

[Page 97]A review of Jason Hartley. *Ng? Mahi: The Things We Need to Do; The Pathway of the Stars*. n.p.: Xlibris, 2013. 264 pp., no index. \$23.00AUD (softcover).¹

Jason Hartley's book manifests a passion for alleviating the problem of M?ori surging into the prisons of Aotearoa/New Zealand² by restoring their old, traditional religious ethos and the social control that hinges on the recovery of the old belief that they are potentially noble children of God. In setting out his own disappointing discovery of the roots of both a growing problem and what he believes is the solution, he describes how he came to learn the arcane moral teachings, or old stories, that once buttressed M?ori social order. For Latter-day Saints, he also demonstrates that for some M?ori, despite much degradation, the Heavens are still open, just as they were when Latter-day Saint missionaries first encountered a people prepared for them and their message by their own seers, thus also implicitly challenging recent efforts to downplay or explain away the old stories as mere embellishments, wishful thinking, or an implausible founding mythology.

Jason Hartley has both training and wide experience in criminology and criminal justice systems. He is, among other [Page 98]things, an expert on Asian gangs in Australia.³ *Ng? Mahi* is an account of how he came to be employed for a decade seeking ways, other than merely building more prisons, of stemming M?ori degradation and the resulting flow into prisons. He came to believe that what is required is the recovery of the traditional, ancient M?ori moral teachings and the related power and authority of traditional social controls. *Ng? Mahi* sets out what these moral teachings are and why he believes they constitute the proper recipe for resolving the most pressing problems facing the criminal justice system in New Zealand.

*Ng? Mahi*⁴ is also, among other things, an account of Hartley's own journey of discovery — a striking spiritual odyssey — among the M?ori in New Zealand. His first encounter with M?ori was in 1988–1990, when he served as an LDS missionary in the New Zealand Christchurch Mission. He later found it difficult to reconcile his earlier experience with M?ori Latter-day Saints with what he encountered in the New Zealand criminal justice system. In *Ng? Mahi* he calls attention to the malaise and turbulence that troubles the contemporary M?ori world. Stated bluntly, an increasing number of M?ori are unable to win the battle against the blandishments of attractive/addictive European vices that are sending large numbers of them to prison.⁵ They often find themselves in the [Page 99]clutches of alcoholism,⁶ drug addiction, and resulting violent criminal activity. They are also addicted to gambling, tobacco,⁷ casual sex (resulting in a flood of irresponsible fathers and often indifferent single mothers), increasing domestic violence, etc. In one way or another this is the story of indigenous and other peoples elsewhere.

Hartley attributes this tragic debasement to the loss of the beliefs and actions that once morally sustained a noble social order. This degradation has resulted in an ever greater flow of M?ori, who have lost their moral bearings, into crime and hence made them the clients of New Zealand's criminal justice system. The often well-meaning government efforts to stem the tide of debasement have failed, while increasing the tax burden to finance and maintain prisons.⁸

Hartley argues that the M?ori have within their oldest traditions the cure for the malady that afflicts them. Given the challenges they face, he argues that their own old stories — their traditional, arcane teachings — (see pp. 180–230) have the power to ameliorate their lives by giving them a moral anchor to help them avoid the allure of very attractive European vices. Hartley argues the flow of M?ori into prison can be stemmed,⁹ if they recover their traditional moral bearings, and thereby overcoming “the senseless disregard of sacred things” (p. 226). M?ori must turn back to their old beliefs — to ancient sacred teachings about human and divine things. They must do the [Page 100]works (*ng? mahi*) necessary to climb the steps to the highest heaven (see p. 226),¹⁰ or “pathway of the stars.”

An Encounter – “It Started in 1990”

Hartley's odyssey began in 1990, following a visit to his future wife and her family in Whangarei, the provincial center of the area north of Auckland known as the Northland. Hartley served his LDS mission on the South Island of New Zealand. They had met when they were both serving missions on the South Island.¹¹ This explains why he was in Whangarei and also why and how he came to work as an advisor for the New Zealand criminal justice

system among his wife's people.¹²

Hartley's future wife made it possible for him to spend the night in Auckland (in the home of the manager of the Mount Eden Prison) so that he could catch an early flight back to Brisbane, Australia (see p. 5 for details). During that night he had an encounter with a long dead M?ori (pp. 6–7). His night-visitor turned out to be Mokomoko, a M?ori from the small *Whakat?hea* tribe, who had been falsely accused of killing a Protestant preacher. He was arrested, tried, and then later executed. (For details, see pp. 27–37.) On 17 May 1866, Mokomoko was hanged, and his body was buried at the Mount Eden Prison (p. 32). The Crown then seized 173,000 acres of [Page 101] *Whakat?hea* land (p. 32). Mokomoko's descendants were eventually able to prove his innocence, and in 1993, he "was officially exonerated by the New Zealand Department of Justice" (p. 33). Over 123 years later, his body was exhumed and taken back to tribal lands to be properly buried. Hartley indicates that "it was between his exhumation and his exoneration that Mokomoko appeared to me at the Mount Eden Prison" (p. 33).

Hartley states: "In colonial times, the Mount Eden Prison was a holding yard for certain M?ori leaders who failed to submit to British rule. Having dared to resist crown authority, many of the leaders were treated as criminals and sent to 'the Mount'" (p. 7). The terrible, "tragic irony" is that this prison was once "part of the mechanism to dismantle the social controls and leadership of M?ori," while it is now being "used to incarcerate their descendants who are very much the product of too little social control and not enough leadership" (pp. 7–8).

The desire to know the identity of his night-visitor began Hartley's quest for the causes — and a real remedy — for the growing degradation of the M?ori, who have clearly ceased to know or follow their own traditional ways. Instead, they have become addicts of alcohol, violence, drugs, casual sex, and hence also violent criminal activity. He tells how he came to see that the reconnection of the M?ori people to the highest and best in M?ori traditions is the answer to the flood of M?ori into prison.

He states:

Although not widely understood, the M?ori say there is a divinity to humankind, a heavenly potential that gives life dignity and deeper meaning. In fact, the M?ori explain our troubled, struggling world through the uncomplicated assertion that we have lost our ability to unleash that divinity, and so we are left to reap the consequences. In simple terms, our modern societies and our busy lifestyles [Page 102] have distracted us from who we truly are so we have lost sight of what we can truly become. (p. 4.)

Hartley also describes the way he came to know of the identity of the night visitor, and his tribe, the recovery of his remains and their eventual interment on his tribal land, with an apology from the New Zealand government. And then he sets out his desire to listen to those he describes as "scruffy" M?ori so he could hear their stories and better understand their blighted world.

Ng? Mahi also provides some evidence that, despite the degradation taking place among the M?ori, and hence what must be called the decline of M?ori "spirituality," the memories of those original and subsequent encounters with the divine that buttress the faith of M?ori Latter-day Saints¹³ are still present, though for the very reasons that send M?ori to prison, they are in decline. Without intending to do so, *Ng? Mahi* demonstrates that those famous accounts of M?ori seers, and other similar and closely related stories of signs, wonders, dreams, and heavenly visitors are not to be brushed aside as mere legends or myths, wishful thinking, or mere embellishments of ordinary events.¹⁴ They are still taking place. The evidence, of course, cannot be examined in this brief review of Hartley's spiritual odyssey.

A Personal Excursus

When it arrived unannounced in the mail in February 2013, the first thing I noticed about *Ng? Mahi*, were the names of Latter-day [Page 103] Saints my wife and I knew while serving as missionaries in New Zealand in 1999 to

2000 — such as Cleve Barlow and Wallace Wihongi. Hartley also mentions some of the same *whanau* (extended families) I knew in 1950.¹⁵

In addition, I also immediately noticed the following statement:

I have been to prisons many times and have always had the most amazing, even powerful experiences. I have found that when the focus becomes greater than self; hope moves in the forefront, while race and hatred seem to take a backseat. (p. 49)

In 1999–2000, my wife and I became somewhat familiar with the New Zealand criminal justice system, since for most of two years we visited a prison one afternoon each week. In addition, we also became aware of M?ori Saints who for many years performed extraordinary services in New Zealand prisons.¹⁶ Hence I was intrigued and then overwhelmed by what I read of Jason Hartley’s experiences with the M?ori in New Zealand. His recipe for stemming the tide of degradation leading to criminal activity and then prison rang true to me.

When I opened *Ng? Mahi*, it was immediately apparent to me that Hartley had to be a Latter-day Saint. Hartley’s being a Latter-day Saint was not, however, directly relevant to his “final report” on his decade of work. However, being an Australian and involved with the police, seems to have been a [Page 104]handicap with non-LDS M?ori — one he had to endure and strive to overcome. However, being a Latter-day Saint, I believe, was very helpful in his work, though it was not, of course, directly relevant to his “final report” on his decade of work in Whangarei.

Much of what Hartley describes of arcane M?ori traditions seems to have been derived from or with the help of M?ori Latter-day Saints in the Northland. This involved friendship with some of same extended families I encountered in 1950–52, while I served in the area around Whangarei.¹⁷

Are the M?ori Heavens Still Open?

Much like many LDS missionaries called to New Zealand, I saw evidence from 1950 to 1952 — and on subsequent visits — of a special openness to the divine among the M?ori Saints. And in 1999–2000, while my wife and I were serving as missionaries in New Zealand, we were privileged to witness the continued presence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit among the Saints in New Zealand. Despite portions of the larger M?ori world being in turmoil and though they have unfortunately diminished, spiritual gifts have not disappeared among the M?ori.

The despoiling of the best of M?ori traditions has yielded a host of evils. These include prisons packed with M?ori driven to excess and despair by, among other things, the temptations (and the allure) of the worst elements of the now dominant European civilization. This is a familiar story. European “discovery” often tears apart the social order of indigenous peoples. These evils, in addition to diseases for which they tend to lack immunity and vices to which they often become [Page 105]addicted, which include alcohol, drugs, casual sex (and hence the unraveling of the family), gambling, and dependence on welfare, all of which lead to violence and crime. Hartley has sought a way out of the current malaise among the M?ori if only the secular authorities, including M?ori opinion leaders, will pay attention. “It would have been a gross error” on his part, he indicates, “to have published a book concerning the life and circumstances of the Whakat?hea Chief Mokomoko without first seeking the consent of Mokomoko’s living descendants” (p. 35). Why? In the M?ori world it is wise to have permission to tell sacred stories, and one must be truthful in the stories one tells.

Hartley tells of some of his own experiences with signs, wonders, and divine things. His book is an account of his own remarkable awakening to the importance for the M?ori of a return to the highest and best in their traditional culture. M?ori Latter-day Saints will not find his prescription at all objectionable. Those who have served missions in New Zealand will probably be at least somewhat familiar with the kinds of stories that he tells. It is also very likely that they will have come to love the M?ori, including those who might have had their moral world blunted with addictive vices and excesses by having been “discovered” and “civilized” by Europeans with addictive vices and excesses. His book should be valuable to Latter-day Saints who have served missions in New Zealand. Those

who would care to probe the heart of the M?ori world, despite whatever flaws there are in *Ng? Mahi*, will be both edified and inspired by its life-affirming messages. Even those unfamiliar with both New Zealand and the M?ori can be instructed by his encounter with the remnants of the older world of the M?ori and by the hope it offers. If it is not already clear, I highly recommend *Ng? Mahi*. [Page 106]

Addenda: Some Polemical Notes

When Latter-day Saint missionaries to New Zealand made the first significant contact with the M?ori in 1882, they found some who were prepared for both them and their message. Even secularized skeptics or the disaffected tend to grant that this is true. They sometimes ask: why has all that ended? Or where did all the M?ori go? Put another way, various explanations have been proposed by secularized academics who challenge the traditional M?ori/Mormon “faithful history.” They see the stories as mythical and hence seek to demythologize what they consider a naive understanding of the real M?ori Latter-day Saint past. Critics tend to turn to half-understood categories and also the explanations of revisionist historians to fashion a secular and presumably “objective” account.¹⁸

Some critics imply that the M?ori were and still are a superstitious lot and, therefore, vulnerable to the kinds of beliefs held by Latter-day Saints. Put bluntly, the argument is that some M?ori, with the collusion of naive, uncritical LDS missionaries, fashioned stories that both include and manifest M?ori superstition and wishful thinking. These critics assume that naive missionaries were in thrall to these stories, which they then embellished. They grant that something happened, but they then ignore the accounts they think have been embellished and turned into a sort of founding myth by both the M?ori Saints and their American comrades. An example of this is the claim that what the American LDS missionaries offered was the opportunity for some M?ori to forge a new, more noble identity separate from the forms of the rather despised Christian faith of the increasingly dominant, land-hungry British colonizers, [Page 107] whose hypocrisy and duplicity tended to make them and their message increasingly distrusted and even despised.

My own position is that some but not all M?ori were prepared by what were authentic divine special revelations by their own *matakite* (seers)¹⁹ for both the authority and message of Latter-day Saint missionaries.²⁰ These “prophets,” including Arama Toiroa, have drawn considerable attention among both M?ori Saints, and LDS scholars.²¹ In addition, many M?ori Saints still treasure their own accounts of how some of their own ancestors became Latter-day Saints as a result of truly remarkable divine manifestations. I have called attention to all of this elsewhere.²²

In setting out some of the relevant details, I did not, of course, plow entirely new ground. I did not begin with the well-known stories of M?ori seers. Instead, I focused on the much less well known initial LDS missionary encounter with the M?ori. This took place while William Michael Bromley was serving as New Zealand Mission President. His fine diary, which covers his service from 10 December 1880 through 9 August 1883, when he reported back to President John Taylor, [Page 108] provides a carefully written, detailed account of the first of the fruitful LDS missionary endeavor among the M?ori.²³ This took place, it seems to me, in part because of an openness at all levels in the traditionally aristocratic M?ori society to divine providence and the work of the Holy Spirit. The M?ori were not hampered by post-enlightenment distrust of divine things, which tended to make them seem superstitious to some *P?keh?* (European) observers, including even Christian clergy.

I have sought to call attention to an interesting and important M?ori institution — to *whare w?nanga* (special schools for elite M?ori) — where an esoteric understanding of human and divine things was taught to an aristocratic elite. Secularized critics have ignored such things and hence have missed the point of what took place in what they call “top down” conversions—that is, the conversion of a M?ori tribal leader that opened the way in an aristocratic society for many conversions. They have not addressed the question of exactly what LDS missionaries taught that attracted the attention of those tribal leaders, or how those teachings were understood by those who had been initiated in those *wananga*.

The European focus on “top down” conversions does not address the fact that common M?ori also experienced

divine special revelations. Bromley provides an elegantly written, contemporary account of his and his two companions (William John McDonnell and Thomas Levi Cox) with Hari Teimana, who does not seem to have had any special status in the M?ori world. Instead, he seems to have been a rather ordinary M?ori who was prepared by a divine special revelation from the Apostle Peter for the arrival [Page 109]of these three Latter-day Saints and also for their priesthood authority and message.²⁴

This encounter led immediately to a series of baptisms and then in 1882 to the establishment of the first M?ori LDS branch. This was the first of a series of similar and related stories,²⁵ only some of which included traditional M?ori seers. Both *Pakeha* and M?ori critics, often drenched in post-enlightenment skepticism of fanaticism, tend to ignore these M?ori encounters with the divine. They do this by pointing to what they consider M?ori/Mormon superstition and myth-making that somehow helped make possible (or flowed from) the positive reception of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ among the M?ori.

In addition, the M?ori arcane teachings, which constitute much of the contents of Hartley's *Ng? Mahi*, about which Latter-day Saint missionaries were mostly unaware, seem to fit rather snugly with beliefs of Latter-day Saints that are simply not typically found among either Protestant or Roman Catholic clergy.²⁶ However, as far as I can see, there is no evidence that Teimana or his associates were known as *matakite* (seers) or that they had been initiated in the arcane Io cult in a *Whare W?nanga*. The conversion of those elite Maori that had lasting impact on the community of Saints in New Zealand only came later.[Page 110]

Concluding Remarks

If one believes that M?ori seers once received important divine revelations and other remarkable manifestations of divine providence, do these continue to take place now? It seems to me that *Ng? Mahi* provides a qualified but affirmative answer to this question, providing an answer to those skeptics who seek to downplay the role played by the traditional *matakite M?ori* or to ignore the other remarkable stories treasured by M?ori extended *whanau* (families). *Ng? Mahi* shows that the door has not been closed on the kinds of real-world, yet extraordinary, events that once captured the hearts and minds of M?ori Saints as well as those of some of their American LDS missionaries associates.

Ng? Mahi shows that among the M?ori the old stories of divine dealings with the M?ori people have not ceased. There is solid evidence that signs and wonders are still taking place among the M?ori. Those not already inclined to brush aside such things will relish Hartley's witness to the opening of the heavens.

1. *Ng? Mahi* can be ordered at www.ngamahi.com. This is a corrected edition of the one first published in 2010 (with a slightly different subtitle).

2. Though I have not used the name Aotearoa/New Zealand, I always have it in mind, since Aotearoa is the M?ori name for this beautiful land.

3. Hartley was the officer in charge of the Asian Specialist Unit for Queensland, Australia Police. He also has extensive training as a linguist. For more information, see <http://www.ngamahi.com/author>.

4. *Ng? Mahi* is M?ori for "the (plural) work," and in this instance those things that must be done or performed to accomplish or fulfill the purpose of our probation here in mortality, hence the subtitles.

5. Alan Duff begins his chapter on "Crime" in *Maori: The Crises and the Challenge* (Auckland, New Zealand:

Harper/Collins, 1993), 17, with the following bleak statement: “The most telling fact of Maori society not having the means to cope with modern times can be seen in the tragic figures on crime. The Maori offending rate is about six times that of European and any other ethnic group.” Hartley estimates that in the general population about 3% and among the M?ori about 10% will be in and out of prison. (Personal communication from Jason Hartley, dated 7 July 2014). The same criminal temptations are at work in both instances, but they have a somewhat greater impact on the M?ori.

6. There is reason to believe fetal alcohol syndrome is producing a host of damaged human beings).

7. M?ori women have the highest lung cancer rate in the world.

8. According to Hartley, in one decade New Zealand spent “over 1.2 billion dollars building new jails,” but still cannot keep up with the incoming prisoner population (see p. 14).

9. Hartley describes *Ng? Mahi* as his final report on the work he did for the decade he worked for the New Zealand prison system (see pp. 246–253).

10. In M?ori this is sometimes called *te ara poutama*, which means something like “an awakening to the stairway back to the highest heaven.” Hartley translates this phrase slightly differently as the “pathway to heaven” (see p. 226). This is sometimes visually represented in the stepped pattern of one of the woven designs (*tukutuku*) found between the carved wooden genealogical slabs that decorate carved houses on M?ori *marae*. It is not uncommon to see this design in reversed directions at the back of those houses.

11. Hartley has a diploma in M?ori Studies and is fluent in the M?ori language.

12. Hartley’s work in New Zealand was essentially among the Ng? Puh? *iwi* (tribe), which is one of the largest M?ori tribes. His experience as a police officer in Australia qualified him for the position he took in the New Zealand criminal justice system.

13. For a brief mention of the recent efforts of M?ori Saints to teach the old M?ori traditions and link them to the messages of the Restored Gospel, see Midgley, “M?ori Latter-day Saint Faith: Some Preliminary Remarks,” *Interpreter* 8 (2014): 45–65 (hereafter cited as Midgley).

14. Unfortunately, one of two writers gloss over or debunk key elements in the traditional faithful accounts of M?ori spirituality. It is, for instance, disheartening to see Gina Colvin mocking the grounds and contents of the faith of M?ori Saints on her blog. Her perspective is essentially a foreign, European/P?keh? secular ideology.

15. I share with Hartley a fascination with the M?ori and some, but not all, of their traditional ways. We also share a profound disappointment at the deracinating forces that send too many M?ori into a life of violence and crime.

16. I have in mind Heriwini Jones — and his various companions — who have for more than a decade done remarkable work in very tense situations in New Zealand prisons. And I also have in mind Mutu Wihongi, who had been called by an Auckland New Zealand Mission President to visit the two prisons in Auckland. When the Mission President was replaced, he forgot to release Mutu, who continued to do the job he had been called to do until his age made it impossible for him to continue.

[17.](#) I am fond of New Zealand, especially the Northland. I began my mission in 1950, plump in the ignorance and arrogance of youth, in Whangarei and the Bay of Islands. My brother, Rushby C. Midgley, Jr., also served his mission to New Zealand (1938–40), first under Charles Woods, my uncle, and then for a short time under Matthew Cowley, who was a family friend. Much of my brother’s mission was also in the Northland.

[18.](#) For example, see Marjorie Newton’s *Mormon and Maori* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), for what I see as, despite some new information on several side issues, as an unfortunate and unnecessary debunking, for example, of the accounts of M?ori seers opening the way for LDS missionaries (see pp. 2–3).

[19.](#) The authentic M?ori word *matakite* was eventually supplemented and then replaced by the English loan word *poropiti*, which is “prophet” spelled in the M?ori alphabet. The most accessible older account of M?ori “prophets” can be found in the chapters New Zealand in R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 253–245.

[20.](#) See Midgley, 45–65.

[21.](#) For a new and more richly detailed account, see Robert Joseph, “Intercultural Exchange: Matakite M?ori and the Mormon Church,” *Mana M?ori and Christianity*, ed. Hugh Morrison, Lachy Paterson, Brett Knowles and Murray Rae (Wellington, NZ: Huia Publishers, 2012), 43–72. Though Marjorie Newton (in her *Mormon and M?ori*) quotes from the opening paragraph of Professor Joseph’s essay (159) to make some point unrelated to its substance, she merely mentions Paora Potangaroa (see 2–3) and ignores much new information on Arama Toiroa, who was the first and, I believe, most important of the M?ori seers.

[22.](#) For my own position, see Midgley, 51–53.

[23.](#) See *None Shall Excel Thee: The Life and Journals of William Michael Bromley*, ed. Fred Bromley Hodson (n.p., privately printed, 1990).

[24.](#) On 5 April 1881, Bromley called William John McDonnell, then a member of the Auckland Branch, to serve as a missionary to the M?ori. McDonnell set about to learn the M?ori language. He soon learned to speak M?ori and to serve as translator for Bromley and others (see *None Shall Excel Thee*, 113, 309–310, 331). Bromley, with McDonnell and Cox, witnessed the events that began on 24 December 1882 near Cambridge, a small provincial town 14 miles from Hamilton (*None Shall Excel Thee*, 293–296, 311).

[25.](#) See Bromley, *None Shall Excel Thee*, 293–297, and for a summary, see Midgley, pp. 51–53.

[26.](#) See Midgley, pp. 55–63, for some details.