

Huia Come Home – J. Lucas

This essay serves to seed an idea, a metaphor, that I hope will rest on the forefront of leadership thinking in the next decade. I hope this metaphor will serve like a mooring to the mind, as leaders shape New Zealand society. In the next five years, New Zealand is facing two anniversaries significant in our narrative. The first is 2014, marking two hundred years since Marsden first preached the gospel on the shores of Aotearoa. The second is 2015 with the one-hundredth anniversary of the Gallipoli Anzac story, which has made a recovery into the current psyche of New Zealand. But this is not the focus for this essay.¹ Instead I focus on the gospel story in Aotearoa and both its success and shortcomings in the land, revealed through the Treaty of Waitangi.

Over the past decade or so, coming to the forefront of Christian thought and shaping of Christian community, has been a growing understanding of narrative theology, the idea of scripture being the *story* of God.

The Church has recovered her ability to see scripture not as the value system of the Christian religion, but as the actual story of God working in *global* history, not just Christian history. In the story we see the eternal character and intentions of the Triune God revealed to all of humanity and all of creation. Christians, in line with Newbigin's "logic of election"² are called to be God's viceroys, God's elected demonstration of humanity living rightly-related to everyone and everything around them. We are the body of people called to live God's way of life in every nook-and-cranny of society and culture, across the entire earth. *Selah.*

As leaders in New Zealand society, and especially as leaders elected to bear witness to the gospel, it is our joy to immerse our self in God's story, likewise necessitating the need for immersion in our own local story. As Christ followers, our way of living is called to mesh the stories of our land – the joys and triumphs, struggles and pains - with the gospel. We are called to identify points of intersection between God's way of life and the life actually lived. At those intersections we find an expression of humanity that triggers celebration, or a point of injustice needing rectifying, or as Brueggemann would highlight, the church's prophetic role in society is to *criticise* and to *energise*.³

Several years ago my wife and I began running a summer gathering for Christian young adults. We wanted to provide space for young people to capture story that has gone before us, awaken memory and hope, and encourage them to be change agents in New Zealand. For the first two years we had different people highlight aspects of Christian history, but whoever shared generally seemed to give history from Jerusalem, into Europe and the Reformation, finishing in the States.

When it came to our third gathering, we had the idea to explore New Zealand Church history. I asked two gentlemen to come and share: one on Christian history in New Zealand, and the other, a Maori friend, would interpret that history from a Maori worldview.

By the end of that week, it was no exaggeration to say that everyone was stunned. For the first time, most of this young Christian audience heard the story of Samuel Marsden, Henry Williams, radical conversion of Maori, the forming of the Treaty, the land confiscation fiasco; heroes like Tarore and her gospel of Luke were highlighted along with Wiremu Tamihana and the creation of the Kingitanga movement, and the emerging of prophets like TW Ratana. We discovered that Aotearoa, in her past, had experienced dramatic revival and reformation. As author Keith Newman describes in his recent book, *Bible and Treaty*:

Maori evangelised their own people with Christian ideas, stories and principles that were a catalyst for powerful moral and social change... The tectonic shift away from blood utu and cannibalism, the rapid growth in literacy, the reduction of intertribal wars, new agricultural and trading skills and the freeing of slaves can primarily be attributed to the practical, spiritual and humanitarian input of the missionaries and their faithful Maori teachers.⁴

At the learning of our own history, everyone voiced the same response: “Why have we not heard this before?” In that week in 2008, a tinge of sadness was also felt in the fact that we New Zealanders simply don’t know our story.

Christian leadership, both in the Church and wider culture, must begin to restock our memory bank. To *re-imagine* and *re-envision* our missional engagement to New Zealand society, a shift in values must take place to desire unlocking the treasure chest of our story.⁵ History must be made visible and accessible through multiple mediums, filling our memory and fuelling our imagination.

Speaking of the West, author John Ralston Saul says, “It is as if we have no functioning memory, in the sense that memory is the context of our community.”⁶ This is the case in New Zealand. With the loss of memory we forget our context. We forget the contours that have shaped the very community and society we’re called to always energise and sometimes critique.

It is as if, by in large, the New Zealand Church has acquired a bad case of *amnesia*. A sad effect of amnesia is the diseased is unable to envision the future. To imagine the future requires the use of memory to act as a guide in choosing elements of what we like or dislike, want or do not want, in the future.⁷ Saul goes on to say, “... societies require the context of memory in order to shape their thinking and their action.”⁸ He adds, “Without memory there is a vacuum. Propaganda thrives in a vacuum, as does ideology. As does public relations. All three replace context with scrambled fragments of memory. False memory.”

Unfortunately, Aotearoa has much public-relation propaganda! Whether it is her latest, trashy sitcom from Hollywood studios, or Christianity’s insatiable fervour for Floridian revivals! New Zealanders are fed and devour *other* contexts. We’re enamoured by portrayals of life fleshed out in contexts that are foreign to our own, producing misguided hope and short memory.

Which segues to the metaphor. While discovering our New Zealand story in 2008, my wife lay down for a summer afternoon nap. In the space between dozing and waking, she had a dream. In her words:

I saw an enormous hen standing in front of a pohutakawa tree. She was as tall as a three-story building, but in every other way looked like an ordinary chicken. I laughed at her over-sized body. She looked out-of-place and unnatural at such a ridiculous scale. Just as I was wondering why I was seeing such a large chicken, I heard God speak to me one word loud and clear: "Huia."

This dream has captured our imagination. These two birds, the chicken and the huia, offer a window to view New Zealand. Comparing these two birds side by side we see:

The Chicken: imported; oversized; a ground dweller; pecks its food from the ground; domesticated and farmed; the most common bird in the world.⁹

Te Huia: indigenous; unique – male and female had distinct differences, but always seen in pairs; could fly; wild yet friendly; considered the most sacred bird in New Zealand as the feather was used to rank chiefs of distinction; unseen and extinct.¹⁰

In the dream we see the extremely oversized, imported *chicken* dominating the landscape, overshadowing the native pohutakawa. Meanwhile the *huia*, indigenous to Aotearoa, is heard and not seen, due to its extinction. The chicken represents imported western culture that is abnormally oversized, while the huia represents that which is indigenous, local and unique to our New Zealand heritage.

What this metaphor tells us is that western values and *modus operandi* are too large. It is not that our western ways need to be done away with; they just need resizing. Alternatively, there is a way of being and doing life - a Maori way - that is solely unique to our tiny portion of the earth: and it is not predominantly seen, known or valued. The unpacking of this metaphor necessitates a leadership imperative. The exploration of this metaphor requires a Christian missional and ecclesial challenge.

Christianity in New Zealand started in the hope that Maori would know God.¹¹ For three decades leading up to the signing of the Treaty in 1940 all Christian activity focused on seeing Christ expressed in and through Maori. The only reason New Zealand has the Treaty of Waitangi is because of concerned Christian's in England, applying political pressure who, "...believed British exploration and trading should be edged with a sense of responsibility... for the people they encountered in far off lands."¹²

The Treaty was first thought of by Christians; the Treaty was written by Christians; the Treaty was translated and interpreted to Maori and the Crown, by Christians. In other words, the Treaty is not just national history, but a crucial part of our Christian story that we presently, predominantly, know nothing about.

After the treaty was signed and the intentions of the crown became fully known, we eventually saw a mass exodus of Maori from the church. In his Masters dissertation,¹³ Alistair Reese documents that as the crown confiscated land and the New Zealand Company actively purchased land we basically see Maori asking the missionaries, *whose side are you on: ours or the Crown?* Vice-versa we see the crown asking the same question to the missionaries. In despair and frustration, after decades of hard work undone, Reese notes, "...the church as a whole... left behind its missionary orientation... concentrating on the needs of the growing settler community."¹⁴ In the 1880's the work of Christianity in New Zealand, in a very large way ceased its mission to Maori.

And in 2010 we feel the disconnect. For example, at the last election, I asked several of my *Christian* friends what they thought of the Maori Party. Most did not see the point of the party, viewing them as ethnic segregates. One only has this view, when one does not know, nor value, history. One only has this view when their framework of thinking values an alternative way to process decisions. The same scenario can be said of the foreshore and seabed debate, or the Auckland super-city commission review, recommending to have set Maori seats on the new council. One value system *only* highlights equality for all councillors to be elected democratically by the present citizenry. This requires no memory. Another *prioritises* memory, with a living connection to the emotions and expectations of Waitangi in 1840, Kohimarama in 1860 and Bastion Point in 1970.¹⁵ The *ways* in which decisions are made are very different.

I look again at the use of narrative to understand scripture. Western Christian communities are finding life through a narrative approach to the text. To have this happen has required the advanced academic expounding of theologians. On the authority of these theologians churches began to embrace the idea of *story*, and be enriched for it.

But the idea of life and history as narrative has been in Aotearoa for nearly a millennia. Maori do life in story. That's what *whakapapa* is. It is primal knowing to have understanding as to where, how and to whom individuals connect. It is often experienced among Maori who become Christian, that their favourite portions of scripture are the genealogies! The very sections the average western reader skips. The concept of *narrative* as a lens to read life has been under our nose for a long time. We just have not been present to see it.

And to be *present* is the leadership challenge required in the next decade of New Zealand society. Christian's must reengage their missional call to this land and the people of the land to discover and apprehend a way of doing life that is not just unique to New Zealand, but offers hope to a planet of worldview dissonance. New Zealand has experienced the collision of civilizations, the merging of western and indigenous worldviews. In the midst of that meeting stood Christian leadership that held high hopes for the union of Maori and Pakeha. We must humbly relocate ourselves in that place again. This entails a leadership approach that is not elite, but is as simple as sitting with Maori and, through relationship, learning new ways of living via worldview osmosis filtered through the gospel.

As we approach 2014, and we are drawn to gratitude and celebration at the story of Christianity in Aotearoa, we must remind ourselves to not only celebrate our own church story, but to intentionally celebrate the *nation's* story. We need to draw attention to the incredible gift of Maori and Pakeha; our unique relationship together, expressed through Scripture and bound by Treaty, which signifies hope to the world.

Using the phrase *Huia Come Home*, it is my hope to generate several responses. Firstly, that we would be enamoured by the sheer beauty of the Huia as a natural New Zealand phenomenon. I hope it will stir pride reminding us of this *taonga* only found here.

Secondly, I hope it will stir grievance. In 1901 the Duke and Duchess of York visited our shores. As the huia feather symbolised chiefly status, Te Arawa elders gracefully placed one in the Duke's hat. Reporters took photographs of this and published them, not realising this would turn a selective symbol of honour into a fashion accessory.¹⁶ Immediately the demand for huia feathers increased and several years later the bird was seen no more. December 28, 1907 is the last official sighting of the huia.¹⁷ Is it coincidental that Maori *tohunga* and the *huia* would disappear in the same year?¹⁸ *Huia Come Home* is a prayer, not just for cultural recovery, but for cultural creativity leading Aotearoa forward.

Finally, I hope the image of an obese chicken, and an absent huia, will cause leaders to ask the question: *Whose story am I living out of?* As leaders, will we shape societies - churches, schools, movies, and politics - that culturally reflect our memory, or someone else's? Will we perpetually, wilfully and blindly transplant the aspirations of another context on to our own, burying our own uniqueness?

The huia offers a metaphor causing us to pause and consider, that within the borders and history of our own land, awaits a phenomenal story to tell! We just don't know it. Therein lies the leadership imperative before us: the apprehension of our memory.

Huia Come Home.

¹ Thinking of the Anzac story, I have asked the question in recent years, "What would 1915 look like redeemed? 1915 bought death with the atrocity of Gallipoli. Now that the Anzac's and Turks have an unusual relationship from foes to beloved friends, how could we see the antithesis of 1915 happen 100 years later? How could the Anzac's remember their forebears, and redeem it by offering life to the people of Turkey in 2015 in an array of community projects? But that's another story.

² Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989, 83.

³ Brueggmann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 3.

⁴ Newman, Keith. *Bible & Treaty: Missionaries Among the Maori - A New Perspective*. Penguin Books, 2010, 312.

⁵ In recent years, in order to get people interested in our story, I've wrestled with the question, "How do you make history cool?"

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- ⁶ Saul, John Ralston. *On Equilibrium*. Camberwell: Penguin Books, 2001, 215.
- ⁷ I am unable to locate the source where I read this sorry.
- ⁸ (Saul 2001, 216)
- ⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicken#cite_ref-0 Accessed July 29, 2010.
- ¹⁰ Information on the Huia in from: <http://www.nzbirds.com/birds/huia.html> Accessed July 28, 2010.
- ¹¹ Newman's *Bible & Treaty* sources everything I am about to say.
- ¹² (Newman 2010, 23)
- ¹³ Reese, Alistair. "Truth, Repentance and Naboth's Vineyard: Towards Reconciliation in Aotearoa New Zealand." University of Cambridge, 2007, 31-36.
- ¹⁴ (Reese 2007, 36)
- ¹⁵ McLauchlan, Gordon. *The Life and Times of Auckland: The Colourful Story of a City*. Penguin Books, 2008, 196.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.nzbirds.com/birds/huia.html> Accessed July 29, 2010.
- ¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huia> Accessed July 29, 2010.
- ¹⁸ See: Tohunga Suppression Act, 1907. Tohunga were tribal leaders that carried the ancient history of iwi, and moved in spiritual healing. In 1907 the crown banned them from teaching and acting in supernatural powers. Special thanks to Keith Newman and friend, for their email dialogue that pointed out the connection of these two dates.

Bibliography

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