the mind of some Maori. As a legal father of a *tamariki* I am intertwined with Maori. As I make my case, I ask you to remove me from your sights. I am with you, and my ancestors had the same troubles as you – but much worse. Our shared problem is with English Aristocracy of the 19th Century. While they were mistreating the Maori those same class of people were doing the same to me. I am Celtic on my father’s side – from Ireland. I am Gaelic on my mother’s side – from the Scottish Highlands.

**At the time you were signing your Treaty with the English my ancestors on my father’s side were tenant farmers in Ireland.** Their tiny plots of land grew potatoes – the only crop of enough bulk to sustain a family. The potato blight struck in 1845 and lasted for 7 years. We were part of Britain then, and the English Aristocracy continued to export our meat, grain, and other high-quality food to England, while we starved. We never wanted handouts from England, just investment in our country so we could work. That was denied. One million Irish died from starvation and typhus – one-eighth of the population. Another one million were put on crowded boats and sent to the colonies. With two million people removed and many small land holdings cleared, the English formed larger holdings to grow sheep and cattle and animal foods for England. The English elite viewed the famine as an Act of Providence to punish the shortcomings of Irish agriculture and Irish people.

Starving bodies also mean starving minds. Many became weak in their brains through lack of nutrition. They became stigmatised and the butt of ridicule. This condition was not genetic, it was due to under-nourishment, and yet the stereotype persists to this day. Irish jokes are still regarded as funny – PC culture offers us no protection.

My great-grandfather, John Duncan, arrived in Lyttleton in the 1860’s and took work digging the rail tunnel through the Port Hills to Christchurch. He was paid with a small division of the Bangor Estate in the middle of the Canterbury Plains – a barren, windswept, drought-prone, dustbowl with no water. He farmed there and had three sons. My second cousin describes him as ‘mad’. The depravities of life in Ireland would take generations to climb out of. I knew my grandfather as dour, grumpy and bigoted – but apparently, he was an improvement on his own father. Our grandmother was lovely. Grandad send his only son (my father) to boarding school. He had a good report in Form Three (Year 9). Fearing that he might get big ideas and not want to take over the farm, my father was pulled out of school and sent to work on the farm for 15 years without wages. Then my grandfather made him buy the farm! My father was driven by the desire that his four children had a better lot than he. He sacrificed for it and died of a heart attack at 60 before seeing any grandchildren.

I never heard my father speak ill of his father even though his father never spoke to him, despite living three miles away in Darfield. And he never spoke any ill will towards the English upper class in Bangor, which was next door.

My father left the farm to my brother and I should we want to go farming. We both did. I walked away to the freedom of living my life as I chose and to prefer harmony with my siblings which we still enjoy. My brother looked after our mother. Was that fair? Maybe not, but it was practical. It allowed me to tackle my life, looking forward rather than looking back.

It is my responsibility to improve on my father’s gains and to produce a child who will make her own mark on the world and, who knows, on her own people – the Maori.

**At the time the Maori were signing their Treaty with the English my ancestors, on my mother’s side, shared joint tenancy in the McGregor clan in the highlands of Northern Scotland.** The English monarchy didn’t trust these Highland clans. They had fought in a revolt against the monarchy. Rob Roy McGregor was a colourful legend of those time and is likely a distant relative. The English wanted the Highlands for sheep and pasture. So, they imposed restrictive laws weakening the power of the chiefs. They undermined Gaelic culture by banning the use of tartan dress and of bagpipe music and other measures. They gradually cleared the way for outsiders to acquire much land and they introduced capitalist agricultural models. Some evictions were brutal – burning cottages.

The Highlanders moved to the coast where there was a kelp industry producing iodine. There was fishing and small subsistence plots of land called crofts, where many grew potatoes. Like the Irish to their west, they became small tenant farmers. And, like the Irish, in 1846 the potato blight hit the crofters and left them in financial ruin facing disease and starvation. The kelp industry also failed.

For one hundred years the English had systematically cleared the Highlands. Legal protection stopped further eviction by an Act of Parliament in 1886.

My great great grandfather, Lake McGregor, sailed to Timaru with nothing but the will to survive. He went to Burkes Pass on the edge of the McKenzie Country – an uninhabited, frozen, barren wasteland in South Canterbury. A second hotel had been built at Burkes Pass but misfortune prevented the place going into business so the building was converted into a home by Lake McGregor. Life was stark.

An extract from the Juibilee History of South Canterbury describes a slice of life then.   
“Half of those buried in the cemetery have died of drink, a sad truth, disgracing no man; for owing to the solitary life, the cold and the wretchedness, men have felt that, without refuge in forgetfulness, madness would take possession of them; many have been found frozen to death, and feelings of pity rather than any harsher sentiment, move in the breast of the one learning these melancholy details.”(1)

They were survivors. Hardened in the highlands they rebuilt their lives – each generation improving on their parents. My grandfather moved to Dunsandel where he bred Corriedale sheep. He bought a home on Bealy Avenue, Christchurch, so his five children could benefit from good schools and other opportunities of the city. His oldest daughter married my father, a farmer in Darfield, and so my generation was born – fourth generation Canterbury farming kids.

**At the time the English Aristocracy were doing those dark deeds to my people a new light was dawning among them – a light that was to have profound effects on Maori at the other end of the earth in Aotearoa.**

William Wilberforce and his sincere Christian friends in Clapham (England) had a long struggle against the brutal slave trade resulting in a Bill halting the trade in 1807. By 1833 more than 700,000 slaves were released. Many who had campaigned with Wilberforce formed societies with other humanitarian goals. One was the church missionary society (CMS). In 1806 Chief Ruatara met CMS missionary, Samuel Marsden. In 1814 he invited Marsden to preach the message of Christmas at the Bay of Islands. Other chiefs requested missionaries. By the 1830’s the New Testament had been translated into Maori and they themselves took its message of Jesus around Aotearoa. The CMS missionaries considered the oppression of native people in colonised nations to be very much like slavery. And so, when the British Parliament passed a bill to open up the islands of New Zealand for limited colonisation, the CMS missionaries petitioned against it. They cited the ‘disastrous consequences to the Aborigines… in their rights, in their person, their property and moral condition.’ Their efforts failed. The New Zealand Company of Edwin Gibbon Wakefield had begun buying land.

However, William Wilberforce’s nephew, also of the Clapham sect, Sir James Stephen, advised Lord Normanby concerning a treaty to protect the rights of Maori. These plans were brought to Waitangi, New Zealand by Governor William Hobson in 1840. The CMS missionaries, most notably, Henry Williams, were commissioned to translate the treaty. They believed it would be a fortress to protect Maori, their land and the mana of their chiefs.  
(Ref: *Hope for All Booklet. A Better World 2018; p15-17)*

Unfortunately, as land grabbing continued and the Treaty promises were side-lined, the message of Jesus Christ fell into disrepute because, in the eyes of some Maori, missionaries were connected with the settlers who were both white and from Britain. This was tragic. Both the missionaries and their message were on the side of justice and fair treatment for Maori, as promised in the treaty. They opposed the land grabbing but their voices were silenced. But not forever…. More voices were heard – Ratana, Bastion Point and Dame Cooper’s hikoi, then Treaty Tribunal Settlement claims and Waitangi Day, the Haka, the New Zealand National anthem and Te Reo Maori. We are a bi-cultural nation. Much has been restored, but much is yet to come.

So, what is the way forward for Maori? And what lies ahead for me and Maori? Let us consider grievances again. If holding onto grievances is the answer then please advise me what I should do. If you have grievances against the 19th Century English then I have more. They took some of your land. They took all of mine. They killed several hundred Maori warriors. They starved one million of mine. They dishonoured your Treaty. I had no legal rights at all. They left you your best land. They left me on the worst. You got to stay in your native land. I got deported to the end of the earth.

So, what should I do? Harbour grievances against the English? That would destroy only me. That would be living in the past and I would go nowhere. No, my forefathers got a raw deal but they put their hand to the plough and made the best they could with what they had and improved their lot for the next generations.

I am all for Treaty settlements. God honours Treaties and so should we. To do so brings blessing. But grievances are another matter. They are toxins to the soul. They produce bitterness, resentment and revenge. They damage the person harbouring the resentment but do nothing to heal the issue or mend relationship. They are a return to ‘*utu*’ which was festering between tribes and causing bloodshed until the Gospel of peace came with the CMS missionaries. Is there a grievance? Come to the cross of Jesus Christ. Lay it down, repent, forgive and cleanse your soul. Then you will be free to move forward and embrace the heritage promised in the gospel.

So, what is God’s plan for Maori, and for Maori and Pakeha? For my daughter? For my brothers in prisons? What is the future? And how do you discover it? It is the opposite process from examining the past. The past has mountains of facts to be sifted and culled. The future has only clues, few and faint, to be pondered. God alone knows the future so to Him we turn. Like the wise men, they gazed at a star and found their treasure, while everyone else glanced at stars and slept the night. Proverbs 2:3-6 tells us to search for treasure, for wisdom. Seek it hard and you will succeed in learning about God.

Let us consider some clues:

1. In the history of conquest or colonisation has there ever been an indigenous people who began their relationship with a legal treaty granting them equal sovereignty? This Treaty, though dormant many years, is now being honoured and being woven into the fabric of our identity as a nation.
2. For myself, God gave Wendy and I a Maori baby as our own, when we weren’t even looking, and had no hope of a child.
3. God called me to work with prisoners and in drug re-hab. where I find many Maori.
4. The Treaty settlement process began in the mid 1970’s. That was the same time that God spoke directly to me through Isaiah 45:5,6 where it says, “He arms me that men may know Him from the rising of the sun to its setting.” On the first dawn of the new millennium people came to New Zealand’s East Cape to witness the rising of the sun, *Ra whiti*.
5. Maori are a spiritual people. They knew God as ‘*Io*’ and looked for clues of Him – in the sea, the sky, the land. When they found Him in Jesus Christ, they applied the truth to their world and they themselves spread the message among themselves.
6. Maori are a people of oratory. Words have power. God created with words. Jesus’ words are Spirit and Life. God’s word in redeemed Maori has potential yet unleashed.
7. Maori are a tribal people. It is widely recognised that the tribal peoples of the world are often the most responsive to the Gospel. Could God have a purpose to use Maori to carry the Gospel to other tribal peoples of the world?
8. Maori are a warrior people. The exploits of the Maori battalion are legendary. Their depth of passion goes on display before every All-Black game. Proclaiming the Gospel is warfare – spiritual warfare. Jesus said, ‘…the Kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing and forceful men take hold of it.” Matthew 11:12
9. Yet when you talk with a Maori they have an aura – they relax you, make you laugh, have a gentleness. They have *mana*.
10. Maori have a sense of protocol, of order in community, centred around the Marae and Kaumatua. There, identity and belonging are re-established.  
      
    There are more clues, but these are a few.

The way forward is both on a national level and a personal level. The national level is the Treaty settlement process. The personal level is to bring grievances to the cross of Jesus. These steps are just the beginning. Pakeha must not say that Treaty settlements solve the issue, and just get on with it. No. That step takes us back to the place we were before greed and injustice set in. Maori and Pakeha were intended by God to live in mutual partnership with each other, with each contributing much to each other’s worlds. A Pakeha world dominated by commerce is shallow and cold, materialistic and alienating. Yet it brings enterprise, diligence and prosperity. The Maori as discovered by the first missionaries, were intelligent, astute traders, but were tearing each other apart by tribal rivalries. The Gospel of Jesus brought peace and reconciliation.

When woven into the commercial and social structure of Maori society it enhanced all the best that is Maori. When we Pakeha are invited to share in your world we are greatly enriched. At the same time, we share with you of our strengths to help you prosper.

This was how it was at first. The first missionaries came bringing the Gospel, education and new technologies. Maori invited them into their world and a trust grew. This was at its height in 1840 when the Treaty was signed. “It is God who created all races of mankind and made them to live throughout the whole earth. He Himself fixed beforehand the exact times and limits of the places where they would live. He did this so that they would look for Him and reach out for Him and perhaps find Him” - Acts 17:26-27

Maori were looking for God, and knew Him in part, before the missionaries came. Some had made gods of parts of His creation but when Jesus Christ was revealed it was indeed ‘tidings of great joy’, Luke 2:10, as Samuel Marsden had preached. They believed and turned to Christ as their Saviour and as their source of peace. History has muddied those waters in the name of progress, but God does not change His intentions; that two people should live together in this beautiful land in mutual respect and mutual enrichment of each other’s lives and destinies.

Maori have shown much restraint and dignity and honour when our relationship has been less than mutual. Pakeha need to slow down, take the time, lay aside our schedules and accept the invitations of Maori into their world. And, as we remove our footwear, leave outside also all arrogant attitudes. Leave also stereotype notions and critical attitudes, come contrite, come humble, come thankful, come respectful, come to learn. There is another way of being a human being, a valid way, a way displaying the creative hand of our common maker. Come to detect some clues about God and His handiwork expressed in a people different from us. Come to search for a way to partnership again. You also have much to bring to them, as they have to enrich you.

This vision is nothing new. It was happening in the 1830’s. It was revived in the 1970’s and it goes on today. We all need encouragement and affirmation. Perhaps these are what we Pakeha can start with towards our Maori brothers and sisters. They will welcome you. Let our *korero* go on.

Haerai mai

Ref. Maxwell, James ‘Discovering the MacKenzie and Mt Cook Country’, Herald Print, Timaru, p 11

Paul Duncan

March 2021