


Māori theology and syncretism

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Abstract

Syncretism will never be a word used at the dinner tables of whānau (family) or at the marae (Māori communal gathering places) for it is ingrained in a specifically theological world. However, the concept behind the word is something with which Māori are very familiar because we do it automatically. We walk in Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of predominantly European ancestry) worlds and our spirituality comes with us. We navigate, negotiate and traverse the syncretistic terrain every day.

Keywords

Christianity, Māori theology, religion, syncretism

Syncretism

When cultures come into contact with others, their belief systems change (Shils, 1981; Zimmerman, 1997). In theology, the mixing of religious ideas is known as syncretism. Syncretism investigates the origins of religious views and how history shapes these (Stewart, 2004) and is an essential concept for analysing both how religious traditions mutually influence one another and how hegemony and power operate from a theological perspective (Andersen, 2009). In general, syncretism may be described as the selective appropriation and amalgamation of ideas, symbols and practices of one religion into another (Berling, 1980). Syncretism may also be described as the dynamic mixing of elements from two or more cultures that results in something that is “basically different from the respective original components” (Sowande, 1996, p. 19).

All cultures and religions, therefore, are syncretistic because they have transformed over time and have absorbed external elements as they have developed (Stewart, 2004). In fact, the historical development of religion, in particular, is inconceivable without syncretism (Rudolph, 2004). Both universal and unavoidable (Baird, 2004), syncretism is the dynamic means through which religions relate to one another (Berner, 2004).

Boff (1985) proposed six characteristics commonly found in syncretistic adaptations of religious beliefs and practices which tend to overlap with one another which are summarised below:

1. Syncretism as addition: The addition of religious elements without integration; engaging in a range of religious rituals and experiences without combining them.
2. Syncretism as accommodation: The accommodation of religious elements by a subjugated people as a means of either survival or resistance without

necessarily erasing the identity of the Indigenous religion.

3. Syncretism as mixture: The mixture of religious elements without theological systematisation.
4. Syncretism as agreement: The understanding that there is no unique revelation in history, that there are diverse ways of encountering divinity and that it is necessary to synchronise religious elements as much as possible since religions are, from this perspective, considered inadequate in isolation.
5. Syncretism as translation: The selective use of categories, cultural expressions and traditions by a religion as a means of translating and expressing its theology using only elements that are consistent with the host religion.
6. Syncretism as adaptation: The process through which a religion is exposed to other religious expressions and assimilates, interprets and recasts these in light of its own identity.

These characteristics are also evident in Māori engagements with Christianity, which I will discuss later in more detail.

Some religious scholarship—based on perceived inherent purity—analyses syncretism subjectively and concludes, from the perspective of the religion concerned, that it is immoral (Droogers, 1989; Harrison, 2014). Conversely, an objective approach posits that syncretism is “a natural part of the history of religions” (Harrison, 2014,

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p. 9). Therefore, the concept may be understood in either negative or positive terms as “decline and theological ruin” or as indicative of religious “creativity and vitality” and tolerance (Jørgensen, 2013, p. 101; van der Veer, 1994).

Emerging from the debates around 17th-century Protestant theology, the term syncretism came to refer to the “illegitimate mingling of different religious elements” (Kraemer, 1956, p. 203). This highly particular definition of syncretism could only have developed within a Christian context in which “an absolute standard of reference is assumed” (Kraemer, 1956, p. 203). Frequently considered a “dirty word” (Harrison, 2014, p. 8) in religious conversations, syncretism has been considered theologically problematic because it subjectively implies impurity, mingling, contamination and inauthenticity (Andersen, 2009; Shaw & Stewart, 1994).

Christianity is inclined to view syncretism as a pollutant (Panikkar, 1975), regarding syncretistic beliefs as undesirable and destructive (Schreier, 1985). From theological and missiological perspectives, syncretism is considered “heretical or sub-Christian” (Mullins, 2001, p. 809). Such a negative view emerges when beliefs and practices are deemed incompatible with Christianity and when aspects of the Christian faith are replaced with those of the receiving culture (Goosen, 2000). The view that Christianity is the “adequate and definitive revelation of God in history” (Goosen, 2000, p. 95) considers syncretism a threat to Christianity, arguing that “to add something to Christ is really to take something away from him” and that any attempt to alter the gospel is a “a denial of the gift of God” (Visser’t Hooft, 1963, p. 60). In this sense, syncretism is considered an “inappropriate fusion” (Yong, 2014, p. 26) of religious traditions, resulting in that which debases what existed previously.

A positive view of syncretism

In William H. Harrison’s (2014) book, *In praise of mixed religion: The syncretism solution in a multifaith world*, he argued that positive syncretism is about progress and progress is about change for the better; therefore, “syncretism is a good thing when it results in an improvement to one’s existing religion” (p. 91). He opined that it is for the individual to determine what constitutes an improvement and what criteria should be used to make a judgement (Harrison, 2014).

Harrison (2014) outlined three criteria for assessing whether syncretism improves a religion. He argued that “the new answer must appear to be more accurate [and] more consistent with the information that we have about all reality,” “the new answer must be genuinely helpful in the world in which we live” and “it sustains and even expands upon some important part of the religion” (Harrison, 2014, pp. 92–93). Syncretism is invariably pervasive. As Harrison (2014) maintained, Christianity was unable to remove all traces of paganism and so it instead incorporated them into its festivals, such as Christmas which is intimately linked to the festivals of Saturnalia and Yule (Victorovna, 2020). Similarly, Harrison (2014) argued that capitalist secularism

has failed to remove important Christian elements from law, government and education—I would also add medicine to this list.

For two or more religions to be successfully woven together in ways that are helpful and positive, the goals of each religion must be complementary (Harrison, 2014). For example, some Christians use yoga, which has roots in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, to fulfil a specific need that Christianity is unable to meet (Harrison, 2014).

Harrison (2014) identified three categories of positive syncretism. The first category, symmetrical syncretism, is a balanced form of syncretism in which two or more religions become one, and in which the previous religious identities are transported into the new composition. As an example of symmetrical syncretism, Harrison (2014) cited the Chinese reception of Buddhism: Taoism and Buddhism “blend seamlessly,” with each offering its “priorities, practices, and texts,” thus becoming “one religion incorporating all of the roots” (p. 97).

Asymmetrical syncretism, the second category, occurs when Religion A incorporates into itself aspects of Religion B. While Religion A maintains dominance over Religion B, Religion A is changed by the encounter. The development of systematic theology in medieval Islam due to contact with the Byzantine Empire—within which Greek Hellenistic thought was embedded—is an example of asymmetrical syncretism (Harrison, 2014). This exposure to the Byzantine Empire led to a philosophical shift, resulting in an asymmetrically syncretistic version of Islam that incorporated aspects of Greek thinking processes but “retained its nature” (p. 107).

The third category, reflexive syncretism, occurs when religious components taken from Religion B are a reminder to Religion A of what has been obscured or removed over time. Religion A formerly contained elements that are similar to, or compatible with, those found in Religion B, resulting in a form of syncretistic revitalisation. Religion A is changed through association with Religion B. As an example of reflexive syncretism, Harrison (2014) cited the example of medieval Celtic Christianity. In this case, elements of the Celtic religion prompted Christianity to be “more true to its own roots by reminding that religion of important aspects of life that have been forgotten” (Harrison, 2014, p. 115). While Christianity imparted to the Celts some theological certainty about the afterlife, the Celts reminded Christianity of the “importance of the natural world and a religion’s response to it” (Harrison, 2014, p. 115).

Syncretism is not always beneficial. Violence, for example, was not part of Christianity’s origins; however, in incorporating aspects of Latin thinking and culture and becoming central to the life of the Roman Empire, Christianity’s expansion regime came to include the use of violence (Harrison, 2014). Over the centuries, as empires rose and fell, Western Christianity incorporated into itself Roman ideas about power and order, Platonic notions of hierarchy and non-Christian ideas about the use of violence, including theories of just wars and practices of unjust wars, such as the Crusades (Harrison, 2014). Harrison (2014)

contended that syncretism in Western Christianity is likely an example of symmetrical syncretism, in that there appear to be approximately equivalent Christian, Latin and Germanic influences.

Capitalism, in the form of prosperity theology in Christianity—also not part of Christianity’s origins—is another undesirable syncretism (Harrison, 2014). Prosperity theology holds that faith in God leads to material wealth (Harrison, 2014). According to television evangelist Kenneth Copeland (2010) and author of *Spiritual Millionaire* Keith Smith (2004), one must fully believe in God’s power to bless, name the blessing and claim it. In an Aotearoa New Zealand context, the prosperity theology espoused by Brian Tamaki (Lineham, 2021)—a well-known and polarising Christian religious leader—is often featured in print and online media—the media does not, however, report on other ministers who purport the same theology. This theology is problematic because the earth does not hold sufficient resources for all people to be rich through belief, it insults Christians in poor nations, and it undermines the essence of Christianity—to put others before oneself as Jesus did (Harrison, 2014).

Harrison (2014) stated that religions should relate to each other through the process of syncretism—that is, “the effort to incorporate wisdom from one religious context into another” (pp. ix–x). Syncretism “enlarges the pool of resources” from which individuals may draw in attempting to understand life and their place in it; this is the “real value” of syncretism as a concept and practice (Harrison, 2014, p. 147). Harrison (2014) argued for a critical openness to syncretism that necessitates critically assessing and “accepting all of the relevant evidence rather than rejecting material which may tend to disprove our preferred positions, but also recognizing that all evidence is simply that: evidence” (p. 180).

Syncretistic critical openness leads to greater wisdom because it allows humans to examine the wisdoms of other traditions about life, the universe and their place within it, as well as to incorporate aspects of those traditions into their own lives (Harrison, 2014). Harrison (2014) contended that syncretistic critical openness liberates the faithful from the simplistic notion that truth comes in one package, freeing them to explore new and exciting faith pathways. An increase in peace may be experienced on both personal and communal levels. Personally, syncretistic critical openness may introduce more peace because it eliminates the need to feel defensive about one’s beliefs (Harrison, 2014). On a communal level, peace may be increased because the need to regulate and control beliefs is decreased: “the responsibility of the community and its leader shifts to a focus upon rational expression of the wisdom that it has inherited and an ongoing commitment to transformation through the reception of wisdom from other traditions” (Harrison, 2014, p. 183). The most successful religions are those that deal openly with other faiths and learn what they can through these interactions as a means of religious innovation and invigoration (Harrison, 2014), in the process dealing with cosmic questions regarding existence and purpose.

Māori theology and syncretism

In Henare Tate’s (2012) extremely important work, *He puna iti i te Ao Mārama: A little spring in the World of Light*, he argued that the theological discourse more broadly, was “not yet adequate for a fully indigenous contextual theology” (p. 35) because the development of a Māori theology needed to be “by Māori for Māori” (p. 23). However, he also asserted that “the discussion opens perspectives for Māori that stimulate them, and other indigenous peoples, to develop criteria for indigenous theology appropriate to their context” (Tate, 2012, p. 35).

For Wiremu Tāmihana, Christianity exposed the reality that the empire was, by its own Christian standards, morally wrong, which provided justification for taking up arms against it (Cooper, 2017; Stokes, 1990). Other 19th-century Māori leaders were also acutely aware of the hypocrisy of the empire. Te Kooti believed that one way to mitigate the negative effects of the empire and Pākehā law was to use that law against itself (Higgins, 2012). He said, “*Ko te waka hei hoehoenga mo koutou i muri i ahau ko te Ture, ma te Ture ano te Ture e aki*/The canoe for you to paddle after me is the Law, only the Law will correct the Law” (Binney, 1997, p. 490).

The Māori prophets, like Te Kooti and Rua Kēnana, critically engaged with the Bible and Christianity, and then, through a process of “rejection and reformulation” (Elsmore, 2008, p. 100), challenged the validity of missionary Christianity and selectively developed syncretistic movements that reflected their harrowing circumstances as metaphorical Jews in exile (Rangiwai, 2015). Without the Bible, 19th-century resistance movements would never have existed (Rangiwai, 2015). Rather ironically, the Bible, when interpreted through Māori eyes, provided our people with the tools necessary to resist the empire (Rangiwai, 2012, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2019).

Explicit Māori theological writing is scant and only started to emerge after the 1960s (Tate, 2012). Previously, the theological literature paid little attention to Māori theology. This is likely because, as Darragh (2003) contended, there were a few writers of Māori theology, and Pākehā theologians were unable to traverse the terrain, or considered the area non-Christian. Darragh (2003) categorised Māori theology into the following three approaches: recovery, critique and reformist.

A recovery approach to Māori theology refers to “a recovery of key Maori concepts that have not been considered in the Christian theology of the past” (Darragh, 2003, p. 55). The recovery aspect of Māori theology, Darragh (2003) argued, can be seen in the Anglican and Presbyterian Māori liturgical texts. For example, in *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, and specifically to the Hākari Tapu (Holy Communion) service from page 476, known affectionately to some as simply by its page number—“476”, Christ is referred to as *te pou herenga waka*—a mooring post (Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 2005, p. 476). In the same prayer book, we also find reference to Papatūānuku (earth mother) and Ranginui (sky father):

—No reira matou ka tapae ki a koe

I a matou whakamoemiti.

Mo Ranginui i runga nei, mo Papa-Tuanuku e takoto nei.

(Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 2005, p. 477)

—Therefore, we offer to you our praise. For Sky Father above and Earth Mother laying herewith

The above is part of a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the sky and land. This is an example of a recovery-type Māori theology, which as Darragh (2003) posited “is not explicitly Christian, but yet not thereby pre-Christian or non-Christian” (p. 55).

A critique approach to Māori theology “provides a critique of some culturally and politically important Maori practices and understandings” (Darragh, 2003, p. 56) based on scripture, Christian tradition or feminist theology. Darragh (2003) questions the motivations of this approach and asks,

Does this imply a critique of Maori religious concepts and practices in general because they are seen to be largely unchristian, that is, is this a general resistance to syncretism, or is this critique confined to particular points of Maori concepts and practices? (p. 56)

The reformist approach to Māori theology seeks to critique and reform the church practices that have been applied in the Aotearoa New Zealand context (Darragh, 2003). For Darragh (2003), the Māori prophetic movements signalled a rejection of the traditions of missionary Christianity. A reformist approach “maintains its connections with overseas church traditions, as in the Maori section of the mainline churches” and “it is inevitably reformist to the degree that it seeks to restructure an originally European church into one that respects Maori cultural forms” (Darragh, 2003, p. 56).

Pā (Father) Henare Tate (2012) argued that Māori theology is theology developed by Māori for Māori. For him, “theology cannot simply be received ‘from elsewhere’, as if there simply exists a monocultural theology having universal claims to truth and relevance to Māori” (pp. 16–17). Instead, Māori theology “is rooted in the faith-filled contemporary experience and culture of the Māori people” and takes into account “their own analysis of their culture, language, symbol systems, stories, myths and values that were a part of their culture in the past and that continue to have significance in the presence” (Tate, 2012, p. 21).

It could be argued that Māori theology begins with Atua and the creation narratives that speak of emergence, growth and separation (Rangiwai, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). The word Atua refers to an ancestor with continuing influence; or a god, demon, supernatural being, deity, ghost, strange being or object of superstitious regard (Moorfield, 2011). While the word Atua is commonly translated as god, this is a misconception of the original meaning (Moorfield, 2011).

Atua were “not worshipped and adored”, instead, “they were propitiated with offerings but otherwise addressed in karakia (god chants) that might be peremptory and demanding” (Salmond, 1993, p. 52). Although feared, the powers of Atua were “equally confronted and controlled” (Salmond, 1993, p. 52).

From the word Atua comes the term Atuatanga which may be defined as divinity (Marsden, 2003, p. 50; Ryan, 2001). The notion of Atuatanga has been used as a concept in the Māori church—particularly in the Mihinare or Māori Anglican tradition since the mid-1990s—to describe Māori theology (Hollis, 2013; Melbourne, 2011).

Dr Te Waaka Melbourne stated that Atuatanga brings together the many Atua of the Māori world and Te Atua o te Paipera—the God of the Bible—into a modified concept (Melbourne, 2011). Dr Melbourne described Atuatanga as pre-European theology, Māori spirituality, theology from a Māori perspective and the study of God from a Māori perspective (Melbourne, 2011). One school of thought, Dr Melbourne argued, names Atuatanga as the system of knowledge surrounding the tradition of Io, the creator and ruler of all things (Melbourne, 2011). This tradition is found in certain iwi (tribes) and some parts of the Pacific, including Hawai’i, the Society Islands and the Cook Islands (Moorfield, 2011), but it is a topic of debate, as some have argued that Io is a post-contact response that mirrors the *supremacy* of the Judeo-Christian God.

Dr Jubilee Hollis (2013) argued that the term Atuatanga requires careful consideration; in fact, he wrote an entire doctoral thesis around Atuatanga and its potential to hold together the Christian and Māori theological worldviews. He expounded that Atuatanga may refer to the domain over which Te Atua (God) or ngā Atua (Māori Gods) express authority. The term may represent, he claimed, the characteristics and the study of ngā Atua or Te Atua. He stated, “Atuatanga has been equated to the English word theology and some *te reo Māori* experts considered it to be the closest word in *te reo Māori* to the Greek derivative of [the word] theology” (Hollis, 2013, p. x).

What are the benefits of syncretism for Māori?

In my research around the positive impacts of syncretism on the development of Christian faith among Māori, I interviewed 15 participants, 14 of whom were Māori, including a Māori woman (Rangiwai, 2019). Of those interviewed, 13 were ordained ministers—Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Reformed Old Catholic—while two were Māori theologians. Significantly, one of the ministers was also a practitioner of karakia tahito—pre-Christian incantations and rituals.

In my research, I used Harrison’s (2014) definition of positive syncretism to determine whether Māori had positive experiences of syncretism. For Harrison (2014), positive syncretism is about improvement, and for improvement to have occurred he argues that syncretism should be as follows:

1. Align the religion more closely with new knowledge about reality.
2. Contribute positively to progress in the world.
3. Sustain and expand upon important aspects of the religion.

In applying Harrison's (2014) first point—to align the religion more closely with new knowledge about reality—my research revealed that the syncretism that occurred between Māori and Christianity had the following effects.

Māori inverted biblical messages in culturally relevant ways as a means of religiopolitical resistance in the face of colonisation and land loss (Rangiwai, 2019). Māori prophetic movements represented a powerful religiopolitical response to colonialism and devastating land loss (Stenhouse & Paterson, 2004). Through these movements, we associated ourselves with the plight of the Israelites (Binney, 1997; Elsmore, 2008). Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki, for example, was a political prisoner who developed a religion of resistance. His Ringatū (upraised hand) faith was concerned with the issues of the colonised. For its adherents, it provided hope and a scaffold for analysing the Māori position within the colonial context. Simultaneously, it extended a distinctly Indigenous relationship with God (Binney, 1997; Binney & Chaplin, 1996). To provide this religiopolitical framework, Te Kooti incorporated elements of the introduced faith with Indigenous Māori spirituality. This allowed people to make sense of their situation and to reclaim autonomy over their lives.

By accepting the gospel on our own terms, Māori prepared—by becoming literate, for example—to encounter the realities of the modern world (Rangiwai, 2019). “From the outset,” Salmond (2017) argued, “the Bible stories began to influence Māori thinking” (p. 189). The Bible was a new system of knowledge with which we engaged critically and intellectually (Cooper, 2017). Indeed, “Māori embraced literacy and Bible ownership as a means to gaining access to new knowledge” (Paterson, 2010, p. 109). While some, like Mikaere (2005, 2011, 2016) might argue that the Bible and Christianity, as part of a cultural invasion, has played a significant role in changing tikanga for the worse, Cooper (2017) asserts that our ancestors always looked for ways to enlarge our knowledge base and that the Bible and Christian understandings were part of that expansion. As an essential part of 19th-century Māori print culture, the Bible was “instrumental in the construction of a collective Māori consciousness” (Paterson, 2010, pp. 114–115).

In applying Harrison's (2014) second point—to contribute positively to progress in the world—my research revealed that the syncretism that occurred between Māori and Christianity yielded the following results.

The application of the Christian notions of love and forgiveness caused Māori to break the cycle of utu—the process of restoring balance between groups in which social relations have been disturbed—allowing us to experience life in new and enhanced ways (Rangiwai, 2019). This phenomenon is probably best explained with the story of Tarore. Born around 1826, Tarore had been taught to read the Bible, by missionaries, Alfred and Charlotte Brown, and possessed a copy of St Luke's gospel

in te reo Māori (Morgan, n.d.; Moxon, 2014; Taylor, 2019). She was a gifted storyteller and regaled her community with the stories of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son (Taylor, 2019). Tragically, due to rising inter-tribal conflicts, Tarore was killed in 1836 during a raid (Taylor, 2019). Importantly, Tarore's father, influenced by the teachings of St Luke's gospel, forgave his daughter's murderer (Creegan, 2005). This is a powerful example of liberation from the cycle of utu—which would normally have called for some form of retaliation to restore balance.

Māori extended concepts such as aroha and manaakitanga to include the love exemplified by Jesus (Rangiwai, 2019). Procuring slaves was a normal part of Māori warfare. In a series of malicious raids on Ngāti Porou (Māori tribe, East Coast) by Ngā Puhī (Māori tribe, Northland), many captives were taken back to the North and enslaved. Christianity arrived first in the North in 1814 when Anglican missionary Samuel Marsden and Ngā Puhī Chief Ruatara together preached the first sermon. In the 1820s and 1830s, the rate of conversion to Christianity among Māori increased considerably (Sissons, 2015). Indeed, Soutar (2000) stated that the intense inter-tribal warfare of the 1820s and 1830s “was to wane only with the introduction of Christianity” (p. 78). The effects of Christianity on Māori were multifaceted. Some Māori converts evangelised their people (Yates, 2013). Ngā Puhī iwi (tribe), who held other iwi prisoners, released their captives as a result of gospel influence (Yates, 2013). Piripi Taumata-ā-Kura of Ngāti Porou had been a prisoner of Ngā Puhī, but following his release and return to Waipū around 1834, he preached the gospel to his people, taught literacy and initiated a style of battle that was in line with Christian ideas (Mahuika, 2015; Soutar, 2000). The Christian missionaries did not arrive in the area until after 1839, and while they disparaged the teachings espoused by Taumata-ā-Kura, he had laid down the Christian foundations that paved the way for the missionaries (Mahuika & Oliver, 1990). Christianity clearly inspired Ngā Puhī to extend their sense of aroha and manaakitanga by freeing their Ngāti Porou captives (Rangiwai, 2019).

Though charismatic prophet-leaders, Māori were inspired by the liberation theology of the Old Testament and used this to resist colonisation, while at the same time investing in new syncretistic belief systems (Rangiwai, 2019). The example of Rua Kēnana is an important one here. Born in 1869, Rua Kēnana—of both Ngāi Tūhoe (Māori Tribe, East Coast) and Ngāti Kahungunu (Māori tribe, Hawke's Bay, Wairarapa) descent—believed he was destined to assume the prophetic mantle left by Te Kooti (Binney & Chaplin, 1996; Binney et al., 1979; Elsmore, 2008; Rae, 2012). In 1907, Rua and his followers, the Iharaira (Israelites), established the City of God at Maungapōhatu, as it was believed that building Zion on the mountain would stop the Crown from taking land (Binney et al., 1979; Elsmore, 2008). They built a circular meeting house called Hiona (Zion), embellished with yellow diamonds and blue clubs; this was Rua's parliament and council chamber (Binney et al., 1979; Elsmore, 2008). The gateway to the settlement displayed the word Mihaia—a transliteration for Messiah—which is how Rua was

identified (Binney et al., 1979). Rua is still considered a Messiah by his contemporary followers, the Iharaira, who continue to gather and pray beneath their sacred mountain, Maungapōhātu, to this day.

In applying Harrison's (2014) third point—to sustain and expand upon important aspects of the religion—my research revealed that the syncretism that occurred between Māori and Christianity produced the following outcomes for participants:

- By applying the example of Jesus, certain aspects of Māori culture were enhanced;
- The notion of giving without utu or the expectation of reciprocity is a uniquely Christian notion exemplified by Jesus and imported into Māori culture;
- Acceptance of the gospel made Māori culture more loving (Rangiwai, 2019).

Largely, the benefits of syncretism for Māori are extensive. Syncretism offered Māori the means to adapt to novel ideas, generate new meanings and most pointedly, to engage with Christianity as Māori.

The research revealed that syncretism provided for us the means with which to maintain features of our old religion—that have endured to this day—notwithstanding the prevalent acceptance of Christianity among Māori. Through syncretism, Māori religion and Christianity were able to exist together, which is chiefly evident on the marae—I have observed this many marae and at my own marae in Waiōhau (Rangiwai, 2021).

As regards the many Christian denominations that Māori belong to, syncretism has provided the means for Māori to encounter a range of churches and theologies on the marae without issue. Indeed, syncretism neutralises the need to be antagonistic about one's beliefs.

Syncretism allows religions to connect and have meaningful conversations with one another. This allows many religious traditions to learn and grow and gain more knowledge and wisdom with which to try to answer life's great questions.

Through syncretism, Christianity becomes progressively more Māori. This is clearly advantageous for Māori as it allows us to be Christian in a Māori way. Meaningfully, syncretism was used as a coping strategy as we encountered the upheavals of colonisation and significant land loss. Indeed, our Māori prophets exemplified this with the syncretistic movements that they founded as a way of leading their people and inspiring faith in their followers.

Syncretism, gave us the tools to relate as Māori to Christianity. In facing Christianity as Māori, we comprehend and consider our faith with Māori eyes, we connect with Christianity with a Māori heart and we meet God with a Māori spirit. Syncretism allows us to be both authentically Māori and authentically Christian on our own terms.

Glossary

Aroha love, compassion, sympathy

Atua	an ancestor-deity with continuing influence, God, supernatural being; also used to denote the Christian God; Gods
Atuatanga	in this work, this term pertains to Māori spirituality, whether one is referring to ngā Atua—ancestor-deities—with their continuing influence or Te Atua—the Christian God; for some—particularly those from the Māori Anglican and Presbyterian traditions—this term can refer to Māori theology
hākari tapu	eucharist
Hiona	Zion
Iharaira	Israelites
Io	creator and ruler of all things
iwi	tribe, tribes; bones
karakia	God chants—see karakia tahito, Christian prayers
karakia Karaitiana	Christian prayers
karakia tahito	Incantations and rituals that summon the powers of ngā Atua
manaakitanga	hospitality
marae	Māori communal gathering places
Mihaia	Messiah
Mihinare	Māori Anglicans
ngā Atua	Māori Gods; ancestor-deities with continuing influence
Ngā Puhī	Māori tribe, Northland
Ngāi Tūhoe	Māori tribe, East Coast
Ngāti Kahungunu	Māori tribe, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa
Ngāti Porou	Māori tribe, East Coast
Pā	Father; Māori prenominal for Catholic priests
Pākehā	New Zealanders of predominantly European ancestry
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother
Ranginui	Sky Father
Ringatū	upraised hand; a syncretistic faith founded by Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki
te Atua	God
te pou herenga waka	Mooring post, used by Māori Anglicans to describe Christ
te reo Māori	Māori language, sometimes shortened to te reo
tikanga	Māori customs, practices, ethics
whānau	family
utu	the process of restoring balance between groups in which social relations have been disturbed

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