

**STAINED GLASS WARS:  
ISSUES OF NATIONALISM, PROPAGANDA, RACE AND  
GENDER IN NEW ZEALAND'S STAINED GLASS WINDOWS**

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INTRODUCTION

Religion, politics and art have been intertwined in human history. Art has been a tool of dominant ideologies and has portrayed events and figures of religious faiths, political regimes and generally been used as an agency of social control to further the interests of nationalism and by reinforcing moral and spiritual lessons and attitudes.

The full extent to which nineteenth and twentieth-century stained glass functions both as a powerful social determinant and indicator has been overlooked by scholars. By challenging cherished but false assumptions about the role and status of post-Medieval stained glass (so often dismissed as a beautiful but boring, minor, decorative art form) it becomes possible to tell an enormous amount about a society from the type of stained glass windows which it has chosen to install. The history of a nation and culture(s) can be read in them, albeit through a conservative lens, and keeping in mind that what is not displayed can be telling as well.

It is asserted that this is uniquely so in New Zealand. By analysing the country of origin, the documentation relating to commissions and the iconography of windows, observations can be made about religious and political demarcation and propaganda. Stained glass windows in New Zealand give vital insight into a transplanted and then post-colonial society, celebrating, reinforcing or reassessing its identity and attitudes to questions of race, gender, religion and politics.

In this paper observations are offered from a book which I am writing entitled *The Reflection of a Nation: Images of Cultural Identity in New Zealand's Stained Glass*.<sup>1</sup> This is concerned with a substantial discussion of national identity evident in stained glass unique because it is based on an exhaustive nation-wide survey, conducted in the 1980s; the first catalogue of any country's stained glass. These observations are set against a background of research conducted by this author in Europe, Ireland, North America, the Pacific, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

This paper discusses several inter-connected themes: the significance of colonial foundation and how denominational difference and political origins determined the type of stained glass installed; the frequency and style of depiction of European and New Zealand iconography, women, Maori and other Pacific cultures; and war memorials in which declarations (intentional or otherwise) of patriotism, religious affiliation, racism and sexism become most apparent.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLONIAL FOUNDATION

New Zealand was colonised in 1840 and settled predominantly by people from the United Kingdom and Ireland. There had been missionaries at work in New Zealand before then. Importantly New Zealand was annexed at the height of the Gothic Revival which meant a programme of church and secular building incorporating the newly fashionable adornment, stained glass windows.

The majority of windows in New Zealand were imported from a wide range of English studios, supplemented by a selection from Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany and Belgium. Surprisingly few were obtained from Australia. Therefore the New Zealand collection is more strongly Anglocentric than that in other former colonies which began and relied on their own stained glass studios earlier or Continental European studios. New Zealand retained strong ties with Britain until the 1970s when it joined the EEC after which time New Zealand imported very few stained glass windows from any country.

#### AN IDYLIC MISSIONARY OUTPOST

From 1845 onward, stained glass was imported mainly from England for Anglican churches (the dominant denomination), and the iconography used underlined the nineteenth-century concept of New Zealand as its pastoral outpost. The subjects are largely images of comfort and present oblique references to New Zealand through discipleship and spiritual conversion in a new land.

Informed English clergy and Gothic Revival architects in New Zealand strongly influenced by the Ecclesiological Movement strictly favoured Heaton, Butler & Bayne, Lavers, Barraud & Westlake and Clayton & Bell of London so these studios executed the majority of Victorian stained glass for New Zealand Anglican churches.

Where it is based on a pictorial source, nineteenth and twentieth-century stained glass in Church of England buildings almost exclusively quotes Pre-Raphaelite and late nineteenth-century English religious paintings. *Christ the Good Shepherd* after Frederick Shields and Sir Joseph Noel Paton and *The Light of the World* after Holman Hunt were the most popular subjects for windows. One of Holman Hunt's paintings of *The Light of the World* toured New Zealand in 1906 and was impressed upon the national consciousness resulting in many replicas in stained glass being commissioned. Almost every Anglican church with stained glass has a reproduction of at least one of these themes (the former underlines New Zealand's reliance on the sheep industry). These have come to be regarded as Anglican icons and commissioning one celebrated a palpable connection with the wider Anglican communion. Very few windows exhibiting the *The Good Shepherd* or *The Light of the World* are found in churches belonging to other denominations. The majority of other windows in Anglican buildings elucidate scenes from the Life of Christ and a small range of Apostles and British saints.

In direct contrast stained glass in Roman Catholic churches originates predominantly from Continental studios. There is the notable exception of windows in Catholic churches from John Hardman & Co of Birmingham patronised because of its Catholic ownership. In the nineteenth century the majority of windows were imported from France because settlers, in collaboration with French priests and nuns in New Zealand, imported stained glass from the home of their orders. There are examples by Lorin of Chartres, Lucien Begule of Lyons and Lobin of Tours and George-Nicolas Dufâtre of Grigny among other studios.

Denominational difference is further denoted by choice of iconography. That depicted in most Catholic stained glass is based on High Renaissance and Baroque paintings (works by Raphael and Guido Reni being popular sources). This reflected the seat of authority as Rome but little of the British and Irish ancestry of the majority of Catholics in New Zealand. Because of the special veneration accorded many saints in Catholic dogma there is a great diversity of figures, both well-known and obscure, demonstrated in Catholic buildings however most show Biblical and continental European saints. Popular works reproduced on devotional cards were also chosen for stained glass subjects such as the portrait executed in 1912 of *St Theresa of Lisieux* by her sister Celine.

An interesting aspect of New Zealand's twentieth-century imported collection is that there are examples by many British artists whose work is

rarely or not found at all outside the United Kingdom. Studio records prove this observation. New Zealand also has the best selection of British Arts and Crafts Movement stained glass outside the United Kingdom. Again this situation is attributable to New Zealand's past bond with the United Kingdom.

In the twentieth century Presbyterians and Methodists commissioned stained glass more than they had in the nineteenth century but in lesser quantity than Anglicans and Catholics. However, the former denominations elected to patronise New Zealand studios to a greater degree and far earlier. New Zealand studios which had come into existence at the turn of the century still found it hard to compete for commissions with overseas firms. The Anglican Church solidly patronised English studios and the Catholic Church installed much German work although the World Wars posed diplomatic problems and lessened the market. Following the edicts of Vatican II in 1968 the Catholic Church came to commission work more from local studios.

#### GENDER BIAS

Women are the dominant figure in barely 20% of ecclesiastical windows which reflects the patriarchal nature of the orthodox Christian religion. In the majority of cases they are depicted in traditional and submissive roles and St Mary BV is the most frequently represented figure. There are a few exceptions to stereotypical poses and demeanour and very few, non-Biblical female historical figures are delineated.

Women artists designed and executed stained glass as part of the British Arts and Crafts Movement in the earlier decades of this century and women after them were confidently trained. Where the artists have been recorded they have mistakenly been attributed as male in approximately 30% of cases. Surviving documentation regarding commissions shows that gender bias is evident also in the denial of recognition for women donors (who have in fact donated the majority of windows). Newspapers and church publications show that far less publicity has been given to windows commemorating women.

#### NEW ZEALAND ICONOGRAPHY

Victorian stained glass evinces little New Zealand iconography but there are a few explicit manifestations of Maori and European settlers and events.

One outstanding example is a portrait of *Te Matiaha Tiremorehu* by John Hardman & Co of Birmingham, 1891. A Kai Tahu leader, he is depicted with dignity as himself. In the companion light are a European woman and child, a pairing of two cultures, which looks forward to the later bi-culturalism of New Zealand denoted on its coat of arms.

Secular stained glass windows began to be executed in New Zealand in about 1895 which incorporated aspects of New Zealand landscape and life. But these were for private homes so not seen widely.

### FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIALS

New Zealand and New Zealanders are represented little in ecclesiastical stained glass until after the First World War. For European New Zealanders the flood of war memorials declared the grief of a country, and the decimation of a nation's youth at Gallipoli and elsewhere is very evident in stained glass windows in New Zealand. English studios suddenly had to depict New Zealanders at home and abroad with mixed results. New Zealanders began to see themselves more in stained glass windows (literally in the case of portraiture) and photographs were used so that uniform, landscape and facial details were correct.

War memorials provide the meeting point where Christianity, nationalistic identity, patriotic fervour, strict gender roles and attitudes to race become most acute and obvious. This is more apparent in stained glass than in any other form of memorial because of its pictorial, attractive, didactic, large-scale and ubiquitous nature. In stained glass, church art reflects the interests of the State by recording its triumphs or heroic struggles in defeat, and patriotic impulses are blended with Christian ethics.

Stained glass in New Zealand shows little actual fighting or death but a notable exception is *The Great Sacrifice* by Frederick Mash, New Zealand, c. 1920 based on the painting after John Adams (British Museum, date unknown). In an attempt to make sense of a son's loss of life it is equated directly to the sacrifice of Christ. The honouring of sacrifice could also involve a form of canonisation of dead sons by portraying them as warrior saints. Windows showing the reception of the soldier in Paradise and St Michael vanquishing the devil or a serpent were also a popular choice for war memorial windows linking a spiritual enemy with the real foe.

Even war memorials in secular buildings had Christian overtones and refer to English ideals and history. The dead being remembered were all killed in British wars and the use of chivalric iconography in many war

memorials underlines a long-standing British and European heritage of representation of manly virtue. Thereby New Zealand's strong kinship with England was doubly asserted. World war memorial windows are expensive, community focal points. They reflect a conservative and sanitised viewpoint agreed to by a ruling elite because the designs were vetted by public boards or church governing bodies who were composed largely of white males. It is no surprise then that there is little reference to Maori, or the sacrifice, loss of life or service under fire of women in the First World War in New Zealand's stained glass. A few nurses are depicted alive and well.

An identification with British imperialism was asserted extremely vigorously by New Zealanders who chose the iconography in other First World War memorials. One extraordinary example is a large-scale work, *The Service of Humanity*, designed by Martin Travers of London. It was not completed until near the outbreak of the Second World War because the artist was forced to redesign the work as his initial concept included German historical figures. The outline of the mount resembles the coastline of England.

## SECOND WORLD WAR MEMORIALS

Second World War memorial windows differ from those of the First World War. Portraiture of the dead had become unfashionable and they show less allegorical figures such as Peace, Truth and Justice. Instead they reflect a broader section of New Zealanders who participated in the war effort. They do include male farmers and mechanics, but not land girls for example. Again the sacrifice and effort are connected to Christian ethics and the allies are shown to have fought on the side of right in a just war. The texts on Second World War memorial windows generally refer to male sacrifice and death only.

Other memorial windows include women for the first time as both nurses and service-women but Maori nurses are not shown. Sex roles are still clearly defined; men are linked to action but women to caring and children. Again, there is no overt reference to women killed in war zones.

There are few depictions of service-men in action and the theatre of war is shown in only a few windows. The Maori involvement in the war is scantily acknowledged. Further the battles shown are still in England and Europe; the fighting in the Pacific is little represented in stained glass. There are a few stained glass windows given from England in recognition of the

contribution made by New Zealanders in the Second World War including one of St Michael donated by the townspeople of Worthing of Sussex in gratitude for food parcels sent by the people of Timaru.

FROM TROPICANA TO CENTENARY CELEBRATION;  
THE 1940S TO THE 1960S

In general non-war memorial windows imported after the Second World War show a greater and wider reflection of New Zealand life. In the 1940s and 1950s some windows present a tropical isle more akin to Hawaii with native birds wildly out of proportion.

The enormous prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s when wool prices were high in New Zealand resulted in many windows being commissioned by wealthy church-goers. Many works follow more insistence on the part of donors that New Zealand details be both incorporated and accurate surely reflecting a sense of national pride. In the 1950s many New Zealand regions celebrated centenaries of European settlement and memorials from this decade often proclaim some aspect of colonial history. These tie up European pioneering spirit and prosperity with Christian traditions. The sense of thanksgiving and happiness at fruitfulness and peace is also evident. Few windows however show contemporary scenes. Other windows executed in the 1950s and 1960s by English studios make some attempt at supporting bi-culturalism by showing Maori and Europeans in partnership.

DEPICTION OF MAORI AND PACIFIC ISLAND CULTURES

It is argued that 'indigenous' people are represented to a relatively greater extent in New Zealand stained glass than in the windows of other countries with First Nation cultures. These depictions are not all positive. What are now classed as culturally insensitive and racist images reflect widely-held attitudes of the past both from outside New Zealand and within it.

Earlier in the twentieth century for European studios the thought of exotic and savage South Sea cultures resulted in lurid versions of Pacific martyrdoms. Sources of great cultural insensitivity are versions of *The Binding of Satan* showing a dark-skinned devil. Maori are revealed with dignity in some nineteenth-century stained glass but in other windows as Anglified 'dusky' fellows and maidens. In other windows Pacific cultures are clearly portrayed as heathens to be converted. Some may see this as a form of cultural imperialism which destroyed traditional spiritualities.

The founders of Pacific religious institutions and missionaries are also shown in relation to Maori and Pacific Island cultures in many New Zealand windows. *Bishop Selwyn* and *The Life and Death of Bishop Paterson* (an Anglican Martyr of the Pacific) are figures who appear often. But the depiction of Pacific people in relation to them is frequently patronising and limited.

Maori have commissioned few stained glass windows perhaps because they have traditionally executed art works in wood and fibre. A memorial to First World War Maori soldiers shown worshipping at the feet of a crucified, European Christ is located in a Maori church. In direct contrast a Second World War memorial shows a Maori Battalion Warrior with *mana* and an inscription in Maori.

New Zealand studios fared better after the Second World War executing numerous works which reflected New Zealand society more. One New Zealander who made a determined effort to include New Zealand iconography was Martin Roestenburg who emigrated to New Zealand from Holland. In the 1950s he executed previously unthought-of images in stained glass for Maori churches of *A Maori Holy Family*, *A Maori Madonna* and *A Maori Christ*. His work was commissioned almost exclusively by the Roman Catholic church.

In 1995 several churches were arsoned in connection with racial tension in New Zealand. One Anglican church which was instead the focus of reconciliation recently installed a window by Rita Haag. It shows a famous act of Christian charity when *Heni te Kiri-Karamu* who had been taught by missionaries gave a dying British soldier water after a land battle against her tribe. The present church came to be built on the battleground, a Maori Pa.

Today numerous stained glass artists from several cultures work in response to local landscape and life and Maori and Pacific symbolism is depicted significantly but mostly in secular stained glass. A 39 square metre window finished in 1993 for a public library depicts *Inanahi ki Tenei Whakatipuranga* (Yesterdays, yesteryears and all the time in between until tomorrow). It blends history with environmental concerns and spiritual perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

Religious stained glass in New Zealand explores the link from the present to the past and from the living to the dead. The impulses behind

commissions and the images depicted can be interpreted in several ways. The tying of Christian ethics to justification of war may appear jingoistic now, but at the time may have been a way to make sense of something senseless. Stained glass windows enunciate a common, national grief and purpose.

Certainly New Zealand society has good reason to be less bellicognisant and more pacifist. It has also become less Eurocentric and more Pacific-focused. While its stained glass images stress the contributions of white males in the likeness of British chivalric or Biblical heroes the way is now clear for those conspicuous by their absence to be included in future windows.

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#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Wider discussion of stained glass in New Zealand is contained in Fiona Ciaran, 'Nineteenth and twentieth-century stained glass in Aotearoa / New Zealand', *[First] International Seminar on Stained Glass of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Worcester, Massachusetts: 1994) and *Stained Glass in Canterbury, New Zealand, 1860 to 1988* (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 1992; University of Otago Press, 1996).