TONY BALLANTYNE, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, M ori, and the Question of the Body*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; pp. xiv + 360.

Tony Ballantyne started researching the mission history of Northern New Zealand in a second-year honours history class at the University of Otago. This book, then, has been a long time coming, and it bears all the hallmarks of expertise that Ballantyne has gained during a career that has seen him make many important and exciting contributions to the area of imperial history in New Zealand and beyond. *Entanglements of Empire* examines Protestant missions in New Zealand from 1814 to 1840, the period just before formal colonisation began in earnest in New Zealand. In its pages we find much about the missionaries and their families who travelled to an unfamiliar land with the conviction that the lives of the M ori people who lived there would be improved by Christianity, the unexpected challenges and lessons that they learned, and the impact they had on M ori lives and culture. Ballantyne states early on that at the heart of the book is “a set of struggles over the materiality of the body” (p. 9), and he offers a series of elegant lessons about how the physical intimacy of people from different cultures shaped their interaction. But what is most enticing about this wonderful history is Ballantyne’s reshaping of mission/Indigenous interaction into a conversation between two adapting populations, rather than a history of impact, imposition, humanitarian effort, or religious conversion.

Entanglements of Empire tells stories of reciprocity, of personal connections between missionaries and M ori, and how webs of relationships and the movement of people around the world impacted on intimate family arrangements, the administration of transgressions and cultural transmission. Ballantyne describes the economic and technological advances that attracted the M ori to the missionaries, and how the missionaries were, in turn, often economically dependent on the M ori for their survival. In chapters organised around themes of space, time, transgression, death and the shift to formal colonisation, Ballantyne traces the accommodations M ori made to Christianity in their understandings of time and cosmology, but is at pains to demonstrate that there was no neat, coherent, or all-encompassing cultural shift on either side. Change, he says, was uneven and unpredictable, and missionaries lived with considerable uncertainty (p. 137).

Ballantyne takes a firm and deliberate step away from historical assessments of missionary work that read it only as a form of cultural imperialism. Doing so, Ballantyne suggests, not only places the power in the transaction in the wrong side of the ledger, but also obscures the important processes of translation going on in both missionary and Indigenous communities. Rather than a neat story of cultural dominance, Ballantyne stresses entanglement, translation, conversation and complexity. He does so through a deft handling of the archives of the Church Missionary Society mission in the Bay of Islands in the 1820s. Sometimes quoting at length, sometimes using a paragraph to give the reader a delicious summary of their message, Ballantyne moves so far beyond the idea that such records can give only one side of the story of colonialism that it is hard to believe we historians ever agonised over this issue. This methodology has useful insights for historians who work on any moment in the colonial story — historians of colonial encounter, violence, intimacy, protectorates, assimilation and even decolonisation.

Ballantyne often traverses material that has been written about before, and he offers his new interpretations of the past with clarity and humility. Nowhere is this more evident than in the passages he addresses the fundamental question of mission history: what role did missionaries play in the settler colonial project? In answering this question, Ballantyne rejects a “simple ‘religion versus empire’ formulation” (p. 27). He reveals missions that were profoundly human, full of failed efforts, contradictory behaviour, uneven change, and cross cultural adaptations from both missionaries and M ori. He also acknowledges their

involvement in, and debt to, the knowledge, institutions, and commercial infrastructure produced by non-missionary British activity in the Pacific thus, as he puts it, returning “missionary institutions to the broader field of empire” (p. 27).

The settler colonial history of the Pacific world is unique, and scholars of this time and place are leading the world in studies of settler colonialism, mobility, and intimacy. This new work by Tony Ballantyne offers an elegant and timely intervention into the ways we write about the colonial project that shaped the Pacific world.

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