

## WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO: THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL VOCATION

Mark G. Brett

Whitley College, Melbourne

The reflections in this essay build on many conversations with Tim Meadowcroft over the years, as we have sought to respond to our own regional context. I am pleased to offer this paper in honour of the countless contributions that Tim has made to the communities of learning in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and further abroad. As he reaches this point of retirement from formal teaching responsibilities, we can only hope that the years to come will be full of renewed energy for research and engagement in our region.

The scope of our topic is very broad, and there are many places where we could begin.<sup>1</sup> One might arbitrarily nominate a few months in 1769, when an English ship called *Endeavour* sailed around Aotearoa, bearing a copy of the King James Version, published “by His Majesty’s Special Command.” This was no ordinary book. It had shaped an entire world, which was held to be created in 4004 BC and more recently divided among Christian monarchs. In Cook’s Bible, the patronage of King James reflected the sacred alliance between church and state in seventeenth century England, an alliance that could continue to underwrite not just a Bible translation but also the colonial Doctrine of Discovery and the patterns of sociality within settler colonialism. This unholy alliance of Bible, culture and law might seem a very unpromising starting point to begin a conversation about relational theology, but it is part of the colonial story that is shared between Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, and critical reflection on it will be revealing in several ways. The story provokes some fundamental questions about the conditions that may allow for any genuine conversation, which will in turn yield some implications for a theology of sociality. In this paper I want to show how a critique of coloniality helps us to think afresh about the relationship between creation theology and the love of neighbour.

First, we may remember that the King James Version points to the tribal politics of Christianity. The *Endeavour* did not set sail under the authority of a papal bull or a Catholic version of the Doctrine of Discovery. Protestant imperial competition unfolded within a revised version of international legal imagination, which presented itself as more humanitarian and more respectful of Indigenous natural rights.<sup>2</sup> In the 1830s, mission societies levelled some strong critique against colonial abuses of power,<sup>3</sup> but by the end of the nineteenth century these critiques had subsided, along with the very idea of natural rights. The earlier anxieties about colonialism on the Pākehā side seem to have been steadily

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at a conference at Laidlaw College, “Whakawhiti kōrero: Conversations between Theology and Social Vocation,” 1–2 October, 2018. I am grateful to the organizers of the conference for the opportunity to participate in such a rich, interdisciplinary conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Mark G. Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 36–54.

<sup>3</sup> Hilary Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 322–28.

overwhelmed by economic interests, but with an exquisite irony, some of the Māori resistance in the second half of the nineteenth century began to draw on the Bible and theology. Theology offered the possibility of mediation between Māori and Pākehā, but there were still a number of impediments to genuine conversation. I will not pretend to know all the details of nineteenth century history in Aotearoa, but I offer some suggestions here for conversation.

The collaboration of the northern chiefs in their Declaration of Independence in 1835 (*He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga*) forged a new kind of collaboration on the Māori side, and in the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the chiefs did not yield sovereignty to the English Crown.<sup>4</sup> This became clear in the 1850s in a new way when Chief Wiremu Tāmihana advocated for an alliance of Māori iwi under a king, and his reasoning was in some respects comparable with what we find in the books of Samuel. In the biblical narrative, the elders of Israel introduce the novel idea of a king in order to unite their tribes mainly because the Philistines were advancing from the west. Similarly, the Māori of the nineteenth century were experiencing a threat to their own tribal sovereignty with Pākehā advancing from the west. But Tāmihana's argument attempted a more subtle compromise than we find in Samuel, which could better express the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi: a new *Kingitanga*, supported by local Māori councils, could relate directly to the English version of sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> The suggestion was, in effect, an adaptive vision of political theology that could hold together the various parties in a new complex society.

Tāmihana's remarkable biblical arguments were advanced in a famous speech in 1861. The Crown had suggested to the Waikato Māori that they could keep their land "so long only as they are strong enough to keep it; might and not right will become their sole title."<sup>6</sup> Tāmihana's response is recorded in the British Parliamentary Papers at the time.<sup>7</sup> He begins with traditional *waiata* as lament,<sup>8</sup> and moves on to a poetic critique of the colonial administration. If the British were to take to heart their own Bible, they should acknowledge the law of the monarchy stipulated in Deut 17:15, "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother" (KJV). The English who had been "far away" had now drawn near (invoking Eph 2:13), but in this expanded sociality, only a Māori brother could exercise *rangatiratanga*, whatever the shared arrangements under the Treaty of Waitangi might suggest. England had its monarch, and so did Māori: "leave this King to stand upon his

<sup>4</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Te Paparahi o te Raki: Northland Inquiry, Part One* (Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal, 2014), xxii.

<sup>5</sup> Richard S. Hill and Vincent O'Malley, *The Māori quest for Rangatiratanga / Autonomy, 1840-2000*. Occasional Papers 4 (Wellington: Treaty of Waitangi Research Unit, Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, 2000), 2–5.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800-2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 141. I am indebted to Steve Taylor for his presentation on Wiremu Tāmihana, delivered at Whitley College for the "Reimagining Home" conference, 2–5 July, 2017. See Steve Taylor, "Indigenous Home-making as Public Theology in the Words and Deeds of Māori Leader, Wiremu Tāmihana," in *Re-imagining Home: Understanding, Reconciling and Engaging with God's Stories Together*, ed. Darren Cronshaw, Rosemary Dewerse, and Darryl Jackson (Sydney: Morling Press, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Wiremu Tāmihana, "Reply to the Declaration Addressed by the Governor to the Natives Assembled at Ngaruawha," *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers*, 1862 [3040], 73.

<sup>8</sup> On the *waiata* as lament see, Alistair McKenzie, "Learning to Lament in Aotearoa," in *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament*, ed. Miriam J. Bier and Tim Bulkeley (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 173–186.

own place, and let it rest with our Maker.”<sup>9</sup> This political claim sits within a larger theology of creation: “God did not make night and day for you only. No, summer and winter are for all, the rain and the wind, food and life, are for all of us.”<sup>10</sup>

Chief Tāmihana’s argument was extraordinary in many respects, but I want to take it as an example of the kind of theology that can build a more complex society within which it is possible to live with multiple sovereignties. This kind of theology was much needed in settler societies, but the theologians at the time seem to have had their energies diverted by other issues, and the social vocation of Christianity was embedded, in large measure, within an ideology of a civilizing mission.<sup>11</sup>

Tāmihana’s theology set a different agenda. He conceived of a world structured with multiple social identities and loyalties, covenanted together in such a way that those identities could also find common ground. The Treaty of Waitangi did not need to be seen as the submission of one group to another, or as a legal sanction for unequal distributions of power. Rather, it provided a set of principles which fostered new relationships, which were themselves ultimately grounded in the divine gifts of the created order. This theology implicitly affirmed the possibility of expanding a social identity while recognizing the validity of other ways of imagining connections to God. And this points us to one of the key questions for any political theology: how do people hold together the particularity of their own distinctive commitments while, at the same time, seeking to form a common life with those who have a different vision of the world? Or to put that in more personal terms, how do we love our neighbour without imposing our own expectations on them?

Mindful of these questions of power and culture in the formation of a common good, how is a social vocation to be conceived in theological terms? I want to explore some of the contours of Old Testament theology, before turning to the radical demands that are implied in the call to love our neighbour.

## BEGINNING WITH CREATION THEOLOGY

We have begun by acknowledging Tāmihana’s grounding of sociality in a creation theology. A number of the Old Testament writers also begin with creation and only then move to sociality. The creation theology in Psalm 104, for example, has deep resonances with Indigenous spiritualities. Instead of seeing God’s dwelling in heaven, with divine sovereignty being exercised at a lofty distance, this psalmist finds a sacral presence throughout the cosmos. All of creation becomes, in effect, a temple.<sup>12</sup> The spirit of God pulses with an intimate power through every living creature.

---

<sup>9</sup> Tāmihana, “Reply to the Declaration,” 73.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> As already noted, however, problems with colonialism were clearly articulated already in the 1830s and '40s. See, e.g., Louis A. Chamerovzow, *The New Zealand Question and the Rights of Aborigines* (London: T.C. Newby, 1848).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Krüger, “‘Kosmo-theologies’ zwischen Mythos und Erfahrung: Psalm 104 im Horizont altorietalischer ‘Schöpfungs’ Konzepte,” *BN* 68 (1993): 49–74. A comparable view is suggested in Amos 9:6 and Isa 66:1–2. Amos 9:6 is distinctive insofar as this cosmic hymn is immediately followed by a dramatic critique of Israel’s election. Brent Strawn, “What is Cush Doing in Amos 9:7? The Poetics of Exodus in the Plural,” *VT* 63

[All creatures] all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.  
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps 104:27–30)

This immanent conception of divine presence is comparable in some respects with the first creation narrative in the book of Genesis, even if these texts come from quite different theological schools. In Genesis 1, for example, it is not simply that the Creator lives in the heavens,<sup>13</sup> but rather, that the heavens themselves are the created “firmament” (Gen 1:7–8). They are the hard dome that holds back the primeval waters above the sky. This implies an ancient cosmic geography, which we cannot take literally any more, but the theological emphasis of Genesis 1 is not found in its cosmic dividing of the waters above the dome and the waters below that earth; that conception was an intercultural commonplace. The theological proposal in this representation of the world’s beginning was that God is qualitatively different from the world, and as a consequence God is free to appear anywhere.<sup>14</sup> We can view this as the common ground between Psalm 104 and the first creation narrative, since they both find God at work throughout the whole earth, and not just in Israel, and not just in a temple. Accordingly, Genesis 1 consistently refuses to name God using Israel’s national name, Yhwh. God is consistently named “Elohim” in the first creation narrative (without a definite article), and this is not so much a name as a tantalizing abstraction, like “divinity” in English, which leaves open the naming of God.

Genesis 1 begins a larger composition that is woven throughout the first few books of the Bible, and in contrast with the national tradition, this composition insists that the ancestors only knew the Creator under the name El Shaddai (Exod 6:2–3). The abstract non-naming of God in Genesis 1 expresses an inclusive monotheism, in principle shared by all humankind.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, all human beings – both men and women – were made in the image of Elohim, and not in the image of a national

---

(2013): 99–123. See further, Konrad Schmid, “Himmelsgott, Weltgott und Schöpfer; ‘Gott’ und der ‘Himmel’ in der Literatur der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels,” in *Der Himmel*, ed. Dorothea Sattler und Samuel Vollenweider (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006), 111–148.

<sup>13</sup> In some traditions, God’s dwelling may be located “above” the heavens, as in Ezekiel 1 and Ps 29:10. Cf. Christoph Uehlinger and Susan Müller Trufaut, “Ezekiel 1, Babylonian Cosmological Scholarship and Iconography: Attempts at Further Refinement,” *ThZ* 57 (2001): 140–171.

<sup>14</sup> Schmid, “Himmelsgott,” 135–36.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Albert de Pury, “Gottesname, Gottesbezeichnung und Gottesbegriff: ‘Elohim’ als Indiz zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Pentateuch,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion*, ed. Jan C. Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, BZAW 315 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 25–47. Regarding the Yahwistic traditions in Genesis, see now Mark G. Brett, “Yhwh among the Nations: The Politics of Divine Names in Genesis,” in *The Politics of the Ancestors: Exegetical and Historical Perspectives on Genesis 12–36*, ed. Mark G. Brett and Jakob Wöhrle, FAT 124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 113–130.

god. The basic assertion was that the one Creator had many names, and by implication, each people group could find their own way to God. In contrast with the national denomination in Deuteronomy, which calls for a uniformity of religion, this is a more ecumenical social vision, which biblical scholarship has dubbed the “Priestly” tradition.

The genius of Wiremu Tāmihana’s theology is that he proposed, in effect, a combination of the national and the creation traditions. In order to grasp this paradoxical combination, I have been suggesting that we also need to appreciate the diversity of creation traditions in the Hebrew Bible, which stretch from the Priestly creation story to the wisdom literature. While Priestly denomination in the Torah is often seen as diametrically opposed to the wisdom traditions, I would argue that there are some very substantial agreements between them. The Priestly and the wisdom traditions both addressed the question of how to relate to God outside of Israel’s own peculiar covenant traditions. Similarly, the understanding of a universal divine presence in Psalm 104 is linked to the presence of wisdom in all of creation and not just within the land of Israel. Accordingly, in the wisdom traditions like Proverbs and Job, we find a way of understanding the traces of God in the world through the experience of creation, rather than through the peculiar story of Israel.<sup>16</sup>

Let’s consider the Book of Job for a moment. In this book, ethics are clearly grounded in creation rather than in the law of Moses, but Job’s understanding of social vocation also overlaps with what we find in Mosaic law. Especially in ch. 31, Job claims that he has defended the rights of slaves, widows, orphans and aliens, subscribing precisely to the social norms that we find in Israel’s national laws, without agreeing that these norms are based on a Yahwistic faith.<sup>17</sup> Job sees himself as answerable before El, rather than Yhwh:

If I have rejected the rights (*mishpat*) of my male or female slaves,  
when they brought a complaint against me,  
what then should I do when El arises?  
When he investigates, how shall I respond?  
Did not He who made me in the belly make them,  
and form me in the one womb?  
If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,  
or brought resignation to the eyes of the widow,  
eaten my morsel alone, and the orphan has not eaten from it...  
then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,  
and let my arm be broken from its socket...  
No stranger (*ger*) spent the night outside;  
I have opened my doors in their path. (Job 31:13–17, 22, 32)

---

<sup>16</sup> Human wisdom is localized, whereas divine wisdom encompasses the whole world and all its creatures, but this is more a difference of scope and extent. See especially Paul S. Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing the World: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Deut 14:28–29; 16:11–14; 24:19–22.

This social vision is law-observant without the need of positive law, and Job is engaged in an argument with El rather than Yhwh. In this respect, the name of Job's divinity coincides with the "Elohim" and "El" of the Priestly denomination in the Pentateuch.

In developing his theology of protest, Job shifts attention from Torah observance to world observance. Having established the ethical foundations in creation, he urges his friends to learn from nature:

But ask the wild beast, and *she will instruct you*;  
the birds of the air, and they will declare to you;  
speak to the earth, and *she will instruct you*;  
and the fish of the sea will relate to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of Yhwh has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every living thing  
and the spirit of all human flesh. (Job 12:7–10)

This passage is dense with allusions to the creation narratives in Genesis, but most striking is the two-fold choice of the verb form *wetorekba* (literally, "and she will instruct you"). This wording is related to the familiar noun for law and instruction in the legal tradition: *torah*. The semantic play is too significant to pass over, and we must therefore conclude that the earth has, according to Job, its own forms of instruction for those who are willing to listen. This where we might find Job in fundamental agreement with Indigenous spiritualities.

At this point, then, we can draw some preliminary conclusions about the value of the Priestly and wisdom traditions for intercultural theology. Rather than Deuteronomy, which tends to promote a uniformity of national religion, the Priestly and wisdom traditions in the Hebrew Bible are ready to engage in a different way with the nations. It is no accident, then, that when the Apostle Paul comes to reflect the Old Testament covenants, he concludes that the Gentiles can enter into the story and blessings of Abraham, the founding ancestor of the international Priestly tradition, but not into the national covenant. The followers of Jesus are not baptized into Moses.

The theological proposal that came from Wiremu Tāmihana in 1861 fits together very well with the social visions of the Priestly and wisdom traditions, and it is a great tragedy that the dominant theology of settler colonialism did not take this road.<sup>18</sup> It is especially in the Priestly and wisdom traditions that we find the universality of creation theology, which can then shape the character of engagement with the neighbours who share our common life. With this creational approach, we can conclude with Luke Bretherton that

---

<sup>18</sup> See especially Graham Paulson and Mark Brett, "Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible through Aboriginal Eyes," in *Voices from the Margin: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), 61–76; Jione Havea, ed., *Postcolonial Voices from Downunder: Indigenous Matters, Confronting Readings* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017); Norman Habel, *Acknowledgement of the Land and Faith of Aboriginal Custodians* (Melbourne: Morning Star, 2018).

As creatures, situated in various covenantal relations... we are always already in relationship with others. Our personhood is the fruit of a social and wider ecological womb as much as a single physical one; that is, we come to be in and through others not like us, including non-human others. This means we cannot exist without some kind of common life with a plurality of human and non-human ways of being alive.<sup>19</sup>

## LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR AS SOCIAL VOCATION

Some Christian theologians tend to ground all talk of social vocation in a doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps because I am a Hebrew Bible scholar, I am reluctant to do so. But as I have already suggested, it is actually the Apostle Paul who, already in his first-century gospel for the Gentiles, orientates his scriptural interpretation around Abraham rather than Moses. Abraham, not Moses, is the ecumenical ancestor, and the Priestly tradition can point us down the road towards an intercultural theology without at the same time sacrificing any of the particularity of a faith in Yhwh. Accordingly, I am more inclined to pursue Luke Bretherton's theology of the neighbour, rather than conceptions of Trinitarian theology that may inadvertently convey a lack of hospitality in the very peculiarity of Christian language.

In his book, *Christ and the Common Life*, Bretherton examines the spectrum of relational practices through which human solidarity may be built, ranging from personal and ecclesial interactions, to more broadly political constructions of the common good. At each layer of social interaction, we may encounter power imbalances and exploitation, and by implication, the need for reconciliation if a common life is to be created or sustained. And this raises a fundamental question of motivation: what are the most compelling reasons for creating and sustaining a shared world of meaning in human relationships?

In many respects, the easiest and most natural way to answer this question is with a “ripple” theory of sociality, which suggests that our strongest solidarities begin with one's central point of connection within a family, but in addition, that solidarity may flow outwards like ripples in a pond to tribes and nations – with the strength of the social bonds steadily weakening as they move further and further from the ego's own family. Within Indigenous cultures, these ripples would include the wider ecological relationships with one's own traditional country. Even as an account of natural affections, however, there are limitations to ripple theories, not least because violence and abuse can arise even within a single family, and unexpected friendships can form across the most formidable of social distances.

If we conceive of the love of neighbour as a vocation, as Bretherton argues, then the crossing of social boundaries could become a practice that may be exercised on a daily basis. Neighbour love does not cease at the border of a nation state, because literally anyone can become a neighbour, even an enemy. Some have suggested that a love of enemies may be regarded as utopian practice, and not a

---

<sup>19</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life: A Guide to Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), cited by kind permission of the author.

political one, but this response simply points us to the distinctive difference between national loyalties and a Christian love of neighbour. The *institutionalizing* of boundaries between friends and enemies is inherently problematic from a Christian point of view.

Bretherton argues that political arrangements should always be seen as contingent, and open to revision. We should be ready to relinquish them into the hands of the Creator. Letting go of these “contingent” social arrangements is a lot easier said than done, since they are often constructed and maintained over generations, if not centuries. But suspending our prejudices is a necessary condition for the love of neighbour. A neighbour does not arrive in our lives with a pre-assigned social category (like an ethnic label or a gender), or a legal status (like a citizen or a refugee), or a role (like a business client or a soldier), all of which can conveniently structure our social expectations. The neighbour arrives in one’s world simply as a person, or more broadly, as a creature of God, and loving them might well call us across great social distances – whether economic, cultural, or even geographical distances. Ironically, this suspension of conventional identity formations is precisely what allows us to love a person in all their particularity.

While at first glance this account of neighbour love might indeed appear utopian, it is better described as a vocation. Betherton puts it this way:

Being a neighbor is a vocation that does not depend on liking, having a rapport with, or being equal to others... Indeed, the encounter with a neighbor confronts us with a need to interrogate our own settled identities, roles, and habits and the ways these inhibit our ability to love our neighbor. Neighbor love therefore disrupts hierarchal, institutional, and identity-based ways of structuring status.<sup>20</sup>

If we can relate this argument back to the Priestly imagination in the Hebrew Bible, it is the fundamental recognition that human beings are made in the image of Elohim that allows this paradigm of biblical theology to suggest that natives and immigrants should be embraced by a single law (notably in Exod 12:49; Lev 24:22).<sup>21</sup> To update that daring vision for our present discussion, we might say that it is necessary to reach through the many layers of social descriptors and categories in order to welcome the person beyond any categories into our own social world. In order to discover a common good, it will be necessary to cut across established patterns of meaning.

This account of neighbour love sharpens some of the key issues for us, but it also reveals that this kind of love differs markedly from our conventional attachments. We might need to conclude, in fact, that this is not an everyday vocation, but one which calls us into liminal experiences. Acknowledging this liminality might also help to explain why, in the famous parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, the love of the poor and the stranger is performed in a kind of cloud of unknowing.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mark G. Brett, “Natives and Immigrants in the Social Imagination of the Holiness School,” in *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Edelman (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 89–104.

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?” (Matt 25:37–38)

It is not that the righteous in this parable have special spiritual powers that allow them to discriminate between those who belong to the body of Christ and those who do not. Quite the contrary, it is clear that the righteous do not have such powers of discrimination, and this points to the kind of unknowing that can provide for the love of enemies. Here we encounter a paradoxical Christology without Christ – or at least, a Christ who is hidden.<sup>22</sup>

While I would not want to base any procedures for professional social practice directly on this parable in Matthew 25, I do want to suggest that we should find a remarkable analogy between the righteous who cannot identify Christ in the stranger and the Priestly Abraham who does not yet know the name of Yhwh. The love of a neighbour whose humanity lies beyond any categorization intersects with the love of a God whose name is not yet known. Both of these theological perspectives in scripture urge us into a liminal space beyond conventional attachments to family, culture and religious denomination. Both neighbour love and Priestly theology provoke us to suspend our prejudices in order to listen again, and to embrace the other simply because they are made in the image of Elohim, or more broadly, because they are creatures who are enlivened with the spirit of Elohim. In this liminal space, we do not rest on conventional understandings or preconceived generalities, and instead, we learn to pay attention at a much more basic level.

It is not that we can remain transfixed in this liminal state, in a cloud of unknowing, because this is not how we live our everyday lives. There are other kinds of love that certainly require enduring attachments, especially the range of relationships that have a covenantal value – including the more explicitly named relationships within the body of Christ. But a radical love of neighbour provides the conditions under which we might delight in the particularities of others, and not impose our preconceptions upon them. This is the kind of social vocation that allows our world to expand, much in the way that Wiremu Tāmihana suggested long ago when he invoked Ephesians 2:13 in his speech of 1861, when he saw that the English who had been “far away” were now drawn near. This new proximity called for a new set of covenant relationships, expressed in *te Tiriti o Waitangi*.<sup>23</sup> The idea that the Treaty might be a new sacred covenant between multiple communities seems to have been shared by many of those who signed the Treaty in 1840.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Paul’s comment in 1 Cor 10:4 on the desert rock as a “hidden Christ” in Israel’s journey from Egypt. Similarly, the theme of hiddenness arguably belongs to cosmic Christology. See especially Vicky S. Balabanski, “Hellenistic Cosmology and the Letter to the Colossians: Towards an Ecological Hermeneutic,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 94–107.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Picard, “On the Way”, and ‘In the Fray’ in Aotearoa: A Pākehā’s Covenantal Reflections from the Context of a Treaty People,” *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 11 no. 1 (2016): 44–58.

<sup>24</sup> Picard, “Treaty People,” 52, citing Tui Cadogan, “A Three-Way Relationship: God, Land, People. A Māori Woman Reflects,” in *Land and Place, He Whenua, He Wahi: Spiritualities for Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2004), 31.

## CONCLUSION

In some respects, it might be very difficult to think of a political process like the Treaty of Waitangi as an expression of social vocation, but that is precisely what I want to suggest. It presents a model for a society within which multiple communities maintain a continuity of identity while risking new relational practices and covenantal connections.<sup>25</sup> Misunderstandings will be inevitable, and for that very reason, it will often be necessary to enter the liminal space of neighbour love in order to practice the suspension of prior judgements. The relational processes are made all the more difficult when power and resources are distributed unequally, but then, inequalities of power are often characteristic even of the most intimate relationships within a family. Whether we are paying attention to individuals or to groups, the vocation of neighbour love calls us to expand our social imagination and to recognize our common creaturely dependence on God. The love of neighbour provides the conditions that enable us to love all of God's creatures in the way that they are created to be loved.

---

<sup>25</sup> See further, Paul Fiddes, "Covenant: A Basis for Inter-Faith Dialogue in Scripture and Baptist Thinking" (unpublished paper given at the Commission on Interfaith Relations of the Baptist World Alliance, Vancouver, 5 July 2016).