

MĀORI NEW TESTAMENT LAUNCH – TE KAWENATA HOU

Delivered by The Reverend Mark Brown, Chief Executive Officer of the Bible Society in New Zealand

10AM, DECEMBER 17, 2008
POROPORO MARAE, WHAKATANE

INTRODUCTION

Nga mihi ki a tatou katoa i raro i te korowai o te Atua.

Tena koutou Ngati Pukeko. Tena koutou Ngati Awa.

Good morning. Thank you for joining us today on this special occasion marking the launch of Te Kawenata Hou, the 2008 Māori New Testament. It is with considerable excitement that I present to you today the completed work of many people who have, over a number of years, meticulously cared for the sacred text of the Paipera Tapu, and presented it in a more readable and accessible way for a modern generation of Māori.

This edition of Te Kawenata Hou is an important step in the long and often arduous journey of the Māori Bible. It cannot be disentangled from the work of past generations of Christian leaders and scholars, both Māori and Pakeha, and the English missionaries who began the task. From the very beginning, Bible Society has played a God-appointed role in shepherding the delivery of the Word of God into the hands and hearts of Māori everywhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Because of the sheer scope and nature of this project, it was always going to have a long list of credits upon its conclusion. And this morning I would like to acknowledge some of those people.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge and thank our gracious hosts, the people of Poroporo Marae for their hospitality today. It is right to be launching Te Kawenata Hou in a region so rich in Māori heritage.

The actual work of preparing the text of Te Kawenata Hou has been a long and difficult job. I acknowledge the two people in this process who have worked on modifying the orthography; Reverend Leo Te Kira and Brenda Crooks. I thank you both for the countless hours spent poring over the text, making the required changes and then checking and re-checking everything. I also wish to thank Bible Society's UBS Translation Consultant, Stephen Pattermore who has provided expertise, guidance and oversight for much of this project. His service has been invaluable and I thank you Stephen.

From the Bible Society New Zealand team, I acknowledge Gavin Drew, John Jennings, Murray Grindlay and Stephen Opie, all of whom at some stage were involved in oversight of various aspects of the project.

I especially thank the Pihopitanga (Māori Bishops) for working alongside us. They have helped, among other things, with finding translators for the book introductions and allowing us to check our macronised text with theirs. I also acknowledge Arthur Schwartzfeger for his considerable help. It was Arthur who first

alerted us to the existence of an electronic text and it was he who began the work of correcting errors in that text. Arthur has played an important role in the 2008 edition of Te Kawenata Hou.

I thank the Reverend Sonny Melbourne who has been with us since the project's inception and Bible Society is especially grateful to Sonny for organising today's events.

Finally, I wish to thank Te Taura Whiri I Te Reo Māori (The Māori Language Commission) for their guidance with language, especially with the conventions for using macrons.

HISTORY OF BIBLE SOCIETY

Bible Society in New Zealand is part of an international fellowship of more than 140 Bible Societies. Together, our mission is that all peoples in all countries have access to the Bible in their heart language. Currently, more than 2,000 different language groups have a Bible or part of a Bible translated in their tongue. However, with 6,500 languages on earth, there is a fair bit of work left to do.

Bible Society New Zealand was born out of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which was founded in the United Kingdom in 1804. Their mission was to encourage the wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment, with the belief that changed lives would lead to a changed society. The Bible Society quickly established a commitment to Bible translation and distribution throughout the world. Their involvement in ensuring the Māori people had a Bible in their heart language was direct and deliberate from as early as 1827.

HISTORY OF MĀORI BIBLE

Reverend Samuel Marsden, a member of the Church Missionary Society in Sydney, is well known as the founding father of the missionary movement in New Zealand. He sailed to England to encourage missionaries to make the perilous journey to the antipodes on the far side of the world, as he had a genuine concern for the wellbeing of Maori in New Zealand.

It is not widely known that the Gospel first came to Aotearoa as a result of Māori invitation, rather than European initiative. According to historian Col Stringer, a Māori Chief of Ngapuhi called Ruatara invited Marsden in Sydney to bring the Gospel to his people.

After the invitation and a grant of leave of absence from the Governor of New South Wales, Marsden sailed for the Bay of Islands in 1814. It was during this trip that Marsden claims to have conducted the very first Christian service in New Zealand on Christmas Day at Rangihoua. His sermon that day was based on Luke chapter 2 verse 10:

“...tū te mea he kaikauwhau tēnei ahau ki a koutou mō te hari nui meāke puta mai ki iwi katoa.”

“I bring you Good News of great joy that will be for all the people”

Much controversy accompanies the paternalistic approach to mission of Victorian England. Often described as ‘civilise first’, instructions given to CMS agents landing in New Zealand were to introduce European civilisation to Māori rather than convert them. In reality however the missionaries that Marsden left in the North sought primarily to tell the Bible story.

This posed a significant problem for early missionaries: how to communicate the Gospel. It was the same problem Marsden faced during the first Christmas service and one that would plague the introduction of Christianity for some years. Written translations in an oral, non-literate culture presented the missionaries with significant problems. They required people with skills in analysis, transcription and systemisation.

One of Marsden's CMS agents Thomas Kendall began establishing schools somewhat resembling Victorian Sunday Schools. There he taught lessons from the Bible and in 1820, Kendall issued a Māori Grammar containing the Lord's Prayer. This was the first printing of any part of the Bible in Māori.

Early initiatives to translate the Gospels into Māori were somewhat uncoordinated. In 1824 a lay missionary named James Shepherd began the task of translating the Bible into Māori, beginning with the Gospel of John. Others also began their own translation work. By 1826 it was recognised that some coordination was required for such a monumental task to be completed with any kind of haste and efficiency.

So, in September of 1826, CMS missionaries at Paihia began to gather each morning to prepare Māori texts. Their early work included catechisms, services from the book of common prayer and key passages from the scriptures. A volume was later published in Sydney which included highlights from a summarised Gospel, Genesis chapters 1 – 3, John chapter 1, Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 5: 1-30 and The Lord's Prayer from Matthew. Only 400 copies of this small booklet were printed.

The British and Foreign Bible Society had already established an auxiliary in New South Wales, which was founded by Samuel Marsden. The New South Wales auxiliary was enthusiastic about translation into Māori and provided £41 towards the cost of the publication, thus involving the Bible Society with the very first publication of the Bible into Māori.

That year however, the speed at which the New Testament was being translated was frustrating many. A small committee was formed with the aim of speeding up the work. Their meetings eventually moved to the Stone House in Keri Keri. A member of that committee spent six months in Sydney in 1830 preparing to publish a 117 page book with similar content to the 1826 edition but with the addition of longer passages including 1 Corinthians chapters 1-6. With Bible Society assistance, 550 copies were produced. A third edition was published in 1833 with more content but still not a complete New Testament. All three editions were riddled with errors but nonetheless extremely popular. William Yate wrote in 1833 that "Wherever they sit down to rest, all take out their Sacred Scriptures and begin to read. I have actually been kept awake, in my bed, till after midnight, by the [Māori] outside reading the Sacred Scriptures and asking each other questions, or passing comments".

The physical inadequacies of having to print in Australia drove the CMS, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and Bible Society to establish a press in New Zealand. An agreement was reached that Bible Society would pay for production of Bibles in New Zealand. Thus William Colenso was appointed as a missionary to New Zealand to operate the press. He had experience as a printer in England and arrived in New Zealand in 1834. After publishing a small book of Ephesians and Philippians, the remaining drafts of the New Testament were completed and the tiny new press at Paihia was used from March 1836 to December 1837 to produce the 5,000 copies of the New Testament. Binding for the book was taken from curtains found at Paihia.

There was huge demand for the New Testament when it became available. In Rotongia in the Waikato, one Māori was reported to have said:

"One thing only do I desire; it is not a blanket, it is not anything that will pass away, but this is my great desire – the Word of God."

The first 5,000 copies were used up very quickly. It surprised many at the time that demand for this literary and religious product seemed to outstrip the demand for muskets.

By 1854 more than 70,000 scripture portions, Gospels and New Testaments had been distributed among Māori. By 1890 that had grown to a whopping 126,000. With a total population estimated at 180,000, more than 1 in every 2 Māori may have been in possession of some scripture or at the very least heard

part of the New Testament read to them. As a result, Māori culture gained intense familiarisation with the Scriptures and missionaries often noted how well Māori knew the Bible stories.

Although the Gospel came to New Zealand by the hands of English missionaries, it was often Māori that played a pivotal role in spreading the message of peace and hope to each other. History records the significant influence and ministry of many Māori evangelists among their own people. An example of this is when Bishop Selwyn took a missionary to the South Island in the early 1840s, becoming the first European missionaries to set foot there. They found Māori people living in peace and following Jesus. Many had already learned to read and write and the only textbook they had was Tarore's Gospel of Luke and two pages from the Māori Prayer Book.

Tarore was a 12 year old Māori girl from the Waikato. She had learned about Jesus at a missionary school and had been given a copy of the Gospel of Luke, *Te Rongopai A Ruka*. It was so precious to her that she wore it around her neck. As her tribe fled the tension around Matamata in 1836, she was killed at Wairere Falls. The Gospel was taken from her and ended up in Otaki with Tamihana, son of the great Te Rauparaha, and Ripahau, a slave. Tamihana and Ripahau converted to Christianity and took the message of reconciliation and forgiveness found in the words of Jesus to South Island Māori. This must surely be one of the most remarkable stories anywhere in the world of the transformative power of the scriptures.

But around this time in the North Island the Missionaries began noticing a marked decline in the demand for scripture from Māori. It is debated why this occurred but popular theory suggests there are probably two reasons: the saturation level of scriptures among the Māori population, and the onset of the New Zealand wars.

In the late 1840s, Robert Maunsell was to lead the charge in Old Testament translation. In 1847 he released works that covered the first six books of the Old Testament and by 1865 the entire Old Testament was finished. However, for two years, the printed unbound pages of the Old Testament sat in a storehouse due to the New Zealand wars. The translation committee also wished to revise the New Testament before the full Bible was published. So it wasn't until 1868 that the very first one volume edition of the full Bible in Māori appeared.

With the New Zealand wars continuing to rage, leading to a very unsettled and disrupted period, only 700 copies of the full Bible were sold in the first three years.

In 1884 the Bible Society put forward the idea of a second edition. That was published in 1889, but was not well received, partly because of the committee's refusal to let Māori take part in the translation. Again in 1922, Bible Society wrote to the churches of New Zealand pressing the need for a further revision. This need was recognised and work began in 1923, with the third edition of Paipera Tapu published in 1925.

After another 20 years the need for a revised edition that involved Māori translators was put to the church. A major revision began with eight of the scholars being Māori. At a conference in 1946, Bishop F A Bennett appointed three members of the clergy for the work. They were:

Rev Wiremu N Panapa
Rev E Te Tuhi
Rev Te Hihi Kaa

Along with Sir Apirana Ngata they saw the project through to publication in 1952.

That 1952 edition remains a classic Māori text. Its roots are found in the very first publications in Māori and in the lives of missionaries that introduced the Māori people to the message of Jesus Christ. It is in a very real sense a part of Māori culture and life. In the words of historian Peter Lineham, “In the past Māori culture was affected by this book. It is not impossible that it could happen again.”

We gather today, 171 years after the publication of the first New Testament, to celebrate the publication of a new edition. Not a new translation, or even a revision of the 1952 text, but an edition of modified orthography.

Modern Māori are more likely to encounter their language written with macrons and formatted in paragraphs. The addition of these two key orthographic elements makes the text more accessible and familiar to read. Speech marks make it clearer to the reader to follow and the introduction for the very first time of section headings and book introductions add significant value to the 1952 text. Just as the Church Missionary Society and British and Foreign Bible Society were proud of what their labourers achieved nearly two centuries ago, so am I proud of our work leading to the presentation of this classic text here today.

A NEW VISION

I believe that something significant in the life of the Māori Bible still remains to be done. Something stirs Bible Society's heart. There is another chapter to this story I've told you this morning yet to be written. You see, when Bible Society embarked on this journey in the early part of this, the 21st century, it wasn't our first choice.

For many years, Bible Society has been receiving requests for another Māori translation. A translation in contemporary, everyday Māori language that a modern Māori reader will identify with. The need to assist Christians of all races and creeds across the globe in deepening their relationship with God is greater now than ever before. Evidence shows that here in New Zealand, as in Australia, the UK and America, Christians aren't reading the Word of God. The Bible is often now perceived as a by-product of the church.

We must do all that we can for the coming generations. Why shouldn't Māori have access to a modern Māori text, one that they read in their heart language, the language they speak at home, at kura kaupapa, or in the workplace. Before now, revisions of the Māori Bible were completed at intervals of 21 years, 36 years then 27 years. It has now been 56 years since the last revision was completed. Given that a full Bible will take the best part of 13 years to complete, if we began this very day to produce a Bible in contemporary Māori, it would be ready by 2022. It would be a long and difficult road to travel. And it's a journey that we all must take together. I understand that there are significant issues that would need to be resolved; from regional dialects to differing names for Jesus. These are issues that need to be discussed and worked through, but what better context than in preparing a contemporary Māori translation? This is what is stirring our heart at Bible Society.

But it cannot be Bible Society's vision. It must be yours. I pledge to you today our full support and expertise in translation. We will assist in gaining funding; we will do all we can in helping coordinate the project. But it must be your vision. The mandate must come from you, your church, your Marae, your community.

The sacred text of the Paipera Tapu does not belong to Bible Society. It belongs to the people. It belongs to you. It is a sacred document. A taonga.

Our vision is not to replace it, for it will always have its role in Māoridom. Our vision is for a contemporary Māori translation that will sit alongside it. Something that a young Māori reader can open, and begin reading as if God were speaking to him or her in their own everyday heart language.

I urge you to begin thinking about this. Some of you have been thinking about this for a long time. Now is the time to act. Together, let's bring the Word of God to a new generation of Māori speakers, so that God will speak to them in their heart language in order for their lives to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Together, let's turn the page in the proud history of the Paipera Tapu and begin writing a new chapter for a new generation of New Zealanders.

I thank you again for sharing in this special day with us. May God bless the distribution of Te Kawenata Hou and the Paipera Tapu throughout Aotearoa and may many Māori come to know the Jesus of the scriptures.

***“Ko te tarutaru e maroke, ko te puawai e memenge; ko te kupu ia
a to tatou Atua, tu tonu.”***

Isaiah 40:8

Source of historical information:

Bible and Society, Peter J Lineham, Published by Bible Society and Daphne Brasell Press, 1996

Discovering New Zealand's Christian Heritage – God's History Makers, Col Stringer, Robina Town Centre, Qld, 2001

Plus other sources