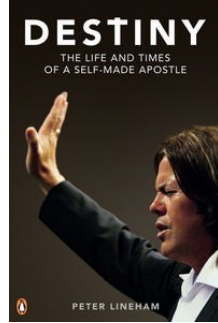


Destiny: The Life and Times of a Self-Made Apostle, by Peter Lineham

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The phenomenon of Brian Tamaki’s Destiny Church came to my attention, as it did many others’ in New Zealand, during Destiny’s now infamous “Enough is Enough” march down Lambton Quay in Wellington in 2004. As will be well known to many readers, the march was largely a response to the Labour government’s Civil Unions legislation, which, among other things, gave same-sex couples the opportunity to have the same legal rights as married couples bestowed upon them by the State. The public response to the march and the marchers, understandably, was overwhelmingly negative, with comparisons made between the Destiny marchers and a wide range of bogeymen, including Nazis, the Taliban, and “brainwashed automats” with a “cult mindset” (17). So it was with great pleasure that I was given the opportunity to review Peter Lineham’s recent book *Destiny: The Life and Times of a Self-Made Apostle*, in order gain a more nuanced understanding of the movement, and broader social, political, and historical contexts from which Destiny comes, and within which it works.

Lineham, a Professor of History at Massey University in Albany who has been following Destiny since 2003, has produced a very readable account of Destiny’s history and development, from its earliest days, up until the development of its “City of God” in the South Auckland suburb of Manukau in 2012. *Destiny* is comprised of eighteen brief chapters, each dealing with an aspect of Destiny including Brian and his wife Hannah’s early lives (chapter 2); their early days in ministry as part of the Apostolic Church movement in New Zealand from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (chapter 3); and later the Tamakis’ split from the Apostolic Church, where they preached in Rotorua, before moving to Auckland, and finally developing Destiny as its own entity and movement in Auckland and throughout the country (chapter 4).

Once the story of Destiny reaches Auckland, considerable attention is also paid to the moralizing efforts of Destiny, which will no doubt be of interest to many readers, perhaps most notably Destiny’s opposition to the Civil Unions legislation, which thrust the movement and Tamaki into mainstream public life. However, Lineham also works to unpack many other as-

pects of Destiny's moral conservatism, and its views on family morality, gender relations, masculinity (Tamaki once claimed he was "sick of men in our nation being wimps, pimps, gimps" (133)), homosexuality, as well as views on prostitution that were exacerbated by another piece of Labour legislation, the Prostitution Reform Bill (chapter 8), all of which are couched within a moral/theological discourse that Destiny uses to represent itself as the bearer of "traditional" New Zealand values. While each of Destiny's stances on such issues is given consideration and description by Lineham, he also finds ways to critique Destiny intelligently, not on its moral positions on these issues per se, but rather on its lack of a strong position on other, related issues. Lineham rightly points out the selective and at times contradictory positions Destiny takes on certain issues, while often remaining silent on broader social problems such as poverty and the lack of equality that poorer citizens and minorities have in New Zealand—larger social issues that arguably contribute to maintaining the other "moral ills" which Destiny spends much of its time criticizing.

One of the underlying strengths of *Destiny* is the fact that, although Lineham admits that he is no fan of Destiny, he does not have an axe to grind. Rather, Lineham works hard to provide readers with something of an insider's perspective and an understanding of Destiny's origins, its social and cultural influences, and why it remains attractive to its members, while also avoiding reproducing its critics' often superficial assessments of it. Lineham's examination of the liberal critiques of Destiny and Tamaki are also insightful and thought provoking, particularly as he shows the way that media hostility often helped constitute Destiny as a movement with more social and political clout than it in fact projected. Moreover, by pointing out the often superficial criticisms that media personalities directed toward Tamaki, particularly as they relate to his conspicuous consumption (such as Paul Holmes's interrogation of Tamaki over the cost of his designer jacket), in addition to the criticisms of Tamaki's self-appointed status as a Bishop, *Destiny* also inadvertently gives readers a glimpse of the often contradictory place of religion in New Zealand society. For, while New Zealanders often pride themselves on their tolerance and secularity, the attention to Tamaki's wealth, consumption, or self appointed (and thus "inauthentic") status as a Bishop suggests that there still remains a normative idea about what "real" religion is and how religious people ought to conduct themselves in New Zealand.

This is particularly evident in chapter 17 "The Cult." What makes this chapter particularly strong, is Lineham's critique of the category "cult" as

something that has no stable essence, but is rather deployed by groups to critique their opponents as dangerous, “inauthentic” or (often) both. Thus, Lineham shows that the accusations of Destiny being a cult are based more on the fears of those making the accusations, rather than anything specific Destiny itself has done. However, Lineham also seems to inadvertently undercut his own analysis when he notes at one point that Tamaki admitted to followers that he had made many mistakes and been “put in his place for them.” Lineham’s own concluding remark thus reintroduces the category of the cult as an observable entity when he notes that “Such an admission is hardly characteristic behaviour of a cult leader” (249).

One of the difficulties of writing a broad history of a movement such as the Destiny Church is the sheer breadth of contextualization required to produce a picture of such a movement in its contemporary environment. Thus, Lineham was tasked with not only writing about the putative “origins” of Destiny but he also had to consider its relationship to American and Australian expressions of Pentecostalism, where it sought to emulate, and where it diverged and why; Tamaki’s relationship with and inspiration from Black churches and their pastors in the United States; the political environment that helped produce some of Destiny’s core positions; its relationship with Māori and Pasifika communities that make up the bulk of its members, and thus the negotiation of its identity and whether or not it was a “Māori Church”; the reception of things such as the “Prosperity Gospel” in New Zealand; the formation of the Destiny political party; and, not to mention, the reception of Destiny itself within mainstream New Zealand. Thus, at times, I felt as though the book was trying to do too much, and the inclusion of so many aspects and angles on Destiny came at the cost of stronger analysis of some of the topics covered. In short, I kept wanting more, and not in the sense that I was on edge with anticipation. Rather, on many occasions when I came to the end of a section or a chapter, I kept hearing the words often directed at me by another New Zealand academic, Paul Morris, when I was a student of his: *so what?*

Yet it would be remiss to critique Lineham for not having written this book in the way that I perhaps might have. *Destiny* is very much a book written for a generalist audience, which is understandable considering the market for theoretically dense texts on New Zealand religious movements is undoubtedly quite small. In that respect, *Destiny* succeeds in its goal of providing a more comprehensive account of a movement that although disproportionately present in New Zealand’s media, remains little understood.

This book provides a strong foundation for understanding Destiny in all its complexities. More importantly, it also has the potential to act as a foundational text from which others can go on to do more in depth, analytical studies of certain aspects of the Destiny phenomenon, and perhaps answer some of those so what questions in the future.

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