

‘ON THE WAY’ AND ‘IN THE FRAY’ IN AOTEAROA: A PĀKEHĀ’S COVENANTAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE CONTEXT OF A TREATY PEOPLE

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Paul Fiddes has made many important contributions to theology in general and Baptist theology in particular, not least being his theological development of Baptist covenanting. Fiddes’ work, along with others, has generated many important possibilities for creative expressions of Baptist identity and a Baptist way of being church. These have found particularly fertile soil in the settings of the United Kingdom and the United States in both academic theology and church expression.¹ However, the generative possibilities of Baptist covenanting are yet to make a significant impression in academic theology or church expression in Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst there has been much work done on Baptist history, there has been much less work done on Baptist theology in Aotearoa. Martin Sutherland’s pioneering theological work has stood out as an important, yet solo, voice. As one Baptist leader from the United Kingdom observed from a recent visit, Kiwi Baptists are a fairly pragmatic bunch and “anyone talking about covenant (or even an ontological view of ministry) is seen as a bit catholic (or plain odd).”²

I want to argue that rather than being catholic or odd, covenant offers Baptists in Aotearoa a significant opportunity to resource the conversation on what it means to be Baptist in the twenty-first century. Not only do Baptists in Aotearoa New Zealand have significant resources to draw from out of their ecclesiological heritage, they also have significant resources in their national heritage. Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) is widely acknowledged as the nation’s founding document, and it was understood by many Māori³ and Pākehā⁴ to be a solemn covenant between two people who were bound together in bi-cultural partnership. This essay examines the Baptist theology of church covenanting in the context of the covenanting history of Aotearoa to explore some of the possible contributions that Baptists in Aotearoa can make to the wider exploration of Baptist covenanting.

¹ Paul S. Fiddes, “Communion and Covenant,” in *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples*, eds. Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes and Richard Kidd (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2014), 133. See also Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 157.

² Neil Brighton, “Observing Baptist Life in New Zealand” http://neilbrighton.typepad.com/distinct_reflections/2015/05/observing-baptist-life-in-new-zealand.html

³ Māori refers to an indigenous person of Aotearoa. Māori Dictionary, “Māori,” <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=m%C4%81ori>.

⁴ Pākehā refers to a person of European descent living in Aotearoa. Māori Dictionary, “Pākehā,” <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=pakeh%C4%81>.

PAUL FIDDES AND BAPTIST COVENANTING

Covenanting together has been an important part of Baptist self-understanding and it is finding a significant resurgence in modern Baptist thought as we seek to understand Baptist identity in our age. At this time, Baptists in Aotearoa are asking questions about our identity—what does it mean to be Baptist in Aotearoa today?⁵ Of course, there is not a singular answer to this question, nor is there a fixity about Baptist identity. There will be a multiplicity of Baptist identities in Aotearoa, but these identities need to emerge from our understanding of a Baptist way of being. At the heart of Baptist distinctives is not a unique understanding of the Trinity, the Bible or salvation, but a distinctive understanding of the church as a gathered community living under the rule of Christ.⁶ As Fiddes has rightly reminded us, it is not the individual convictions alone that are distinct, but the constellation of convictions. It is how Baptists have dynamically held these convictions together that is distinct. The Baptist genetic code finds its beating heart in the promised presence of Jesus Christ in the gathered local church.⁷ The dynamic of living under the rule of Christ was expressed in many early Baptist churches by the making of a solemn church covenant which was central to ecclesial identity and faithfulness.⁸

Covenanting together was a vital aspect of the early Baptist way of being and Fiddes has reminded us of the significance of covenanting in the formative beginnings of the Baptist movement and its constructive possibilities for shaping Baptist theology. The Separatist church at Gainsborough, whilst not yet a Baptist church, had the two founders of the Baptist movement, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, as their pastor and elder. The church at Gainsborough was bound together in covenant in which they “joynd themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting.”⁹ Early Baptists took very seriously the promise of Jesus Christ that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). This passage led them to ask what it meant for Christ to “dwell in their midst”. They discerned in the phrase an echo of the covenantal language of the Old Testament prophets where God’s promise to “dwell among” people is combined with the formula “I will be your God and you will be my people”.¹⁰ The early Baptist covenants fused God’s covenant of grace with humanity together with the local church covenant made between believers to be faithful to God and one another. God’s eternal covenant of grace with humanity is

⁵ The question of Baptist identity in relation to the freedom of the local church was at the centre of the recent debates regarding same-sex marriage. <http://www.baptist.org.nz/news/35/22/Working-party-begins-deliberations-on-same-sex-marriage-and-issues-of-local-church-autonomy>.

⁶ Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 6-7. Nigel Wright offers seven core convictions of the Baptist genetic code: The supreme authority of scripture on all of faith and conduct; a believer’s church; believer’s baptism; the priesthood of all believers; the autonomy of the local church; freedom of conscience; and separation of church from state. However, these convictions, when taken on their own, are not especially dissimilar from other ecclesial traditions. Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005). 42-43.

⁷ Paul S. Fiddes, “Theology and the Baptist Way of Community,” in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000), 28.

⁸ Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 6.

⁹ Cited in Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 21.

¹⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, “A Response to David Carter’s Review of *Tracks and Traces*,” *Ecclesiology* 5, no. 1 (2005). 94.

made visible in the gathering of local believers in the bonds of covenant community. As Stephen Holmes notes, this is a striking elevation of the role of the local church.¹¹

In his constructive work, Fiddes has developed the theme of covenanting through his characteristic theology of participating in God and his engagement with Karl Barth's christological account of election and covenant. Fiddes draws from Barth's theology of election to develop his own theology of Baptist covenanting in the context of the local church's participation in the Trinitarian fellowship. Barth's theology of election centred God's purposes in the person of Jesus Christ who is both the electing God and the elect human person in the unity of his being by the Spirit. "He in whom the covenant of grace is fulfilled and revealed in history is also its eternal basis."¹² As subject and object of election, Jesus Christ participates in the divine determination to elect humanity and he himself is the basis of that election that establishes the covenant between God and humanity. "If God elects us too, then it is in and with this election of Jesus Christ. It is He who is manifestly the concrete and manifest form of the divine decision—the decision of Father, Son and Spirit—in favour of the covenant to be established between Him and us."¹³ In Christ, God has elected all humanity for fellowship and chosen God's own self as covenant partner with humanity. Fiddes notes Barth's caution regarding the use of covenant language to describe the inner divine relations, despite speaking of them in terms of election.¹⁴ Barth's objections, according to Fiddes, are due to his concern over the juridical accounts traditionally associated with Calvinistic federal theology in which the divine persons are viewed as two subjects engaged in legal dealings with one another.¹⁵ Fiddes believes that Barth's critique can be taken to redefine language of an inner divine covenant apart from the juridical assumptions. "We might say that *as* God the Father makes a covenant of love eternally with the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit, so simultaneously God makes a covenant in history with human beings."¹⁶ In Christ and by the Spirit, the horizontal human dynamic of covenant making is taken up into the vertical dimension of God's eternal covenant with humanity in Christ. In this way the church participates not only in God's covenant with humanity but the inner covenant-making in God. "Church is what happens when these vectors [the horizontal church covenant and the vertical eternal covenant of grace] intersect, and God in humility opens God's own self to the richness of the intercourse."¹⁷ Church is the community that the Spirit has gathered together in covenant through Christ to the glory of the Father to be God's community in time through radical commitment to God and one another.

A full account of Fiddes' theology of covenant would need to offer a careful engagement with his major theological motifs of the openness of God, *hypostases* as relations, and his characteristic theme of participation in God. However, the focus of this essay is to develop covenantal insights for and from the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Of particular interest for and from the context of Aotearoa are the

¹¹ Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, 158.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Trans. G. W. Bromiley et. al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 7. (Hereafter *CD*.)

¹³ Barth, *CD* II/2, 105.

¹⁴ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 36. See also Fiddes, "Communion and Covenant," 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135-36.

¹⁷ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 79-80.

relational dynamics associated with covenanting in the setting of indigenous and settler relationality. Indigenous and settler relationality has a long and chequered history. Any suggestions for or from the relational dynamics of Aotearoa needs to engage this history and the ongoing struggle for indigenous and settler identity and belonging. As Fiddes has highlighted, John Fawcett's Baptist anthem, "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" is not a religious version of "Auld lang syne" but a call to radical and costly commitment to God and one another in the context of covenant love.¹⁸ In the following section we will examine the work of Helen Dare, whose definition of Baptist covenantal dynamics as being "on the way" and "in the fray" provides an important framework for the contested space of relational covenant identity.

ON THE WAY AND IN THE FRAY: THE RELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF A COVENANTAL PEOPLE

In her recent Whitley lecture, Helen Dare suggests that Baptist hermeneutics should be shaped by the relational dynamics of a covenantal people who are "on the way" and "in the fray". These committed relationships provide the context for an open-ended and exciting journey of interpreting Scripture together for our day, if we are willing to accept the responsibility and possibility of the relational dynamics of covenanting.¹⁹ The Bible is not there to be mastered, and nor are our fellow way-farers. Instead of individualistic approaches to Scripture, there is a need to fund a way of being in which the voice of the marginalised disorients the settled readings and discourses that emerge from our entrenched communal practices of biblical interpretation. Dare utilises the work of Walter Brueggemann to develop insights from the covenantal relationship of God with Israel which then inform her proposals for the covenantal dynamics of Baptist hermeneutics.²⁰

Brueggemann famously categorised the Psalms into Psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation to describe the complex relationship of Israel with God. Dare employs these categorisations as a heuristic tool for interpreting the dynamics of Baptist covenantal hermeneutics. Baptists often prefer the uncomplicated and well-ordered world of orientation to the risky experience of disorientation; the core testimony of the Psalms of orientation instead of the counter-testimony of the Psalms of disorientation. In such settings, disorientation and the encroachment of chaos and confusion tends to be internalised because they are perceived as an act of unfaithfulness to the settled truths about God, ourselves, and life. However, these polite views of God fail to engage God in the fray and they shelter us from the unexpected surprise of God's grace that is found in the midst of a complex world to which the Psalms of new orientation attest.²¹ Attempts to uphold polite and well-ordered views of the world fail to note that the God of Scripture is to be found in the fray. "The God of Israel is characteristically 'in the fray' ... Conversely, the God of Israel is

¹⁸ Fiddes, "Communion and Covenant," 129-30.

¹⁹ Helen J. Dare, *Always On the Way and In the Fray: Reading the Bible as Baptists*. The Whitley Lecture 2014 (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2014), 25-26.

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Ibid., 8-9.

rarely permitted, in the rhetoric of Israel, to be safe and unvexed ‘above the fray.’”²² Through his covenantal loyalty, God binds himself to Israel in a relationship that profoundly impacts God and Israel as they walk together in a complex world. “Being in relationship with others, divine and human, makes demands of the partners, who are accessible to each other and changed by the interaction.”²³

As well as being in the fray, covenantal faith is set in the context of a journey on the way. Being on the way invites a relational dynamism in which life and faith are constantly negotiated with and for the other. Instead of a linear progress to a supposed enlightenment, there is a spiral of experience in which the community cycles through orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. Being on the way leads to an intensification of relationship in which the core testimony is enriched and matured through the witness of the counter-testimony. Orientation and disorientation are not oppositional options, but necessary tensions that need to be upheld and maintained for a full and honest account of the faith, as well as the depth and intensity of relationship that covenanting generates.²⁴ Faith on the way cannot be intensified by the imposition of the core testimony and the demand that the voice of counter-testimony conform. In such homogenising settings, sedimented power structures are legitimated and the dynamism of the journey is lost in coercive conformity. Instead of harmonisation and homogeneity, the dialectical and creative tension needs to be upheld in a community that are on the way *and* in the fray.

Congregational hermeneutics that seek Christ’s will in the gathered community requires covenant members to relinquish individualised and privatised readings of Scripture and consider the divine and human other who may disorient the core testimony by their counter-testimony.²⁵ The call to covenantal relatedness is a commitment to othering in which we will be disorientated and changed by relational interactions as we seek together the will of Christ which is discerned by the gathered community. It is an ongoing commitment to a dynamic journey of negotiation because relational identity is contested identity. However, the calcified structures of our churches often disempower marginalised voices and silence their counter-testimony. Encountering voices of counter-testimony requires practices of listening and being together that are demanding and taxing. Listening to voices that are different is both difficult and stimulating as our assumptions are challenged and we wrestle with fresh perspectives about living under the rule of Christ. “Relatedness can be seen as the source of disorientation, but may also [be] the appropriate response to it: disorientation caused by an- o/Other requires not a withdrawal from community, but an intensification of the covenant relationship.”²⁶ The intensification of relationship requires renewed thinking about how Baptists embody and enact the gospel in our gathered life.

Stephen Holmes has challenged the practice of church voting because it legitimates entrenched power structures, and suggested that Baptists embrace a necessary lack of competence in discerning Christ’s

²² Helen J. Dare, “‘In the Fray’: Reading the Bible in Relationship,” in *The “Plainly Revealed” Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice*, eds. Helen J. Dare and Simon Woodman (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011), 240.

²³ Dare, *Always On the Way and In the Fray*, 16.

²⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁶ Ibid., 32.

will in the gathered community. Holmes reminds us that the earliest Baptists did not use voting to discern the will of Christ, and when they did start using this system in the early nineteenth century they subverted it in the light of the gospel. When wider British society was limiting voting to the richest ten percent of male aristocrats, Baptist churches were allowing all members, male and female, to vote.²⁷ However, our current use of voting has become an act of cultural conformity in Baptist churches where the systems and power structures of the world are reinforced in ways which are inconsistent with the gospel. Seeking Christ's will is often left to those who are regarded as competent in leadership by worldly standards and as a result we assume that human agency can supply the miracle of grace required to discern God's voice in our midst and follow in his ways. Holmes rightly highlights that many of our church structures for seeking Christ's will are designed to suit those with power:

Inasmuch as those of us who are powerful and educated and successful (and white, and middle class, and male) find it hard to accept and confess our utter incompetence, however, we continue to practice church meeting improperly. We construct and support practices that we find it easy to participate in and manipulate, and that exclude completely those who lack worldly social status and the confidence it engenders.²⁸

Rather than greater competence in leadership, Holmes argues for a necessary lack of competence in discerning Christ's leadership. We discern Christ's leadership by reflecting on the Scriptures and praying for the coming of the Spirit. Even the world-class biblical scholar is dependent on the aid of the Spirit to discern Christ's leadership for the congregation.²⁹ Holmes' constructive quest for an alternative body politic engages the crucial issues of power and privilege that are at stake in covenantal communities who are journeying together on the way and in the fray.

Being on the way and in the fray is not an easy proposition, especially for those who are used to having power. However, voices of counter-testimony need not represent a threat. After all, in covenantal life we are on the way and in the fray in a community of faithful friends. According to Sean Winter, it is here that the art of conversation is crucial.³⁰ In this conversation we will find ways to share our views and interpretations honestly and openly whilst listening attentively to alternative views and irruptive interpretations, in trust that the richness of the conversation will lead us towards greater gospel faithfulness. This is not a journey out of truth into mere subjectivity, but a long and patient journey that takes seriously the demands of seeking Christ's truth in covenant community. These patient practices may mean giving up or reforming some of our treasured views in light of the journey on which God is leading us. But disorientation is central to the calling of a pilgrim people who are journeying together with God and one another in the dynamics of covenant love.

²⁷ Stephen R. Holmes, "Knowing Together the Mind of Christ: Congregational Government and the Church Meeting," in *Questions of Identity: Studies in Honour of Brian Haymes*, eds. Anthony R. Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), 182.

²⁸ Holmes, "Knowing Together the Mind of Christ," 185.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-85.

³⁰ Sean Winter, "Persuading Friends: Friendship and Testimony in Baptist Interpretive Communities," in *The "Plainly Revealed" Word of God?* 267-69.

The risky journey of covenant life is a much more difficult and interesting possibility than simply allowing the accustomed structures of power and authority to mediate Christ's will to us. In the relational dynamics of covenanting we learn that we cannot be complete without one another, and we cannot be faithful without genuinely learning how to love one another in the midst of all of our differences. This is the relational dynamism of a mature pilgrim people who are journeying towards a new orientation—ever greater embodiment of the gospel of the kingdom of God. "Being 'on the way' requires a willingness to embark upon a risky journey within the community that will necessitate a degree of struggle, whilst knowing that this has always been the way for God's people."³¹ This risky journey is often expressed in struggle, but it is a mutual struggle towards faithfulness in which we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and his will.

The acknowledgement of struggle upholds the otherness of the other, both divine and human. Proclamations of the relational dynamic of Baptist covenantalism need to be set within an apophatic modesty in which knowingness regarding divine and human others is set within an unknowingness; an apophatic relationality. The divine and human other cannot be mastered, but only encountered in the bonds of covenantal love. It is in the creative and dialectical tension of otherness and relatedness that we learn to be on the way and in the fray. For some this might seem like a recipe for yet another battle between bickering Baptists. But this need not be the case. There will be contention and there will be conflict, but conflict does not need be a conflict that destroys. Conflict is normal but it does not need to be destructive amidst the mutual love that the Spirit gives to a community of faithful friends who are seeking Christ's will together. Sean Winter helpfully observes that conflict can be a constructive part of intensifying a mature conversation.³² Argument is not a departure from conversation but an important aspect of the conversation as we discuss some of the last truths about God, ourselves, and life, which may well aide in a new orientation to Christ's will in fresh and imaginative ways. It is in relational encounter with the other that our self-certainties are challenged and we are faced with the possibility of change and growth. As faithful friends journeying together in covenant love we discover "the other as other, the different as different" and therefore "the different *as possible*."³³

BAPTIST COVENANTALISM AND TE TIRITI O WAITANGI³⁴

Covenanting together is a call to be God's pilgrim people through relationships of love and trust as we are transformed together into Christ's likeness. Whilst Baptist covenanting is quite foreign to Baptists in Aotearoa, the concept of covenanting is at our nation's roots and was important to both Māori and Pākehā

³¹ Dare, "On the Way and in the Fray," 34.

³² Sean Winter, "Persuading Friends," 268.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ On a recent visit to Aotearoa, Paul Fiddes and I met with David Moko, the leader of Manatū Iriiri Māori (formerly Baptist Māori Ministries), to explore possible insights that Māori may contribute to a Baptist understanding of the communion of saints through the importance of whakapapa. Whilst this is a very important, and potentially fruitful, area of study, it is beyond my capacity as a Pākehā to offer insight about the depth and meaning of the Māori concept of whakapapa. We look forward to the time when Māori Baptist theologians are able to give voice to these potentialities.

understandings of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is regarded as our nation's founding document. It is a broad statement of principles signed by representatives of the British Crown and various Māori chiefs for the founding of a nation state. The contents, meaning, and import of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are widely contested and it stands at the centre of contemporary debates about nationhood, colonization, and decolonisation. Whilst incredibly significant for contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, these debates are beyond the scope of this essay which focuses on the relational dynamics of covenanting for and from the context of Aotearoa for Baptist theology.

Martin Sutherland has rightly noted the “breathtaking potential” of a contextual bicultural Baptist theology. Sadly, as Sutherland cogently remarks, Baptists “have proven the least able of the traditional denominations to learn from Maori ways and thought forms.”³⁵ Unlike the missionary beginnings of the other mainline denominations, Baptists in Aotearoa were settlers. As a settler church, Baptists often upheld a social imaginary that remained largely unaware of Māori as those whose counter-testimony might be the source of disorientation that could lead to new orientation. Avril Bell develops an account of the settler imaginary that draws from Charles Taylor's definition of social imaginaries as the ways people imagine their social existence, their expectations, their relationships with others, and the normative notions that underlie these expectations.³⁶ Bell defines the settler imaginary as that which assumes values, ideas, discourses, and mythologies about identity and normativity which give legitimacy to the seasoned structures of power and the unjust dynamics of colonial relations with indigenous peoples.³⁷ The settler imaginary is a helpful lens through which we can understand Baptist engagements with Māori.

Despite an early unsuccessful attempt of mission among Māori,³⁸ Baptists were rarely drawn into relation with Māori before “the long, painful birth of Baptist Māori Ministry” in the 1950s.³⁹ This is tellingly highlighted by the fact it took seventy two years before a Māori delegate spoke at the national Baptist Assembly. In his report on the 1954 Baptist Assembly, the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* wrote, “In the discussion on the Maori report the Assembly heard, perhaps for the first time in its entire history, a speech from a Maori delegate.”⁴⁰ For much of their history, Baptists in Aotearoa have been neither on the way nor in the fray with Māori. The lack of relation between Māori and Baptists in Aotearoa is the lamentable result of the settler imaginary which has dominated much Baptist thought. The settler imaginary shielded Baptists from the disorienting relational engagement with Māori that might have been the source of the unexpected surprise of God's grace that is found in the complex world of new orientation. As Sutherland concludes in

³⁵ Martin Sutherland, “Seeking a *Turangawaewae*: Constructing Baptist Identity in New Zealand,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (2001): 248. See also Martin Sutherland, “Gathering, Sacrament and Baptist Theological Method,” *PJBR* 3 (2007): 57. See also Martin Sutherland, “On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*,” in *Talking Theology: 2001-2002 Proceedings*, ed. Martin Sutherland (Auckland: R. J. Thompson Centre for Theological Studies, 2003), 128-29.

³⁶ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

³⁷ Avril Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 11-12.

³⁸ R. F. Keam, *Dissolving Dream: The Improbable Story of the First Baptist Maori Mission* (Auckland: R. F. Keam, 2004).

³⁹ Des Jones, “The Long, Painful Birth of Baptist Maori Ministry,” *The New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 1 (1996): 58-61.

⁴⁰ *New Zealand Baptist*, December 1954, 274.

his lament over the lack of Baptist relation to Māori, “The forging of strong identity requires openness as well as commitment.”⁴¹ In Dare’s words, it requires us to be on the way and in the fray.

Sutherland is right that the possibilities of a contextual bicultural Baptist theology are breath-taking, especially given the significance of covenanting in the Baptist story and the story of Aotearoa. However, in his quest for a Baptist way of being in Aotearoa, Sutherland deems Te Tiriti as an inadequate source for a bicultural Baptist theology and opts for other possible sources.⁴² In the following section, I will linger longer over Te Tiriti and its covenantal basis, which is deeply grounded in the gospel, in the hope that Baptists in Aotearoa might discover more of what it could mean to be on the way and in the fray in our own context for the benefit of the whole church.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI AS KAWENATA (COVENANT)

For many of the Māori and Pākehā signatories, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was understood as a sacred kawenata (covenant) in the biblical sense.⁴³ In some recent historical accounts, which draw especially from Māori oral tradition, the Māori understanding of Te Tiriti as has been emphasised.⁴⁴ At the historic Waitangi Tribunal inquiry into the meaning and effect of Te Tiriti, Ngāpuhi (a northern Māori tribe) gave evidence regarding their understanding of Te Tiriti as kawenata. This understanding was preserved in various karakia (prayer) and waiata (song) that were given by Ngāpuhi rangatira (chiefs) at the signing of Te Tiriti. Ngāpuhi chiefs who gave evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal had learnt their kōrero (address) from tribal schools of learning that were established to preserve and maintain sacred tribal traditions and knowledge, much of which had never been shared in public before.⁴⁵ These oral traditions and knowledge serve as an important counter-testimony to the written Pākehā accounts that have dominated discourse on Te Tiriti.⁴⁶ Ngāpuhi elders began their evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal by citing waiata and karakia that were constructed at the time of the signing of Te Tiriti which reiterate the sacredness of Te Tiriti to Ngāpuhi. “He [Rima Edwards] described it as a ‘kawenata tapu’, or sacred covenant, bearing the tohu tapu (sacred marks) of the claimants’ tūpuna [ancestors].”⁴⁷ The sacredness of the document also demanded a holistic understanding of Te Tiriti and its overall emphasis upon creating a relationship. This holistic approach, based upon understanding Te Tiriti as a covenant, stands in contrast to common Crown approaches that have sought to dissect Te Tiriti phrase by phrase, and place certain elements and phrases in conflict with one another. In his evidence, Patu

⁴¹ Sutherland, “Seeking a *Turangawaenae*,” 248.

⁴² Sutherland, “On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*,” 128.

⁴³ Tui Cadogan, “A Three-Way Relationship: God, Land, People. A Maori Woman Reflects,” in *Land and Place He Whenua, He Wahi: Spiritualities from Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2004), 31.

⁴⁴ This is especially important in the evidence given by Ngāpuhi to the Waitangi Tribunal as part of Te Paparahi o te Raki inquiry *He Whakaputanga me te Tiriti / The Declaration and the Treaty: The Report on Stage 1 of the Te Paparahi o Te Raki Inquiry*. (Hereafter Wai 1040.) See also Susan Healy et. al., *Ngāpuhi Speaks: Commissioned by Kuia and Kaumatua of Ngāpuhi. He Whakaputanga o te Rangitiratanga o Nu Tireni and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Independent Report. Ngāpuhi Nui Tonu Claim* (Kaitiaki: Te Kawariki and Whangarei: Network Waitangi Whangarei, 2012).

⁴⁵ Wai 1040, 448.

⁴⁶ Wai 1040, 448-50.

⁴⁷ Wai 1040, 448.

Hohepa, former Professor of Māori language at the University of Auckland, stated his concerns over the dissection way the Crown has interpreted Te Tiriti. “Essentially these questions have separated out certain strands from the covenant in an effort to place them in conflict with each other.... The Crown’s search for conflict within the document negates its overall context which was the desire to create a relationship.”⁴⁸ Many Māori and Pākehā uphold this historic emphasis upon Te Tiriti as a covenantal relationship instead of the forensic and litigious approaches to Te Tiriti.

The early missionaries drew upon the biblical notion of covenant to interpret the meaning of Te Tiriti. At Waitangi, Henry Williams (a leading CMS missionary) told Māori that they and Pākehā could be one people under God in both a physical and spiritual sense.⁴⁹ Hone Heke and Patuone spoke of Te Tiriti as the New Covenant with all the connotations of Christ and his new covenant. As Christ fulfilled and surpassed the old Mosaic Law, Heke stated, so Te Tiriti could be likened to the New Covenant through its promise of a new relationship between the Crown and Māori.⁵⁰ Claudia Orange writes, “The idea had been echoed at Kaitia when one young chief expressed the hope that “if your [British] thoughts are towards Christ as ours are, we shall be one.”⁵¹ Later Government attempts to assert its sovereignty over Māori rights for self-governance and establish Māori allegiance to the Crown, in the face of Māori resistance, drew heavily upon the concept of Te Tiriti as covenant. The Crown held a conference with over 200 “friendly” Māori chiefs from at Kohimarama in 1860, in which “the rebels” were excluded.⁵² The conference was held in Te Reo Māori and translations into English were given by Donald McLean, the Native Secretary and Chief Land Purchase Commissioner. Claudia Orange suggests that he used his knowledge of Māori language and thought to the Crown’s advantage and deliberately manipulated his translations from English to Māori to guide Māori towards the Crown’s aspirations. One of the vital semantic tools that McLean employed in his Crown propaganda to Māori was to translate Te Tiriti (Treaty) as Te Kawanata (Covenant) o Waitangi because he knew the religious significance this held with Māori.⁵³ Māori understandings of Te Tiriti as covenant were common, especially amongst Ngāpuhi where Te Tiriti was originally signed.

As part of their historic settlement with the Crown, Ngāpuhi elders showed that Te Tiriti did not arise in a vacuum. The concept of Māori and Pākehā coming together in sacred covenant no doubt owed much to the influence of missionaries, but it also owed much to Māori. Te Tiriti was preceded by He Whakaputanga (The Declaration of Independence) which was signed in 1835 and considered by Ngāpuhi to be “te kawenata tuatahi [the first covenant].”⁵⁴ Ngāpuhi have argued that the roots of this covenantal understanding are found in Hongi Hika’s⁵⁵ personal visit and relationship with King George in 1820, twenty years before Te Tiriti, and not the later written documents. As a result, He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti need

⁴⁸ Wai 1040, 452.

⁴⁹ Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 90.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁵² Claudia Orange, “The Covenant of Kohimarama: A Ratification of The Treaty of Waitangi,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 14 (1980): 64-54.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 70-73.

⁵⁴ Healy et. al., *Ngāpuhi Speaks*, 74.

⁵⁵ Hongi Hika was an important Ngāpuhi chief.

to be understood as two parts of one relational conversation.⁵⁶ “A relationship of a particular character was created between Ngāpuhi and the British monarchy, beyond the strategic benefits. Speakers [at the Tribunal hearings] described the relationship between Hongi and the King as a sacred, everlasting relationship as in a covenant.”⁵⁷ Ngāpuhi stress that the basis of the relationship was created face to face and not through written documents such as He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti. Both of the written documents are written expressions of the *preceding* covenantal relationship that had already been personally established. “The rangatira’s [chief’s] use of their ngu moko (patterns from the nose) in their signatures to He Wakaputanga attest to the solemnity of their commitment to the relationship with the British Crown. To use the ngū moko is to be present, as in a face-to-face agreement.”⁵⁸ Importantly, the sacred covenant between Hongi Hika and King George was understood to be binding for future generations, and the later documents only acknowledge the pre-existing reality of covenant.⁵⁹

Whatever the ongoing significance of these findings, and they are very significant,⁶⁰ I draw attention to them to highlight two things. Firstly, the importance of covenant for understanding Te Tiriti and, secondly, the insight it offers Baptists about the nature of covenanting relationships. In the following section we will examine the nature of covenanting relationships between Māori and Pākehā as a lens through which we can consider what it might mean to be on the way and in the fray in Aotearoa.

ON THE WAY AND IN THE FRAY IN AOTEAROA

Anne Salmond, Professor of Māori Studies and Anthropology at the University of Auckland, has given a fascinating insight into the colliding worlds of Māori and Pākehā in a recent reflection on the Waitangi Tribunal’s acknowledgement that Ngāpuhi did not cede their sovereignty.⁶¹ In 1992, Salmond was asked to prepare a report for the Waitangi Tribunal regarding the Muriwhenua Land Claim. Together with other researchers, she concluded that Māori had not ceded their sovereignty. But, in the settled core testimony of the Crown, this was not a question they were asking let alone trying to answer at the time. The Crown simply wanted Salmond to help them figure out how much restitution was required for breaches of the Treaty.⁶² Here the core testimony of the settler imaginary sought a way of silencing the counter-testimony of indigenous identity without disorientation.

Twenty years later, Salmond was involved with the Ngāpuhi claim and two worlds collided again. This time Māori leaders employed a politics of recognition that ensured that the disorienting voice of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 65-74.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 75-77.

⁶⁰ The Waitangi Tribunal’s inquiry resulted in the historic acknowledgement that Māori did not cede their sovereignty in signing Te Tiriti. Wai 1040, 526-27.

⁶¹ Anne Salmond, “Ontological Quarrels: Indigeneity, Exclusion and Citizenship in a Relational World,” *Anthropological Theory* 12: 115-41.

⁶² Ibid., 117.

counter-testimony was engaged on its own terms.⁶³ When the Tribunal members arrived at the marae, they were met with a fiery challenge. “Members of Ngāpuhi held up flags and portraits of chiefs who had signed Te Tiriti, brandishing ancestral weapons including muskets, taiaha (fighting staffs) and long-handled tomahawks. In their opening speeches, Ngāpuhi leaders vehemently contended that they had never ceded sovereignty to the British Crown. Rather, their ancestors had forged a relationship with Queen Victoria.”⁶⁴ Rima Edwards, an elder trained in one of the ancestral schools of learning, recited ancient chants about the origins of the cosmos and traced his lineage to the beginnings of the world. He and other Ngāpuhi elders spoke only in Te Reo Māori, held up ancestral portraits, and brandished ancient weapons as an attempt to bring the Tribunal and the conversation within Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) so that the dominant understandings about Te Tiriti could be challenged.⁶⁵ Kingi Taurua challenged the core testimony and assumptions of the Tribunal which sought to discuss the English and Māori versions of Te Tiriti. “[The Tribunal] looks at both Treaties, the Pākehā [English version] and the Māori, which is totally wrong. We did not sign the Pākehā. We signed the Māori version. We are here to talk about the Treaty that we in Ngāpuhi did not sign, and they are here to judge in English what our tūpuna [ancestors] signed in Māori.”⁶⁶

Salmond reminds us that as much as this was a debate about what had happened historically, it was also a debate about how to understand reality as two worlds collide—as the voice of counter-testimony disoriented the core testimony. The two worlds continued to collide throughout the Waitangi Tribunal hearing as the Tribunal conducted the hearing as if it were in a courtroom. Members of the Tribunal sat at a long table to hear evidence, used legal protocols, and conducted cross-examinations of expert witnesses. “As much as a debate about what had happened in the past, this was a struggle of ontological proportions.”⁶⁷ Here were two worlds colliding on the way and in the fray. The settler imaginary encountered the voice of counter-testimony of indigenous sovereignty, which resisted the assimilative impulses and homogenising forces of the core testimony. Among the many outcomes of the Tribunal’s inquiry into Ngāpuhi’s claims was the historic conclusion that the chiefs who signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi did not cede their sovereignty. This was not a mere concession, but a fundamental reinterpretation of the history of Te Tiriti with extensive implications that arise from the voice of counter-testimony speaking on its own terms and disorienting the core testimony.

In the Tribunal hearings, the voice of counter-testimony, which demanded to be heard and understood on its own terms, transformed imaginations and led to renewed and revised understandings of our history, our current context and the possibilities of our future, much of which awaits realisation.⁶⁸ These are the possibilities of what Avril Bell calls the relational imaginary and it finds resonances in the Psalms of new orientation. The new orientation is not a return to the core testimony of orientation, but the unexpected surprise that emerges in the midst of a complex world. The possibilities do not arise from a cosy relational

⁶³ Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities*, 12.

⁶⁴ Salmond, “Ontological Quarrels,” 117.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 117–18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Wai 1040, 528.

togetherness, but the acknowledgement of the unknowable difference and otherness that stand at the heart of the relational imaginary. At the heart of the relational imaginary is an apophatic relationality in which the other cannot be fully known by the hidden desire for mastery that comes in the guise of a romanticised unity. The otherness of the other disrupts and decentres our self-certainties and causes reflection and change.⁶⁹

Alison Jones suggests that the colliding of these two worlds is an invitation to an interminable struggle as we try to walk together in relational bonds. The continued attempts to find synthesis between the Pākehā thesis and its Māori antithesis assume a redemptive solution on Pākehā terms.⁷⁰ The desire to learn, understand, and know the other needs to be tempered with an acknowledgement of the unknowability of the other, lest the romance of unity becomes another pretext for conquest and mastery of the minority.⁷¹ Mythological or perceived Māori respond as Pākehā wish-fulfilment which renders the other invisible in the static fixity of non-persons. The relational imaginary requires an acceptance of apophaticism towards the other that acknowledges the other can never be finally known. Jones advocates an adoption of the politics of disappointment that accepts that uncertainty characterises all forms of knowing and understanding the other.⁷² This ignorance of the other is productive because it demands the ongoing openness of intersubjective relationality through which we know the other as an other. What is needed is not a redemptive solution that homogenises the otherness of Māori and Pākehā, but a commitment to engage in the struggle of otherness-in-relation. The otherness of Māori and Pākehā is not merely different, but incompatible.⁷³

Jones draws from Rewi Maniapoto's phrase he employed when Colonial troops called on him to surrender, "ka whawhai tonu mātou, ake ake ake" [we will fight on against you for ever and ever], to suggest that the way forward is commitment to a relational struggle without end.⁷⁴ "All that becomes possible is a tension. Contradictory and irreconcilable realities sit **in interminable tension** with the other. And in the *tension* between contradictory realities is the *ake ake ake*, the endless struggle—to know, to read, to understand, to work with, *to engage with*, others."⁷⁵ This does not mean a battle to see who wins, but the intensification of relationship with an other that comes with the shift from a settler imaginary to a relational imaginary. A relational struggle is not a battle where we fight for winners and losers, it is an interminable struggle in which the incomprehensibility and unresolvability of difference is genuinely acknowledged and becomes the source of renewed possibilities and new orientations. The acknowledgement of struggle shows that we are engaged in a relationship—it is an acknowledgement of engagement, not disengagement. "To

⁶⁹ Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities*, 174-82.

⁷⁰ Alison Jones, "Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: The Interminable Problem of Knowing Others" (unpublished inaugural professorial lecture presented at the University of Auckland, 24 October 2007), 9. https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/education/about/schools/tepunu/docs/Inaugural_Lecture.pdf.

⁷¹ Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities*, 184.

⁷² Alison Jones, "The Limits of Cross-Cultural Dialogue: Pedagogy, Desire, and Absolution in the Classroom," *Educational Theory* 49 (1999): 315.

⁷³ Jones, "Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou," 7, 9.

⁷⁴ This title was used by Ranginui Walker for his Māori history. Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990).

⁷⁵ Jones, "Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou," 10.

struggle with another is to give active and proper *attention* to the other, to *relate* to the other. Even as an enemy you are *hoariri*—an angry ‘friend’ you are one with whom it is worth engaging, someone with whom you have a *relationship* of struggle. *Ake ake ake* makes the engagement or relationship *permanent*.⁷⁶ The disorientation of the core testimony by the counter-testimony offers possibilities of new orientation in the midst of a complex world. Here is the call to be on the way and in the fray and it is in the midst of the interminable tension that things get more complicated, and more interesting.

BAPTISTS ON THE WAY AND IN THE FRAY IN AOTEAROA

The relational dynamic of Baptist covenantalism has much to offer Baptists in Aotearoa, especially when it is placed in the context of our nation’s bi-cultural journey. However, the possibilities remain unrealised as covenanting and relational encounter with Māori as Māori has not played a major part of Baptist identity in Aotearoa. Nonetheless, the context of Aotearoa as a covenanting people offers insight into the relational dynamic of journeying together on the way and in the fray. The journey of orientation, disorientation and new orientation does not offer a pathway to a settled relational destiny that alleviates tension, but an ongoing cyclical journey of intensified covenant life with God and one another. This tension is not a problem that needs solving, but a searching gift in which the quest to know and master the other is relinquished for the sake of encountering the other as other. The unknowability of the divine and human other calls forth an interminable tension which lies at the heart of engagement and encounter on the way and in the fray. This tension, which upholds orientation *and* disorientation, is the generative source of deeper relations and renewed orientations towards God’s eschatological purpose to unite all things in Christ.

Like Dare and Holmes, Ani Mikaere suggests that the first step to overcoming the sedimented structures of power is for those with privilege to give up control of decision making and entrust minorities to lead through their own personal agency. Without such trust the minority group is forced to submit to the terms of the majority and the imbalanced norms remain undisturbed by the gospel.⁷⁷ In the setting of the covenanted church in Aotearoa, this will mean that power is given over to Māori to lead the church in a process towards greater Gospel faithfulness which Pākehā do not control. The possibilities of this giving up, which is a participation in Christ’s ministry and calling, are vast and untapped. However, as Mikaere states in regards to Pākehā dominance, it will take a leap of faith or else the minority will, once again, be assimilated into the *status quo*. Within the church this leap of faith is not only trusting Māori to lead as Māori, it is also a leap of faith in the God who has called us together into one body, in our rich variety, to be his people who display his wise purposes in the world on the way and in the fray.

On a recent noho marae (overnight marae stay), as part of a culture course at Carey Baptist College, Jordyn Rapana, a Māori student, suggested that the kete (traditional Māori flax baskets) offers an image of what it might look like for Māori and non-Māori to be in mutually flourishing relationships. She told us that

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ani Mikaere, “Are We All New Zealanders Now? A Māori Response to the Pākehā Quest for Indigeneity,” in *Colonising Myths – Māori Realities: He Rukuruku Whakaaro* (Wellington, Huia, 2011), 117.

the kete is made of flax woven together and its strength comes from binding together front to back, over and under. Journeying together means sometimes our perspective and action will be at the back whilst others lead and we follow. Other times, our perspective and action will be at the front whilst others will follow and we lead. As James Liu has stated in regards to identity in Aotearoa, “Everyone should be marginal sometimes; no one should be marginal all the time.”⁷⁸ It is the relational dynamic of being woven together that gives the journey strength. Here is a possible contextual image of a covenant people who are bound together by God to be on the way and in the fray. At a different marae visit for Carey Baptist College staff, Hohepa Renata, Taurahere Marae Lecturer at Unitec’s Te Noho Kotahitanga marae, explained his understanding of biculturalism and multiculturalism by the phrase that Māori sometimes use in speeches to show that the group is united and ready to progress the purpose of coming together: Haumi-ē! Hui-ē! Tāiki-ē!⁷⁹ He explained that the phrase is employed to bind a meeting together and is based on the image of lashing an axe head and a handle together by binding them with rope—two separate parts bound together as one instrument. What binds the distinct groups together are our shared stories and our willingness to journey together. Jordyn’s and Hohepa’s imagery offer important possibilities for contextual echoes of Fiddes’ covenantal theology and the Baptist anthem, “Blest Be the Ties that Bind.”⁸⁰

Baptists in Aotearoa have rich resources from which we might develop a distinct way of being Baptist together in our context. The constructive possibilities of the twin streams of covenanting, the Baptist stream and the bicultural stream, lie ahead of us awaiting realization on the way and in the fray.

⁷⁸ James Liu, “History and identity: A system of Checks and Balances for Aotearoa/New Zealand,” in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, eds. James H. Liu et. al. (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 85.

⁷⁹ Māori Dictionary, “Whano, whano! Haramai te toki! Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē!”

<http://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/13579>

⁸⁰ I am grateful to David Moko, Kaihuatu of Manatū Iriiri Māori, for his support of this research and the explorations of possible contextual echoes of covenanting.