Week 7: Prophets and Dreamers

# Last week

## “Sects” *vs.* “Denominations & Churches”

* Week 6 we looked at Troeltsch’s/Weber’s “ideal types”[[1]](#footnote-1) of religion’s relationship with the broader culture.
	+ Church: e.g. Buddhism in Thailand; state religions; any religion that is hard to distinguish from the surrounding state and culture
	+ Denomination: e.g. Anglicans in New Zealand; similar to “church” but exist alongside other denominations
	+ Sect: e.g. Gloriavale; new religious groups that distinguish themselves sharply from the surrounding culture and other religions; tightly-knit.

## “Cults” and “New Religious Movements”

* Week 6 also looked at the scholarly debate about whether there is such a thing as a “cult,” or whether this is just a name that wider society (including other religious groups) give to new religious movements that they don’t like
* A lot of this debate focusses around the question of whether there’s such a thing as “brainwashing”:
	+ Is this just a way of saying that we can’t imagine why previously “sane” people would believe things that we find “insane”?
	+ Or is there a social/psychological dynamic found in *some* new sects, which makes it hard for people to leave?

# Big picture for this week

* We’re focusing on another common feature of new religious movements/cults: charismatic leadership.
* New religious movements are *usually* (not always) started by a charismatic leader.
	+ Not all charismatic leaders start new religious movements (some try to renew old ones).
* Most new religious movements don’t survive the death of a charismatic founder.
* If they do survive, it’s because they change their style of leadership and become more like “denominations” or even “churches.”
* To illustrate this dynamic, we’ll use local examples: Ratana and Destiny Churches.

# What is charisma?

* Difficult to define; you know it *if* you see it.
	+ But, by definition, outsiders often don’t “get it” in the way that insiders do.
* The term originates with Max Weber (1864-1920).
	+ Charisma is: “a certain quality of an individual by virtue of which [they are] set apart from ordinary [people] and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of these the individual is treated as leader.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Weber contrasts charismatic leadership with two other forms of leadership:
	+ Traditional – i.e. passed on through custom and tradition; leadership of kings, chiefs and priests
	+ Rational-legal – conferred by rules and laws; the CEO, the prime minister, the vice chancellor

### Charisma and crisis

* Charismatic leadership is not just a quality of an individual. It depends on:
	+ recognition by a group
	+ the right circumstances
* According to Weber, the right circumstances are usually a crisis – e.g. the breakdown of an older social order or a sense that society has reached a kind of dead-end. This usually involves a crisis of belief in traditional or rational-legal leadership.
* Charismatic leaders are able to persuade people that they are the only ones who can relieve the people’s distress in this crisis.
	+ i.e. their authority depends on people’s belief in their unique ability to relieve them
	+ in this sense, charismatic leaders are usually prophetic, and/or Messianic
* Their ability to attract followers in this way usually depends on their creative reinterpretation of an existing set of values and myths – in other words, they are only partially original.

### Survival of charismatic groups

* Most groups led by charismatic leaders don’t survive their leader’s death – or his/her perceived failure to deliver the goods.
* For the group to survive the charisma needs to be “routinized.” This can happen in a number of ways:
	+ The leadership changes to a “traditional” or “rational-legal” model – e.g. priests, who possess charisma by virtue of ordination
	+ Charisma is invested in a thing – e.g. a sacred book, a place or object.
	+ Charisma is granted to all the members of the movement – e.g. through a ritual or “sacrament”

# Māori Prophetic Movements as a response to crisis

* European colonization of New Zealand after 1840 brought with it the kind of *crisis* out of which charismatic leadership and new religious movements arise.
	+ Late 1850s: Pakeha begin to outnumber Māori
	+ 1860-1872: Land wars; widespread Māori disillusionment with the missionaries, who seemed to have sided with the government.
	+ late 19th/early 20th century: widespread belief that Māori culture was on the point of disappearing; government taking active steps to prohibit aspects of Māori culture that were felt to be “holding them back” (e.g. 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act, directed against traditional healers and mediums).
* Many Māori prophets and prophetic movements arose in response to these crises. Most did not survive or survive in large numbers, but a few did.
* Cf. “Adjustment movements” such as the Ghost Dance movement among indigenous peoples of the United States in the 1890s.
* Bronwyn Elsmore sees the movements as creative fusions of the pre-Christian tradition of the *matakite* or seer who communicates with the spiritual world, with the model of prophet/seer drawn from the Old Testament and Book of Revelation.
* Elsmore thinks that these movements became more recognizably “Christian” over time, but all were rejected by other Christian churches and wider New Zealand society – e.g. newspapers often spoke about them in the same way the modern media talks about “cults.”

## Some common features of the prophetic movements

* For all of their differences, the prophetic groups tended to share most or all of the following characteristics and beliefs.
	+ Close identification between Māori and the Jews of the Old Testament – especially as the “remnant” (*morehu*) who would be restored to their Promised Land.
		- Associated with pan-Māori identity – tribal identity now less important than identity as God’s chosen people.
		- Religion of Jews older than Christianity, and thus better
		- Focus of worship on Jehovah (*Ihoa*) with Jesus either marginalized or associated with the prophet himself
		- Preference for Saturday as day of worship – or development of alternative calendar of worship.
	+ Expectation of God’s intervention to end the tyranny of foreign rulers/invaders (associated with Pharaoh and/or Assyrians) and restore the people to their land – “New Canaan” or “Zion.”

# Examples

Dozens of Māori prophetic movements listed in Elsmore, Bronwyn. *Mana from Heaven: A Century of Māori Prophets in New Zealand.* 2nd ed. Auckland: Reed, 1999 (available online through library catalogue).

The following are a few of the better-known:

* 1860s-1870s: *Pai Mārire/Hau Hau* led by the prophet *Te Ua Haumēne*
* 1860s-to present: *Hāhi Ringatū* (Ringatu church) founded by prophet/military leader Te Kooti (13,272 members in 2013 census)
* 1860s: Parihaka settlement led by the prophets Te Whiti and Tohu Kākahi
* early 1900s: Settlement at Maungapohatu led by Rua Kēnana
* 1920s-present: *Hāhi Rātana* (Rātana Church) founded by Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana

They don’t completely fit Weber’s theories about sects and the survival of charismatic movements. In some cases, e.g. the community of Rua Kēnana, they were rejecting the Pākehā majority, but were closely embedded in the culture of a particular *iwi.* So, the memory of the prophet was cherished the people, even when many of them moved their allegiance to other churches – e.g. the Presbyterian Church among the Ngāi Tūhoe people.

But, in the case of a pan-tribal church like Rātana, we can see the shift from something like a sect to a denomination, and from charismatic to more bureaucratic-legal leadership.

## Reassessment by the broader culture

It’s also important to note that, in their time, all of these groups met with incomprehension and hostility from parts of Pākehā, and even Māori, society.

In some cases – e.g. Parihaka and Maungapohatu – they were violently (though not permanently) suppressed by the government.

But since the 1980s they have all undergone a kind of reappraisal, that has led, more recently, to formal apologies by the crown to the heirs of these communities.

* June 2017: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/news/93492596/crown-to-apologise-to-parihaka-today-for-past-injustices>
* September 2017: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/96677130/crown-rights-historic-wrong-in-urewera-arrest-of-rua-kenana>

# Rātana

* The decline of the Māori population halted in the 1890s and began to recover in the early 20th century. This period also saw the emergence of Māori political leaders like Sir Apirana Ngata (1874-1950), who had received a more westernized Māori education, and believed that the future lay in working from *within* government and the mainstream churches. Ngata and other such leaders were convinced that surviving Māori belief in what was called “tohunga-ism” (e.g. traditional healing practices) were holding Māori back.
* The Ratana movement, which emerged during the 1920s combined elements of the older prophetic movements with this new emphasis on modernization and rejection of “tohunga-ism.”
* The prophet Wiremu Tahupotiki Ratana (1873-1939) achieved international fame as a faith-healer – among Pakeha as well as Māori – but discouraged his followers from consulting traditional Māori healers.
* He came from a family of prophet and saw himself as God’s *mangai* (spokesman, mouthpiece, or mediator), but his prophetic programme involved forming a political alliance with the Labour Party to achieve justice for the *morehu* (remnant/survivors) and all dispossessed Māori through the political system – a form of “routinisation”
* Ratana’s movement was not only pan-Māori (i.e. tried to transcend tribal differences) but also tried to cooperate with the other major churches. Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans were initially eager to work with Ratana, though eventually the mainstream churches dissociated themselves from the Ratana movement, suspecting that they worshipped angels and even Ratana himself alongside the Trinity.
* Ratana was well travelled – he visited Australia, America, Europe and Japan – and the prophetic symbolism of his church drew on elements from outside New Zealand, - e.g. his close relationship with Bishop Juji Nakada, leader of an independent Japanese church. However, the complex symbolism of his prophetic visions was still recognizably part of a tradition extending through the 19th century prophets to pre-Christian Māori beliefs.
* Example of a new religious movement which has moved beyond its charismatic origins and moved right into the mainstream of New Zealand life
	+ e.g. the attendance of all NZ political leaders at Ratana marae on 25 January
* Census figures for Ratana Church
	+ 2013: 40,353 (0.91%; cf. Islam 46,194; 1.04%)
	+ 2006: 50,565 (1.18%; cf. Islam 36,153; 0.84%)
	+ 1991: 47,595 (1.41%; cf. Islam 6,096; 0.18%)

# Destiny Church

* Founded in Auckland in 1998 when Brian Tamaki (1958-) and members of Lake City Church, Rotorua established City Church in Auckland.
* Tamaki had previously been a pastor in the [Pentecostal] Apostolic Church, but in 1994 decided to go it alone.
* Although it has seen declining membership in 2003, when it had congregations all over New Zealand and in Brisbane (most now closed), Destiny Church has frequently made headlines in mainstream media, e.g.:
	+ 2003: The church’s association with the Dominionist American pastor Eddie Long, and the prophecy at the church’s fifth anniversary that the church would one day rule New Zealand.
	+ 2004: The “Enough is Enough” Rally in which thousands of members of the Destiny Church and supporters rallied at Parliament and in Auckland in protest against the impending Civil Unions legislation.
	+ 2009: the “MomMentum” Conference in which male members of the church were expected to swear an oath of allegiance to Tamaki as bishop and man of God.
* These, along with Destiny Church’s emphasis on the “Prosperity Gospel” and the conspicuous wealth of Tamaki and his wife Hannah, have drawn a great deal of unfavourable media attention – in much the same way that the Māori prophetic movements of the 19th century drew unfavourable attention from wider New Zealand society, but for different reasons.
* Peter Lineham’s research on Destiny Church, while critical of the ethos of the church, tries to get beyond poorly informed media comment and moral panic, and to understand the social conditions to which it’s a response.
* His understanding of this response is summed up in the following quote from “The Rise and Significance of Destiny Church”:

In both cases, they stem from the endemic Māori struggle to find a secure space in Western capitalist society, although there are obviously huge differences between the rural Māori that Rātana reached out to and the urban Māori community that has flocked to Tamaki. The development of a socially and politically active Christianity was a logical response in both cases.

* However, just as all of the prophetic movements involved a critique of Māori culture (e.g. Rātana’s opposition to “tohungaism” of the traditional Māori healers), Lineham sees Destiny church as a critique of urban Māori society – in addition to wider NZ society: “Tamaki’s focus is on improving Māori behaviour, not renewing the vision of Māori society.”
* Likewise, although Lineham thinks that it is unhelpful to use a loaded term like “cult” to describe Destiny, he does think that it displays the characteristics of a “sectarian” movement (see above). In *Destiny: The Life and Times of a Self-Made Apostle,* 258, he sums up his attitude:

Destiny is not a cult. But it is a sectarian form of Christianity, and is very like the Catholic Church in its isolationism. It is easy enough to see the advantages of sectarianism, but there are profound weaknesses in its inability to learn from outsiders.”

# Questions for discussion

* Is it fair to compare the Māori Prophetic movements with Destiny Church?
* How helpful is Weber’s typology of charismatic leadership in helping us understand Destiny Church?
* Given what we know about New Religious Movements and charismatic religious leadership, what would it take for Destiny Church to grow and survive?
* Does Destiny church show any sign of making changes of this kind?
* What would prevent it from surviving?
1. “Ideal type” means an abstract definition; in reality no group fits the definition perfectly. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Max Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization,* edited and translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)