**MISSIONARIES AND MAORI CONTACT**

Like many things at the time, Christianity – in the form of the Church Missionary Society – came to New Zealand via Australia. Historian James Belich described the Christian missionaries as the 'agents of virtue in a world of vice' – a world the British Resident, James Busby, described as 'frontier chaos'.

Although not immune to moral blemish them, these men and women went to extraordinary lengths to bring Christianity and 'civilisation' to Maori. The early years were largely unsuccessful for missionaries in terms of saving souls; as points of contact for trade as well as a source of new ideas, missionaries had a profound impact on many Maori communities. Their introduction of the written word and the development of a written Maori language represented a massive change.

A key figure in the establishment of the first Christian mission in New Zealand was Samuel Marsden. During his time in Australia as chaplain to the penal colony, he met many visiting Maori and developed a close association with the Rangihoua chief Ruatara.

Marsden returned to England in 1807 to secure support from the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) and to recruit lay settlers to prepare the way for ordained ministers. He was convinced that 'commerce and the arts have a natural tendency to inculcate industrious and moral habits. The attention of the heathen can be gained and their vagrant habits corrected.' It was not until 1809 that he was able to return to Sydney with the first lay missionaries or 'mechanics' – William Hall, a joiner, and John King, a rope maker. Ruatara, befriended by Marsden in Britain, was also on board the ship.

[**Rangihoua**](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/?q=node/1251)

When news of the [attack on the *Boyd*](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/node/714) reached the Colonial Office, any settlement in New Zealand was vetoed. It was not until June 1814 that Hall and Thomas Kendall finally arrived in the Bay of Islands as the first missionary mechanics. Marsden arrived on 22 December at Rangihoua, Ruatara's home, where, on Christmas Day, he gave the first Christian service in New Zealand.

Marsden believed Maori were perfect candidates for conversion as they had grasped the benefits of trade, a key aspect in terms of accepting European ideals and beliefs. Trade would make them dependent on Europeans and thus open the way to salvation.

The natives of New Zealand are far advanced in Civilization, and apparently prepared for receiving the Knowledge of Christianity more than any Savage nations I have seen … The more I see of these people, the more I am pleased with … They appear like a superior Race of men. *Claudia Orange, The story of a treaty, p. 9*

[**Marsden's first service**](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/?q=node/1886)

The theme of Marsden's first sermon on Christmas Day 1814 largely fell on deaf ears. Maori were clearly in a position of strength, so there seemed little reason for them to heed the new message. Some aspects of the Old Testament might have been seen as incorporating Maori values such as utu, but, as historian Gavin McLean noted, while men such as Ruatara and Hongi Hika 'listened politely and let children attend the stations' schools', they 'rejected the low-church mechanic missionaries' gloomy emphasis on an angry God' looking to damn their souls to eternal fires. Furthermore, conversion to Christianity was considered to be a blow to the mana of a chief – and to convert the people, the chiefs had to be won over.

Despite increased missionary activity during the 1820s, there were no Maori baptisms before 1830. Maori had their own beliefs and customs, and from a spiritual perspective the missionaries had little to offer. The missionaries were seen largely as another trade opportunity to be manipulated. Missionaries could do little about this as their economic and physical welfare were dependent on the goodwill and patience of Maori.

**Thomas Kendall**

On 12 August 1816 Thomas Kendall opened the first missionary school at Rangihoua, with a roll of 33 students. Education was an important way of introducing Maori children to the scripture and European ways**.** This first school closed at the end of 1818 due to a lack of supplies and trade, but another opened in 1823 under the auspices of James Kemp and George Clark. This time adults were allowed to attend.

The temperamental and driven Kendall was not popular with his fellow missionaries, and he clashed with the more pragmatic and secular approach of William Hall and John King. Kendall increasingly saw himself as the leader of the mission, in part because of his friendship with the powerful Hongi Hika. The dysfunctional nature of the mission was cited as another factor in the slow conversion rate of Maori.

**Victims of 'Maoriness'**

A constant fear of Marsden and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) hierarchy was that single men and missionary children were vulnerable to 'Maoriness'. Men so far from the safety of civilised society could give in to temptation.

Satan surrounded the early missionaries in the form of naked Maori bodies. Marianne Williams spent her first night in New Zealand thinking of them. "The tall muscular forms of the New Zealanders flitted before my mind's eye whenever I endeavoured to sleep." Missionary women are not known to have succumbed to temptation but some of their menfolk did. They included William White, William Colenso, Charles Creed and Thomas Kendall.

**The musket trade: men of vice or virtue?**

Of greater concern to Marsden was the trade in muskets and, in particular, the active role played by CMS employees. This was the era of the Musket Wars, and the missionaries were forced to engage in this trade by their Maori patrons. Sitting on the fence proved difficult. On several occasions Marsden had to remind his settlers not to take part in this trade. All except William Hall agreed to desist, but before long other members of the CMS community were at it again. Forced to take action, Marsden dismissed two of the settlers in 1819 and again banned the arms trade.

Marsden had suspended Kendall when he found out about his adulterous affair with a Maori woman. The latter's dismissal by the CMS in August 1822, however, resulted not from this affair but from Kendall's arms dealing. In a letter to the CMS, Kendall maintained that the settlers could not dictate to Maori what 'they must receive in payment for their property and services. They dictate to us! … It is evident that ambition and self-interest are amongst the principal causes of our security amongst them.'

**The work of Henry Williams**

By 1823 three Church Missionary Society (CMS) stations had been established in the Bay of Islands, and Henry Williams took over the leadership of the society's operations in New Zealand.

Williams, who had been ordained a priest in 1822 'for the cure of souls in his majesty's foreign possessions', inherited a mission beset by problems. Not a single Maori had been converted, and the missionaries were still largely dependent on Maori for food and supplies. Under the leadership of Thomas Kendall and John Butler, the mission had been torn apart by bitter personal disputes.

Williams sought to limit the mission's involvement with the traders at Kororareka and to reduce the dependence on Maori for supplies. Determined to end the musket trade, he imposed regulations on the missionaries' trading. Under his direction, the schooner *Herald* was completed in 1826, and this made the mission independent of local influences

Unlike Samuel Marsden, Williams believed too much time and energy had been devoted to teaching 'useful arts and agriculture' as a prelude to conversion. He reorganised the mission so that more time was devoted to spiritual teaching.

To achieve this, mission members needed to spend more time learning the Maori language, preaching in the surrounding area and teaching in the mission schools. Staff were concentrated at Paihia where the missionaries had regular Maori lessons together. Henry Williams was boosted by the arrival of his brother, William, in 1826. William had a great talent for languages.

The increased proficiency in Maori language and the revitalisation of schooling for Maori children began to pay dividends.

The 1830s was a decade of achievement and progress for the CMS mission. By 1842 over 3000 Maori in the Bay of Islands had been baptised. Whether the years of warfare had taken their toll or the patience and perseverance of the missionaries was finally paying off, for Williams the baptisms were a clear measure of success after many fruitless years. Increasingly, missionaries began to take the gospel outside the Far North.

Although Maori reasons for baptism were mixed and there was considerable backsliding in later years, by 1840 Henry Williams had reason to feel a great sense of satisfaction about his efforts since 1823.

**Missionary women**

Men such as Marsden stressed the importance of the Christian family in helping to spread the word. While they may have gained the fame (and in some cases notoriety), many missionary wives worked tirelessly in helping with the day-to-day work of the mission in New Zealand. Marianne Williams, for instance, played a key role in the revitalisation of missionary schools.

In 1823 the Wesleyan Missionary Society (Methodist) established a mission at Whangaroa, initially under the leadership of Samuel Leigh, a friend of Samuel Marsden. Leigh and his wife arrived in the Bay of Islands in January 1822 and lived with William and Dinah Hall of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) until the arrival of William White in May 1823. Leigh and White then established the Wesleydale mission at Kaeo, near Whangaroa Harbour.

The two missionary societies quickly worked out their spheres of influence, with the Wesleyans based on the east coast. Both groups confined their activities to the Far North until the early 1830s. On the eve of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, there were some 170 CMS missionaries and their families and approximately 69 Wesleyan missionaries.

Ruatara made it clear that he was the protector and patron of 'his Pakeha', the first CMS missionaries at Rangihoua. After his death in 1815 patronage of the Rangihoua station passed to his uncle, Hongi Hika, who was also patron of the CMS station established at Kerikeri in 1819. The need to secure the patronage of a local Maori leader was something that the Wesleyans failed to recognise. They were eventually forced to abandon their first mission station in 1827 when local Maori sacked it. They relocated to the Hokianga in 1828 under the leadership of William White.

**The arrival of Roman Catholicism**

There were concerns in Protestant circles when Jean Baptiste François Pompallier led a Roman Catholic mission into the Bay of Islands in 1838. Religious rivalry was matched by national rivalries as the Catholic missionaries at work in the Pacific were French.

Maori responded to this rivalry in various ways. If one tribe or hapu adopted Catholicism, a rival often adopted Anglicanism. Maori sometimes covered their bets, with different members of their community becoming Anglican while others chose Wesleyan or Catholic faiths.

From the mid-1830s the printed word became a new weapon in the campaign to bring Christianity to Maori. In 1835 the Church Missionary Society (CMS) printer, William Colenso, printed a Maori translation of the *Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to the Ephesians*. With the first New Zealand publication under his belt, Colenso then produced 5000 copies of William Williams's *Maori New Testament*, quickly followed by 27,000 copies of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Maori. By 1840 Colenso had produced over 74,000 books and pamphlets.

The Catholic Mission at Kororareka was equally prolific. In October 1842, 6000 handmade copies of the 648-page *Ko te ako me te karakia o te hahi Katorika Romana* (The teachings and prayers of the Roman Catholic Church) were produced.

These publications attracted much interest among Maori and increased the authority and extent of missionary influence. Maori increasingly recognised the printed word and literacy as sources of Pakeha wealth and mana and as essential skills that they needed to acquire in order to survive and prosper in the post-contact world.

The missionaries clearly paved the way for European colonisation and were instrumental in Britain's decision to offer Maori a treaty in 1840. The Treaty of Waitangi challenged Maori in terms of their newly acquired skills of literacy. It also opened the floodgates for European settlement and changed the face of New Zealand in a way unimaginable a generation before.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

1 – How did the early missionaries win over the Maori people and introduce Christianity?

2 – What was the impact that missionaries had on Maori life?

3 – Why was the trade of Muskets of concern to Samuel Marsden?

4 – What impact did Henry Williams have on Maori life?

5 – How do you think Missionary women differed from their male counter parts?

6 – What impact did the arrival of Roman Catholicism have on Maori culture?