A Biblical Perspective on Land

In the Judaeo-Christian heritage found in the teachings of the Old and New Testaments there is a specific theology of the land. To those who see part of this belief this may come as a surprise. The white settlers who came to New Zealand - most of whom profess to be Christian - either had no conception of this theology or else chose to ignore what they did know.

Rapacious land settlement programs such as the New Zealand Company dictated land policies with which the settlers gladly complied. These policies were based on exploitation, capitalism, individualism, private ownership, commercial gain and racism. Sadly, such policies are still very much part of the land scene today.

The Biblical view of land is quite the opposite of this. To begin with, there was no such thing as the private ownership of land. It was assumed that the earth belonged to the Lord.

The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his. (Ps. 24:1)

In the Biblical teaching the only land owner is God. Land use is determined by the Law which God gave to the people, through Moses, Mt. Sinai. This Law (Torah) sets down all kinds of conditions for the care and use of land. The underlying assumption of this Law was that the giver of such a land policy was a God of Justice who demanded proper care of the land, and a fair distribution among the people. Prior to the settlement of Canaan (about 1200 BC) the Israelites were a semi-nomadic people. In keeping with this kind of agrarian culture there were no class structures among the people. What wealth they possessed belonged to the tribe. Land ownership was not a consideration since they were constantly on the move.

After settlement in Canaan, every tribe and family received a parcel of land. This was evenly divided among the people and protected by legislation. Inevitably, some were more successful in their use of land than others. Some worked harder, some experienced bad fortune. Some fell into debt and had to sell their land. To cover all this, Israel introduced the jubilee principle - namely that every 50 years the land was to go back to the original "owners" - without compensation.

Thus every 50 years land ownership was equalized (Leviticus 25: 10-24). Before and after the year of Jubilee, land could be bought or sold, but what the buyer purchased was not the land itself but a specific number of harvests (Lev. 25:16). The land itself could not be sold as this belonged to the Lord.

Ecological factors were also considered. There was the law of the Seventh Year, under which the land was to lie completely fallow (Exodus 23:10-11; Lev. 25: 3-7). There were two reasons for this. The land was completely rested every 7th year. The Law of the Lord is also concerned with the poor.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat. (Exodus 23:10-11)

In the seventh year the poor are free to gather for themselves whatever grows by itself in the fields and vineyards.

While specific laws governing the use of land are confined to the Old Testament, their tradition spills over into the New Testament. Indeed, they were positively taken up by Jesus to be a part of his radical gospel to the poor:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set the oppressed free. (Luke 4:18)

Space does not permit me to quote more than one example. It is this: Jesus accepted voluntary poverty and he ordered his disciples to practice the jubilee principle by re-distributing their capital.

Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. (Luke 12:33)

Before the invention of the machines, the only wealth for most people came from the land so this radical re-distribution applied to the land and its product. It was not charity, but justice, based on the jubilee prescription of Leviticus 25:

This gospel of the re-distribution of the land and its produce has, occasionally, been taken with complete seriousness. There is an example in the early Church, in the book of Acts:

The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None said that any of their belongings was their own, but they shared with one another everything they had. (Acts 4:32)

The failure of most Christians to follow this example is one of the tragedies of history.

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LIE OF THE LAND

A call to the Church to offer the land back

In 1981 the founding chairperson of the Wakanui Incorporation publicly asked that Whakarewa be handed back to the Maori people. This Incorporation represents the widest group of Maori land interests in the Nelson area. In this article Race Collective presents the background to this issue, and suggests that we can all play a part in allowing this land to go back to its owners.

In 1853, Governor Grey made two grants of land at Whakarewa to the Anglican Church a total of 1,077 acres. It was vested in the Bishop and his successors of the Diocese, of which Nelson was a part. Grey understood a school would be established "for the education of children of our subjects of all races, and of children of other poor and destitute persons, being inhabitants of Islands in the Pacific Ocean". This land was "for the use and towards the maintenance and support of the said school, so long as religious education, industrial training, and instruction in the English language shall be given". So read the Crown grants and Trust deed.

Today, these broad categories of land remain:

Firstly, the Whakarewa Farm, 176 hectare of prime horticultural land on the west side of the township of Motukaka; secondly, approximately 100 residential leasehold sections in Motukaka Borough; thirdly, approximately 30 rural leasehold sections on the outskirts of Motukaka Borough.

On the farm, 5 kilometres from Motukaka, there is a large hostel, which was previously the orphanage. The farm has a manager's house, farm buildings, equipment and stock. The total value of these assets was almost $400,000 in 1982.

(Contd. p.2)
THE CHURCH MARCHES ON

An Account of Recent Events

In 1992 the Whakarewa School Trust Board commission-
ed Mr Ray Caig, Consultant, to prepare a feasibility study on how the land could be developed. His report was re-
leased in February 1983. Newspapers carried glowing reports of a “training centre idea advanced for Whakarewa”. The Fruitgrowers Federation, Federated Farmers, Motueka
Borough Council, Sir Wallace Rowell and the Anglican
Church were greatly enthused by the idea. However, the
report had a glaring omission.

There was no attempt to report on how the Maori
people felt or to look at the foundation on which the Trust
is based. It completely glossed over the Maori point-of-view.
To add insult to injury, the appendix of the report
contains a clear demand by Kasimata for the return of
their land. It was this example of racism that demanded a
response.

In April 1983 Race Collective presented a submission to
the School Trust Board. It argued the case that the Church
was morally bound to return the land to the Maori people.
Neither the Board nor the Anglican Church had ever re-
spended. Why do they try and ignore the issue?

Despite the request to do so, Bishop Sutton has con-
tinued to avoid meeting Race Collective face-to-face.

Mr T.P. Bailey, Kasimata at Motukaka, declined to meet
Bishop Sutton until he addressed the issue of whether the
Anglican Church had a moral right to control that Maori
land. The Bishop has refused to respond to that question.

The Ngati Ruanui Council Committee, representing the
targets within, met the Bishop but were dissatisfied with
his response. Race Collective continued to keep in touch
with Mr Bailey, Ngati Ruanui Council and the Nelson-Maori
Committee. Meanwhile the Anglican Church kept all doors
closed on debate and discussion on Whakarewa.

The Diocesan Secretary, Mr John White, reported in the
NELSON EVENING MAIL in March 1984 that 10 more
parcels of Whakarewa land had been sold off. Later he re-
quested a request from the Maori community to allow the
Whakarewa hostel to be used to house the homeless, even
though it has lain vacant for 12 months. A Motukaka-
based work skills development programme also tried to
use the facility but withdrew because of difficulties.

The Anglican General Synod, in 1984, unanimously
adopted a motion calling the church from freshholding
Maori land. Despite this, Mr White denied this would stop
further sales of Whakarewa land (NELSON EVENING
MAIL 30.5.84).

In late May this year, Race Collective circulated to Nelson
Synod members another submission on Whakarewa. Some
deleges refused to pass these copies on to their lay re-
presentatives. The Synod’s legal advisers said it was a
“document lacking in fact”. One member pleaded for
“perhaps Maori time, so we can work through this”.

Members of the Anglican Church failed to realise they
have had 103 years since the school closed.

Although many of the lay representatives expressed
their concern that they were being kept in the dark, the
central issue was always avoided — that Whakarewa was
Maori land and is now under control of the Anglican
Church. The Synod rejected a motion asking an investi-
gation into the Whakarewa Trust.

At Synod, the Bishop reported on a meeting at Waitua
Pa in June, where Ngati Toa, Ngati Whaka, the Bishop of
Aorere and Race Collective, Maori claims for justice and
the return of their land as promised by Bishop Selwyn in
1853 were once again stated.

GIFTS OF TRIBAL AND
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE TRIBE WANTS THE LAND BACK

Another example is the Oraki School and Church site
gifted by Ngati Whata in 1858 to enable a Church of
England education to be provided in Oraki. For a few
years there was such a school and church but they were
closed. Was the donated land returned to Ngati Whata? No.
It was sold to the Crown. The money raised was paid to the
trustees for two Anglican Maori schools in the Auckland
area. When Ngati Whata complained that their gift was to
provide for their own children they were not heard.
A Royal Commission in 1858 relied on the English translation
of the 1853 Deed. It described the land as an “endorsement”
of a school connected with the Church of England” — but
compare the Maori text: “Te aro kura whakatoa i rugu i nga
tauaha o te karakia o te Maori i lagengan.”

Clearly it is the case that the Pakeha law has here paid
no regard to the tribal nature of Maori landholding and the
tribal link involved in gifts of land to promote educational
purposes.

Should the law’s answer be the end of the matter?
Surely not, for Christians motivated by the gospel of Jesus.

In some cases the government has at least partially recti-
fied historic grievances; the sacred mountain of Tauari
(contradicted in the 1860’s) has been returned to Waitako-Tatau;
some of the Crown land at Takaparawha (Bastion Point)
has been returned to Ngati Whata; the “gold-cove” at Te Kopua (Raglan) has been handed back to Taini
Awhiro.

Presently a draft Bill exists which will settle a longstand-
ing grievance with respect to a former Church property at
Port Waitako. Discussions are commencing in Auckland to
try to settle the Oraki School and Church site issue men-
tioned earlier.

In the main Maori population centres, of the Waitako
and Taniwha Mokaua (Aucklant), there are concerned
groups of Maori and Pakeha people insisting upon a re-
examination of historic injustices. There are many other
examples of similar injustices in other areas. These must
also be attended to, because if we do not learn from the
mistakes of our past, it is highly likely that we will
condemn ourselves to repeat similar mistakes.

Na Rawiri

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WHAKAREWA TIMELINE

1840 Treaty of Waitangi signed.
N.Z. Company issued with Charter. This included the policy of Native Reserves.

1845 The Nelson Deed — a grant of 151,000 acres of land to the N.Z. Company with exceptions of:
1. All Pa, burial grounds and cultivations
2. Native Reserve, defined to be 1/10 of area granted.

1853 Bishop Selwyn persuades owners of Whakarewa to give land for a school, land to be returned should the school cease to operate.
Governor Grey appropriates 1,077 acres of which 918 was Native Reserve. Land entailed to Anglican Church for existing school.
Strong local protests.

1857 School closed.

1866 School re-opened, aided by Native Dept. grant.

1864 School closed.

1868 School re-opened.

1881 All attempts to operate the school abandoned.

1887 Maori people petition Parliament for return of land.

1888 Orphanage established to satisfy terms of Trust, so keeping the land under Church control.

1905 Royal Commission into school critical of Trust administration.

1974 Closure of Orphanage.
1975 Nelson Hospital Board establish a home for intellectually handicapped children.
1981 Maori people ask for land back.
1982 Nelson Hospital Board home closed.
1983 Trust Board received Caird Report on feasibility of an Agricultural Training Centre.

Race Collective submission to Trust Board, urging return of land to owners. Ngati Rarua Council ask Bishop to return land.

1984 Resolution passed at General Synod, encouraging freeholding of land held in Trust for Maori owners. Whakarewa Trust Board continues freeholding of reserves.


THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOURS HOUSE

Whakarewa A Symptom of Racism

Whakarewa is Maori land. This is clear from the history presented on this page. It is not for the white people to decide for and profit from this land. In particular, it is not for the Church to make these decisions. It belongs to the Maori people. The land needs to go back to them.

The fact that this hasn't happened is a symptom of our racism. As white people in New Zealand we live, enjoying the privileges, enjoying the benefits, enjoying the system of being the dominant culture. We have the opportunities and the power to make decisions for other people. In this position we are often blind to the identity of any other culture. This is the racism inside each of us; insidious, deeply ingrained from childhood, re-inforced, and un-challenged.

As the dominant race we have the luxury of choosing what challenge to take up next. For the Maori people, through generations of our racist, there is no such choice. Their challenges, through generations of our racism, is one of survival.

Racism is something very different from bigotry and prejudice. It involves very much the power of one group of people to dominate and control another group of people and to impose their interests and will on the other group of people. Racism comes out of the historical legacy and a historical process of European colonialism within N.Z. society as within other countries. It is very much an issue of white people and particularly white men continuing to dominate the various structures and institutions of society. From government to education, to the media to the churches and other institutions. And so racism is very much a question of power of one group over another.

It's important for white people not to think that the only way to deal with racism is to have contact with Maori people. Racism is our problem, in our institutions, in our society, in our behaviour, in our attitudes. It's not a responsibility of Maori people to help each of us to work through that. It's a responsibility of those of us who are white to work with one another to change that and to change our institutions.

Nothing will change until we begin to ask ourselves questions. Whose culture is constantly reinforced? Where do we get power from? What are we destroying? Think about the history books — over and over again the white culture makes its progress and so extinguishes another. Think about the media. The dominant culture, value system is being upheld and given the image of success. Think about our institutions. The courts, the schools and the Government always favour us. And think about the land. For the Pakeha it is a place to live, a quarter acre section, an economic unit. The land to the Maori people is the heart and root of their being. We have continually severed these roots — our ancestors, and now we today, are profiting from land which does not belong to us.

THE STORY STAYS THE SAME

The History of Whakarewa since 1845

In 1845, five years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, Commissioner Spiege granted land in the Nelson area to the New Zealand Company. The Nelson Deed provided for a grant of 151,000 acres, with the exception of:
a) All the pa, burial places and ground under cultivation.
b) Native Reserves, defined as 1/10 of the area granted, to be held in trust for the future use and benefit of the Chiefs and their families who sold the land.

Native Reserve land was set aside for the continued use by the original Maori Land owners. It was deemed inalienable.

In 1853, the Bishop of New Zealand, Bishop Selwyn, visited Motuoka. While there, he tried to persuade the local Maori to give some of their remaining land to the Anglican Church for the establishment of a school for their children. At first the Ngati Rarua elders did not consent. But owing to the persistence of the Bishop they agreed to provide land for a school, on Selwyn's word that it would be returned, should the school cease to operate.

During the 1850's, Governor Grey granted land to different churches for the establishment of Native Schools throughout New Zealand. Grey visited Motuoka after the original school was established, and liked what he saw, granting further land to support the running of the school. Regrettably, of the 1077 acres appropriated, 918 acres of this was Native Reserve.

This action drew loud protest from Maori and Pakeha alike. The local newspaper of the time, the Nelson Examiner, said in an editorial "His Excellency has also conveyed to the Bishop Native Reserve, amounting we believe, to 440 acres, and this is property which Sir George Grey has no more power to alienate than ourselves". The Nelson Provincial council, on 9 December 1853, passed a resolution condemning the action. They said it was a "violation of the contract in virtue of which the settlement was founded." They later asked the colonial government to set the grant aside.

October 1984
THE PRINTER MUST BE PAID

It has been a challenge for us of RACE Collective to bring you the story of Whakarewa. We have broken some new ground in the process.

It is our intention to produce further issues whenever issues of racism in Nelson demand a response. When time permits, we look forward to sharing our views of how the land lies.

However, this Lie of the Land has put us on the financial tightrope. All work on writing and producing this has been done voluntarily, but the printer must be paid, as must the postage.

We ask for your help to keep the work going. You can do this by sending us money to Race Collective, PO Box 424, Nelson.

THE CHURCH MARCHES ON Contd.

Synd's stand only confirmed the Trust Board's determination to establish a farm training centre. This became plainly obvious when, in early 1984, the Trust approached the Crown Law Office to widen the terms of the Trust in order to proceed with the development. By August 1984 they had advertised for a development manager for the new agricultural unit.

The church marches on, ignoring the ignore. When will the racial end?

MAKING RIPPLES

What You Can Do.

The injustices of Whakarewa demand that we act now. All of us. Certainly, the key responsibility for action lies with the Whakarewa Trust Board of the Nelson Diocese. Without delay, they should start the process which would allow the land to be offered back to the Moa people.

A vital aspect of this process is that the Trust Board hear a clear message from a wide range of people in the Nelson area. The message is, that you support the return of the land to the Moa people. We urge you to join us in this stand. Without you, the injustices of the past will continue.

There are some very tangible ways in which you can act today. Become well informed. Make sure you know the history and details of the issues. Start talking amongst yourselves, and to your local church. If there are things that you and your group don't know then contact someone who does. Contact the Race Collective. They are more than happy to discuss the issue with you.

To begin work on the issue of Whakarewa is a tangible commitment to a bicultural New Zealand. It is a commitment to a vision which speaks of a richness that will come when all are given their rightful claim to this land. We acknowledge that there will be pain in getting there, that there will be some cost to us all. However, it is also a commitment to reconciliation, reparation, a turning-around from past wrongs to a fresh beginning.

It is our hope that it is this spirit in which the issue of Whakarewa is finally resolved.