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A possible new path to Māori-Pākehā understanding

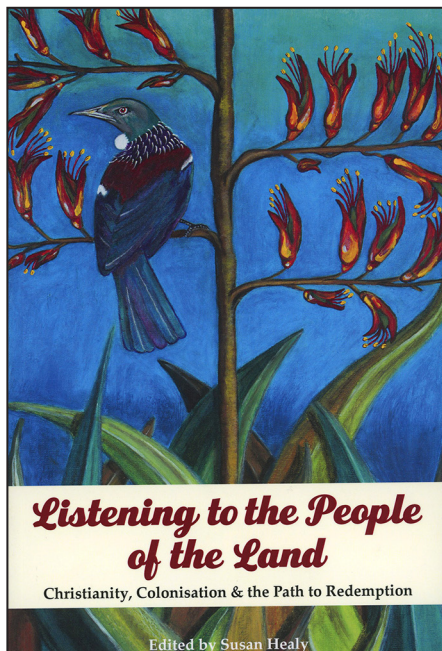
Listening to the People of the Land: Christianity, Colonisation & the Path to Redemption, edited by Susan Healy. Auckland: Pax Christi, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, with support from the New Zealand Dominican Sisters. 332 pages. ISBN 978-0-473-45957-4.

Praying for Peace: A Selection of Prayers and Reflections, edited by Kevin McBride. Auckland: Pax Christi, Aotearoa New Zealand, in association with the Pacific Media Centre, 2018. 152 pages. ISBN 978-0-473-43798-5.

THE STRENGTH of the series of essays in *Listening to the People of the Land* is the varying perspectives given on the brutal losses forced on Māori by white and Christian colonisation. In fact, if New Zealand was a truly just society, the teachings here would be a significant part of our school curriculum.

Editor Susan Healy draws the outline in the first 95 pages. Her chapter raises the occasional quibble and sometimes seems to downplay how inextricably interwoven were the settler culture and the Christian church in 1800s New Zealand.

However, as contributor Jen Margaret says later: ‘Christianity and colo-



nisation have been intertwined from the outset; they are mutually reinforcing projects.’

Healy traces the mistreatment of Māori, at least in part, to Pope Nicholas V’s publication of a papal bull, *Romanus Pontifex*, in 1454, which kick started the Doctrine of Discovery.¹ By today’s lights, it is ugly reading, but within less than 100 years, popes, as well as Catholic scholars and leaders, were starting to defend the human rights of indigenous people in documents such as *Sublimus Deus* in 1537.

Healy’s description of friendship between Māori and missionary is sad and tragic. For example, despite Samuel Marsden’s genuine friendship and insights, he ‘betrayed the people of Rangihoua’. It was a betrayal, but it may be that Marsden simply didn’t know what he didn’t know.

Faith in his own culture blinded him to the magnificent possibilities within a different culture and in that example was contained much of the tragedy of the Māori experience after 1840. Yet not all—for after Te Tiriti o Waitangi, most government administrations acted dishonourably and in bad faith towards Māori, especially by stealing land and taonga.

Land theft effectively destroys the soul of Māori culture. The communal nature of Māori society is based on Papatuanuku (mother earth) and the land. In 1840 Māori owned 100 percent of New Zealand land. About 150 years later they owned a pathetic 4 percent, almost all the rest having been taken from them.

Some Pākehā, mainly missionaries, had insight into the treasure that Māori culture is, and sought to defend it. In the chapter *Rethinking Ownership*, Healy points out that although evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal painted a picture of a Māori economy in which spirituality, ethics and practice were all geared to the care of people, ‘This is not to suggest that Māori belonged to some sort of saintly society’.

The different strands of the 10 authors are woven together to show how outrageous has been the treatment of Māori over nearly two centuries.

Even today, Māori culture is widely misunderstood, with many non-Māori thinking Māori understanding of and attitude to land, river, sea and forest underlies a primitive, animistic faith. Kennedy Warne quotes Tamati Kruger of Ngai Tuhoe who explains: ‘We are

Praying for Peace

*A selection of prayers
and reflections*



this land, and we are the face of this land. Wherever those mountains come from, that’s where we come from. Wherever the mist emerges from and disappears to, that’s where we come from.’

That English offers inadequate translations of Māori principles, such as atua, tapu and many others, even utu, is part of the problem. Christians and others of good faith need to go further than seeking inadequate translations and look for deeper understanding of Māori culture.

Māori matters also feature in *Praying for Peace*, another new book from Pax Christi.

Its 35 reflections cover a range of social and environmental justice matters, as well as honouring particular events and people of significance to many New Zealanders.

Seven themes cover Special Days, Peace and Justice Makers, Indigenous

Rights, Justice, Family Welfare, Cultural Minorities and Creation. Generally speaking, each reflection describes the event, person or issue, explains the significance, has questions to provoke insights and includes prayers and a hymn.

All reflections are worthwhile, although several that struck me in particular dealt with Discrimination, Oscar Romero, Hiroshima Day, the 1835 Māori Declaration of Independence, Parihaka, West Papua and the Rohingya people.

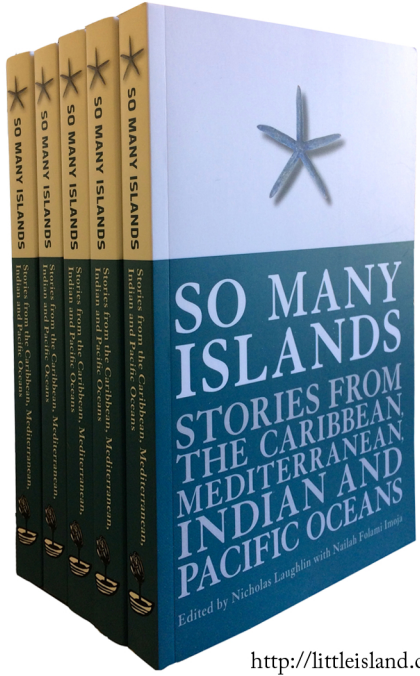
This is a straightforward book which will help those interested mark special days in meaningful ways.

Note

1. As Professor Nick Grier at the University of Idaho puts it: ‘In 1455 Pope Nicholas V exhorted Catholic rulers to conquer, even those “in the remotest parts unknown to us”, all who were enemies of Christ. The Pope gave them permission “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens [Muslims] and pagans”, take their possessions, and “reduce their persons to perpetual slavery”.’ In the 19th century the doctrine was used by the United States Supreme Court to justify the seizure of Native American land.

Reference

Grier, N. (n.d) The doctrine of discovery and the Christian conquest of the world. Retrieved from <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/ngier/discovery.htm>




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