

Maori Understandings and Eco-Theology in Conversation: a Pakeha Perspective

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Raruraru: The Problem

The *mahi* (work) of protecting and restoring the natural environment of Aotearoa New Zealand suffers because the two groups who share that work can struggle to work together. Both Maori *iwi* and Pakeha conservationists are deeply committed to the *hauora* (wellbeing) of this land, but there are significant differences in world-view which play out in practice. Maori have good reason to be suspicious of the conservation moment for its role in alienating *iwi* from their resources. They also have good reason to be suspicious of the Christian church, and yet there are deep connections between the Christian faith and Maori identity. Pakeha are nervous about causing offence, frozen by fear of ‘putting my foot in it’, or of barging in where we’re not welcome. And, of course, many Pakeha continue to see Maori spirituality as dangerous, or irrelevant, or both.

The Christian environmental movement in NZ is small and predominantly Pakeha but I am convinced that it has an important role to play in the conversation between Maori and Pakeha on this sacred ground (*paepae*) of caring for this land we share. Spirituality is central to this conversation, but we are nervous about whether our beliefs and motivations are in alignment.

What follows is my story. In this conversation we cannot hide behind ‘objectivity’. We must declare where we stand, and look to the past as we move into the future. We are who we are because of who we belong to. My voice can only be my own voice and my own calling; “the route to Maoritanga through abstract interpretation is a dead end. The way can only be through a passionate, subjective approach.”¹ I explore themes through my own story of relating with *taha Maori* in order to open up understanding between Maori and Pakeha approaches to the natural world. As a Christian, and a Presbyterian Minister, I bring a particular faith perspective, and a passion to explore Biblical concepts alongside Maori ones. I hope that this narrative expresses deep respect for both, and encourages further conversation.

My focus is on care for Creation. I use the term ‘eco-theology’ to refer to ways of doing theology that explicitly include the natural world.

A note on *kupu* (words)

Through this paper I have chosen to incorporate Maori words, which are identified by use of italics. For some of these I provide a simple translation in brackets. Those I consider to

¹ Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Nganeko Minhinnick, Del Wihongi and Carmen Kirkwood, “Kaitiakitanga: Maori perspectives on conservation.” *Pacific Conservation Biology* vol.2, no.1 (1995): 7–20. DOI: 10.1071/PC950007

be in common usage in New Zealand are not translated. For further translation the reader is encouraged to use online tools. Names or titles are not in italics.

I apologise in advance for making generalisations about Maori ideas, words and spirituality. 'Maori' is not a single cultural entity. Each iwi has its own identity, stories and understandings. There is a growing body of academic literature written by Maori about Maori faith and world-view, but more has been written by Pakeha, with inadequate attention to regional differences.

I use the term 'Pakeha' as this is central to my self-understanding and the concept of conversation developed in this paper. Pakeha are New Zealanders of European descent. Kiwis of Pacific and Asian descent, and other more recent immigrants, need to relate in their own way with things Maori.

Kotiro: The Freckly White Girl

I am a Pakeha New Zealander, *Tangata Tiriti* (people whose rights to be in NZ are based on the Treaty of Waitangi). I am not *Tangata Whenua*. I do not 'have' a *maunga* (mountain) or *awa* (river), though there are several that I love dearly. My sons do not have *ahikaroa* (inherited rights of home) in any particular place. They are citizens of Aotearoa; it is their home. Currently my home is the plains of Selwyn, near the Waikirikiri (Selwyn) River (named for an Anglican bishop). I am part of Ngati Tumatauenga (the 'iwi' of the NZ Defence Force) as my husband is an army chaplain. I am 'in Christ' who is my *kainga tuturu* (permanent home) and I am a minister of the Gospel. My marae is the Presbyterian marae, Te Maunarongo, in Ohope.

Ironically, I was not born in Aotearoa, the first child in my whole extended *whanau* in 100 years to be born in another land. All eight of my mother's grandparents were born here, in the North Canterbury towns of Rangiora and Woodend. All 16 of her great-grandparents came with their families from England, the earliest arriving in 1859. They were Methodists, builders of community, who worked with bricks and people, made gardens and churches, cakes and music. My second-cousin David Ayers carried the family *mana* and values into the 21st century in his role as mayor of Waimakariri, during and after the earthquakes.

I was born in Fiji, into the Methodist Church, for whom my father was a missionary teacher. My father, Ern Crane, was fascinated with Polynesian cultures, taking his family into several Maori communities as well as Fiji and Tonga. He wrote geography textbooks and was an avid photographer and lay preacher. He learned a lot about the various cultures he worked in, but he seem immune from being changed by them, carrying his colonial assumptions intact. A short, dynamic man, he could relate to anyone, yet he made no effort to learn local languages beyond a bare minimum. He believed in the English systems of education and faith; he held passionately his values of pacifism and progress. He was puzzled by my decision to study Maori at High School; why would I not learn a language I could actually use in the world, he asked.

I grew up semi-understanding Polynesian languages from playing with the kids around the Marae in Ruatoria and the girls at Queen Salote College in Tonga. My childhood was spent in a Pakeha bubble in Polynesian cultures, sometimes as the only white girl, my sunburned freckled face a curiosity (especially when dressed in tapa, covered in coconut oil and flowers, dancing the *mau'olunga!*). Then suddenly I was a teenager living in Lower Hutt, my parents divorced, and while I no longer looked out of place I still felt it.

I took Maori at High School, and loved my teachers and visits to marae. Those were the days when Maori was scaled down by the examination system, and I was shocked when I passed School Certificate and my Maori classmates failed.² My eyes were opened to racism and inequality; I had lived in the presence of these as a child but was too immersed to see them. The Methodist Church (Te Haahi Weteriana) enriched my understanding. Those were the heady days of the Bicultural Movement, when white guilt reigned and indigenous theology was finding its voice. At university (Victoria, Wellington) I joined the Kapa Haka group (again the only white girl!) and was deeply impacted by a tour up to Parihaka. *Waiata* and *karakia*, history, pain and beauty, wove themselves into my soul.

(photo: me dancing in Tonga)

Koha: Potatoes and Pumpkins

My father's grandfather was Las Lassen. In 1870, aged only 17, he set off alone for New Zealand from his home on the Danish island of Als. He got himself to Gravesend in England then boarded a ship called the 'England' together with other Scandinavian immigrants, all of whom had pre-purchased land north of Palmerston North. After 104 days at sea they landed in Wellington on 19 March 1871, then set off to the Manawatu. A steamer carried them up the coast to Foxton, where they loaded their possessions onto carts and set off on foot. Unfortunately for them it was a particularly wet autumn, so it was mud all the way, bogging the cart wheels and making for slow progress. By the third day (10 April) they had reached the Maori (Rangitane) village of Ngawahakarau on the banks of the Manawatu River.

There they found that the villagers had prepared a welcome gift for them. A number of *kete* [flax baskets] of potatoes and several tons of pumpkins had been piled at the roadside for them to collect. When the Scandinavian party drew alongside, the chief of the village, Te Peeti Te Awe Awe, welcomed them, saying that the Maori were glad they had come to make roads and to live in this country. He was aware that they had no potatoes and asked that they accept this gift of food and seed, adding that at some time in the future some poor Maori may have need of a similar gift from them.³

² Ranginui Walker explains how in the 1980s and 90s School Certificate was designed to give a 50% pass rate, but there was a deliberate policy to increase pass results for 'bright' students, ie. those taking 'academic' subjects. "However, to maintain the convention of an overall 50 percent pass/fail ratio, the scaling formula lowered the pass rates for non-academic subjects such as art, woodwork and technical drawing. Māori language was classified among the non-academic subjects. ... In one year the pass rate in Māori language fell to 39.1 percent, a stark exposure of how the elites controlling the education system continued to determine negative outcomes for Māori." Ranginui Walker, "Reclaiming Māori education." in Jessica Hutchings and J Lee-Morgan, *Decolonisation in Aotearoa: Education, research and practice* (Wellington, NZ: NZCER Press, 2006): 19-38, 32.

³ Val A. Burr, *Mosquitoes and Sawdust: A History of Scandinavians in early Palmerston North and Surrounding Districts*, Palmerston North, NZ: Scandinavian Club of Manawatu, 1995), 26.

This generous act of friendship made a big impression on Lars and his companions, and they were most grateful. It did, however, cause a practical dilemma – how to transport the potatoes and pumpkins. The decision was made to unload one of the carts, leave behind the baggage it carried to collect later, and load up the vegetables instead. By night fall they made it into Palmerston North, and the following day Lars set foot on his new land. Sadly for the owners of the items left behind at Ngawhakarau, the weather went from bad to worse, the river rose and their possessions were swept away.

This story, a treasured part of my family history, has particular significance for me, like a parable. It expresses for me the foundation of my identity as a Pakeha New Zealander, an identity based at the intersection of choice and hospitality. I wonder at my great-grandfather decision to leave his home, such a young man to leave family and culture, in order to form his own family in a new land. I admire the courage, hard work and determination of my colonial *tipuna*; Lars died a old man after building up a thriving farm and contributing to NZ's dairy industry, survived by 11 children (another four died young).⁴

Mostly, though, I reflect on that moment when the muddy exhausted Scandinavians were met on the roadside by Chief Te Awe Awe and a large pile of vegetables. It is consistent with what I know of Maori people, the values of *powhiri* and *manaakitangi* (welcome and care for others). It expresses the *mana* of the man and his people. It also expresses a connection, *whakawhanaungatanga*, an investment in long-term relationship of reciprocity. Te Awe Awe hoped that these new people, from a land he had never heard of, would form partnership with his people, in which generosity would be repaid in a cycle of mutual *manaakitanga*. It raises the question for me personally of whether in my generation we are honouring the challenge of Te Awe Awe, to return the *koha* to Maori in our time.

The gift that day was of both food and seed, good to eat and an investment in their own new relationship with the *whenua* (land), enabling them to plant and grow food for themselves. This reminds me of Genesis 1:11 as God calls forth the “plants yielding seed”, beginning the life-sustaining cycles of continuing generations.

This gift required the settlers to unload some of the possessions and leave them behind. This moment speaks to me of the need to choose priorities and to lighten our loads. To truly belong in this land there are things we bring from other places that we must let go. This is a spiritual question asked by Jesus who called people to leave their wealth to follow him (eg. Matthew 19:21), and it applies in a pointed way to those of us who benefit from the injustices of colonisation.

The role of the natural environment in the story intrigues me. Aotearoa did not lay down the welcome mat for Las and his fellow settlers. They trudged their new land knee-deep in mud. Their possessions were washed away by the river. Before they could build homes the winter came, harsh and cold. It was not an easy beginning. It was another six years before Las returned to his land in Whakarongo to plant potatoes and pumpkins. The land of green rolling meadows and stopbanks you drive through north of Palmerston North today once looked very different. Little remains of the forests and swamps that sustained rich biodiversity and food sources for Maori. Te Awe Awe gave of his rich plenty, but within

⁴ His wife Christina also raised several of her grandchildren, including my father, after his mother died young.

a generation this was stripped away and his people were battered by war, disease and poverty, despite his choice to side with the British against other *iwi*. For his sacrifice he won a ceremonial sword and a statue in the Square in the city, but the cost to his people was high.

In our time in 'Palmy' I became friends with the current leader of the Rangitane people, himself a Te AweAwe, also a church pastor. My husband and I once hosted him and his wife for a memorable evening over dinner. I shared the story of when our great-grandfathers met that April day, and it meant a lot to both of us, as a sign of God's provision, the beginnings of Christian fellowship between two very different peoples. My at-home-ness in this land of Aotearoa is based on my great-grandfather's choice to come here, and Pastor Te AweAwe's great-grandfather's choice to welcome him.

(photo: Peeni Te AweAwe)

Turangawaewae: A place to stand

My husband teases me that my favourite illegal activity is trespass. I love to explore new places to walk or bike. These days I am exploring the Selwyn district, finding little waterways and peering over fences to photograph ancient falling-down sheds or cart wheels. I have been known to climb fences into other people's property.

I've always felt like this about Maoritanga; wanting to climb the fence and explore but not sure if I was allowed. Pakeha engagement in *Te Ao Maori* has not always been welcome or helpful. I have enormous respect for those Pakeha who have found a place from which to understand Maori culture and serve Maori communities. My faith tradition includes several models for this, notably John (Hoani) Laughton, whose legacy includes our Presbyterian marae, Te Maungarongo, in Ohope.

On the strand of white sand ocean beach ... ringed by native forest on the slope of the hill, it is a peaceful sanctuary, open to all. Its creation was the dream of the Very Reverend J G (Hoani) Laughton, CMG, the Superintendent of the Maori Mission in the 1940s. He saw a need to establish a Presbyterian marae as a point of contact between both Maori and Christian traditions. The building expresses the bi-cultural partnership ... a cohesive blend, designed and built using Maori tradition and art to express Christian faith, creating a unified whole from the marriage of two traditions.⁵

I cannot walk through the carved archway onto the marae without tears coming to my eyes. My commitment to partnership with Maori is not just an academic exercise for me. Emotion wells from a *puna* (spring) deeper than I can comprehend. I am enormously grateful for this place in particular, into which I have been welcomed and made at home. It stands at the intersection of *whenua* and *moana*, Rangī and Papa almost touching; in the Celtic tradition a 'thin place' where heaven and earth come close. Christ is the 'ancestor'

⁵ Te Hinota Maori, "Te Maungarongo: The ancestral house of the Maori Synod." *He Taonga hei Whakatu Honohono, A Gift of Partnership, Book Two*, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, 1992, 7.

carved over the *wharenui* door. Under his outstretched arms I belong. It is for me a place to stand, *turangawaewae*, a place from which to enter into conversation.

And yet the fences are still there. There is much that I do not, will not and have no right to understand about *Te Ao Maori*. Sometimes the barriers seem high, the no-mans-land wide, between western ways and Maori ways. I try not to trespass.

I now move from my story to Maori story. The next section confronts a major barrier between Maori and western conservation, a long story of conflict and pain.

***Mamae*: Maori suspicion of conservation**

Maori have good reason to be suspicious of conversationists. In 1995 Mere Roberts in collaboration with four others wrote a hard-hitting influential article. They describe an underlying conflict between Maori and western approaches to nature conservation; “a result of confusing similar (but analogous) outcomes of indigenous ecological and western conservation practices by assuming, incorrectly, that they derive from similar homologous conceptual underpinnings and motivations”⁶; i.e. it might look like we share the same goals but it is dangerous to assume that we have the same agenda. Maori writers have pointed to the ways in which ‘western conservation practices’ have had painful alienating effects for Maori communities. Coming to grips with this requires an honest look at NZ history as well as appreciating the distinctiveness of Maori ‘indigenous ecological’ understandings.

The question of who controls the lands and waters of Aotearoa pervades our history. In pre-European times Maori *iwi* fought for access to natural resources. European explorers, followed by whalers and sealers, sought out and exploited the resources of land and sea. British settlers hungered for land, escaping systems of post-feudal inequality which deprived them of land.⁷ Colonial government worked to secure settler land from Maori, through fair means or foul. Setting large pieces of land aside from private ownership was valued by both Maori and government, leading to the formation of our early National Parks, most notably the Ngati Tuwharetoa gift of the Ruapehu *maunga* to form the Tongariro National Park. However, the formation of conservation reserves and parks has not always been of benefit to Maori, indeed has created significant loss and suffering (*mamae*) to *iwi*.⁸

⁶ Roberts, et.al., “Kaitiakitanga”, 16.

⁷ My Ayers and Gibbs ancestors left the village of Turvey in Bedfordshire where they lived with two families squashed into a small terraced house, with no hope of a different life.

⁸ This subject touches of much of the work of the Waitangi Tribunal, as in this example from Te Ara: “The era of growth in national parks was followed by a period of turmoil. Māori, whose opinions had been largely overlooked as parks were set up, became more vocal. People of the Tūhoe tribe, who had been pressured into cooperating with the establishment of Urewera National Park, were especially aggrieved. As plans for the park took shape, they were stopped from logging trees on their land within and near the proposed boundaries. Once the park was set up, they could no longer gather traditional food and resources there freely. Under the Ngāi Tūhoe Treaty of Waitangi settlement in 2014, Urewera National Park was disestablished and administration of the land passed to the Te Urewera Board. However, Te Urewera remained open to the public and the Department of Conservation continued to manage tracks and facilities.” “Story: National

To divorce Iwi Maori from their lands and waterways was to damage not only the culture-environment bonds that were interwoven between different *iwi* and their *atua*, *tupuna*, *mahinga kai*, cultural sites, and resources, but also to affect their social order and, more importantly, their *mana* and obligations as *kaitiaki*. The cultural trauma that resulted was profound and far-reaching.⁹

Grievance and restoration has centred around the Treaty of Waitangi; conservation has been hotly disputed between *iwi* and the Crown in the tension between *rangatiratanga* and *kawanatanga*. Te Tiriti guaranteed Maori *tinu rangatiratanga* (literally ‘full chieftainship’) of their land and resources but granted governance (*kawanatanga*) to the Crown.¹⁰ Pakeha demand for both private land and public land, in the form of public parks, has often been gained at the expense of *rangatiratanga*.

At present New Zealand conservation law remains inimical to the locally-placed role and authority of *iwi*, hapū and whānau, and continues to impose limitations on Māori environmental decision-making ... Conservation law has criminalised tangata whenua for practicing traditions that should have been protected as a treaty right. Māori elders have described the conservation protection objective as “hostile to the customary principle of sustainable use, and the spiritual linkage of *iwi* with indigenous resources is subjected to paternalistic control.”¹¹

Beginning with the Conservation Act of 1987, legislation and government policy has acknowledged the Treaty and returned to *iwi* some degree of control of national parks and reserve land, described in law as *kaitiakitanga*. But this has by no means resolved all historic grievances, as *iwi* authority is still limited by constraints which continue to be resented. For example, an ongoing issue for Maori in regard to conservation is around customary hunting of birds; why is it legal to hunt and eat ducks but it is illegal for Maori to hunt and eat *kereru*? Our laws prioritise the protection of native species over *mahinga kai* (traditional food customs). Lyver et.al. claim that “Māori are, in effect, being asked to engage with and contribute to a national conservation system that often conflicts with their

parks, page 3: Māori, conservation, ecology: the 1960s onward.” *Te Ara, The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/national-parks/page-3>

⁹ Ruth Panelli and Gail Tipa, “Placing Well-Being: A Maori Case Study of Cultural and Environmental Specificity.” *EcoHealth*; New York, vol. 4, iss. 4 (Dec 2007): 445-460, 452. DOI:10.1007/s10393-007-0133-1

¹⁰ Lockhart, et. al. found a strong link among Maori people between political activism and environmental awareness: “through the pursuit of *tinu rangatiratanga*, Māori express a desire to see Te Tiriti upheld in order to gain the influence needed to chart their own future. Given the importance of land, a vital aspect of *tinu rangatiratanga* is the responsibility of Māori for the environment.” Christopher Lockhart, Carla A Houkamau, Chris Sibley, G Danny Osborne, “To Be at One with the Land: Māori Spirituality Predicts Greater Environmental Regard.” *Religions* Vol. 10, Iss. 7 (Jul 2019). DOI:10.3390/rel10070427

¹¹ Phil Lyver, Jacinta Ruru, Nigel Scott, Jason Tylianakis, et.al., “Building biocultural approaches into Aotearoa–New Zealand’s conservation future.” *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* (2018)-11. doi:10.1080/03036758.2018.1539405. Quote in text is from Ellison, 2001.

constitutional right to engage with the environment on their own terms which was guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi.”¹²

One fundamental clash between Maori and conservationists is around the idea of ‘wilderness’: “the idea of a wilderness, so dear to many western environmentalists, makes little sense in Maori. Rather than seeing a world of humans in conflict with a wilderness world, Maori tend to think even of the forests as a home, where the people of the land, the tangata whenua, can live well, in the land and off the land.”¹³ What is the ultimate vision of Pakeha ecologists? If it is of pristine natural ecosystems protected from people then this is unlikely to be a shared vision with Maori.

There is a Western tendency to paint indigenous cultures with a rosy idealism. Rogers et.al. warn against “the propensity to romanticize indigenous knowledge, by falsely assuming that these belief systems contain long lost wisdoms universal to all peoples of all cultures.”¹⁴ Maori push back at Pakeha attempts to assimilate or integrate Maori concepts without real power sharing. The challenge for Pakeha environmentalists is to build genuine relationships of partnership and trust with Maori; “Trust and mutual respect, along with the humility that comes from recognizing and owning up to systemic wrongdoing are necessary if Aboriginal peoples and proponents of eco-theology are to be able to strive in accord.”¹⁵

Can we highly value Maori insights into this land of Aotearoa while at the same time holding with confidence and passion our own goals, as Pakeha, for ecology? I would love to think that there is far more common ground between Maori and Pakeha conservationists than there are differences. However, I want to listen to Maori pain and not gloss over it. I accept that there is much to a Maori world-view that I cannot understand, and indeed have no right to understand. I value friendships with Maori and working on dynamic, honest partnership. I am committed to not perpetuating the colonial attitudes, patronising policies and unjust laws that have diminished both Maori and the wellbeing of this land.

Rongo: Harmony

Te Maungarongo (*mau* meaning to bring or create, *rongo* meaning peace) means “the creation of peace, the unification of people in harmony. With this name, the close bond between Maori tradition and Christian faith is embodied.”¹⁶ A respectful conversation between Maori and Christian understandings of the natural environment leans into this harmony and unity, but that is not the whole story. It can feel like wishful thinking or a white-wash over deep-seated differences. Away from that beautiful marae and its gentle waves, bird song and fern fronds, the *rongo* feels more fragile.

¹² Lyver, et. al, “Building biocultural approaches”

¹³ John Patterson, “Respecting nature: The Maori way.” *The Ecologist*, vol. 29, no.1 (Jan/Feb 1999): 33-38.

¹⁴ Roberts, et.al., “Kaitiakitanga”, 16.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 370.

¹⁶ Te Hinota Maori, “Te Maungarongo: The ancestral house of the Maori Synod.” *He Taonga hei Whakatu Honohono, A Gift of Partnership, Book Two*, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, 1992, 9.

As I seek a deeper understanding of Maori concepts and interconnections, I relinquish my desire for 'unification'. I genuinely believe, with the vision of Te Maungarongo, that there is harmony with the Christian faith, and I strongly hope for closer partnership between Maori and Pakeha on caring for our land together. I do not aim for syncretism, and I do not want 'pretend agreement'.

Perhaps a musical metaphor may help. If Maori and Christian convictions are tunes, when do they come together in harmony and when do they clash? The development of an authentic Kiwi eco-theology needs all the notes to sound with their own clarity and beauty. Where there are harmonies may they resonate true and sweet. Where there is discord, let's be honest about it, give space for the other's truth and be energised by the tension. Perhaps subtle notes will emerge, vibrations and echoes that surprise and refresh, or catch the ear off-guard.

The sections that follow explore Maori words central to the human-nature relationship. I seek to understand and explain each Maori concept as best I can, and to engage it in theological reflection. This draws on biblical and faith tradition resources, while continuing to be highly personal and subjective.

Mauri: Life

Mauri is the fusion that makes it possible for everything to exist, by holding the physical and meta-physical elements of a being or thing together in unison. When actions impact negatively upon the mauri of something, this essential bond is weakened, and can potentially result in the separation of the physical and meta-physical elements, resulting in death or the loss of capacity to support life.¹⁷

Paul writes of Christ that "in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). This is similar to the Maori concept of *mauri* as the "bonding element that holds the fabric of the universe together."¹⁸ Paul writes several times of the resurrected Christ being the Spirit of Life (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:45). Maori thinking also describes a life-giving spirit deeply embedded in the natural world.

Mauri-ora is life-force. All animate and other forms of life such as plants and trees owe their continued existence and health to mauri. When the mauri is strong, fauna and flora flourish. When it is depleted and weak those forms of life become sickly and weak.¹⁹

There is, however, a key difference between the Maori concept of *mauri* and the Christian concept of Christ as the life of all Creation. *Mauri* is mortal, the link between the physical body (*tinana*) and the spiritual essence (*wairua*). At the point of death the *mauri* leaves,

¹⁷ Fa'au & Morgan (2014), quoted by Chanel Phillips, "Mahinga kai - He tāngata. Mahinga kaitiaki - He mauri." Thesis, Master of Physical Education, University of Otago (2015, 124. <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/5852>

¹⁸ Marsden (2003), quoted by Phillips, "Mahinga kai - He tāngata" 116.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 53.

releasing the *wairua* to return to the Atua. Where a river has been polluted its *mauri* is damaged, and when a creature becomes extinct its *mauri* dies.

This is strongly correlated with how the Bible describes life in terms of breath. The Hebrew Bible has three words for 'breath': *nephesh* is life-force, understood to be in the breath (as in Genesis 1:20), *neshmah* or *nishmat* is the physical breath (as in Genesis 2:7), and *ruach* is both spirit and breath (used hundreds of times in the Old Testament). In the New Testament the Greek word *pneuma* has a similar double meaning, primarily used for the Holy Spirit. Reaching into the complexity of Biblical Hebrew takes us closer to a Maori understanding of the vital interconnectedness of life, spirit, breath and body and breaks down the dichotomy between human and other living things.

Another way to understand *mauri* could be the metaphor of 'voice'. A river 'sings' with its own unique voice. Jesus prophesied that the very rocks would cry out if the people were silent (Luke 19:40). The Psalms describe all of Creation giving voice to praise:

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the Lord (Psalm 98:7-9a, NRSV)

Each and every created thing has its own unique voice of praise to return to God its Creator. This has been the theme of many a poem, one of the most famous being St Francis' Canticle of the Creatures. This is sung in the well-known hymn "All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and let us sing – O Praise Him."

In Christian theology this is an expression of the 'glory' of God (e.g. Psalm 19:1). Within Luther's writings is a theme of awe for the glory of God found in the natural world. He depicts God as being "with all creatures, flowing, and pouring into them, filling all things" and insisted that "the power of God...must be essentially present in all places even in the tiniest leaf."²⁰ Six decades ago theologian Joseph Sittler invited a deeper vision of creation. He sought to express the "inner nature of things", language to evoke "a sense of the grace of creation."²¹ This demands a very different stance than triumphalist or rationalist theologies; it involves

kneeling down on the earth before the lilies of the field in gentle contemplation, beholding them, withdrawing any claims driven by will-to-power, waiting and watching and wondering in abject spiritual poverty, to catch some sight of "the dearest freshness deep down things".²²

To express the Christian sense of the divine presence within the fibre of Creation, the language of academic theology gives way to the language of poetry, and the contribution of artists. Included in this paper are photographic details of a painting done by a friend of mine, Lynn Ramage, sadly no longer with us. Her artist eye saw into the *mauri* of river, flax and bird and was able to express this for others to see using paint and colour.

²⁰ Martin Luther, quoted by Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "God "Flowing and Pouring into...All Things"", *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, vol. 3, no.12 (December 2003).

²¹ quoted by Paul H. Santmire, "A Reformation Theology of Nature Transfigured: Joseph Sittler's Invitation to See as Well as to Hear." *Theology Today*, vol. 61, no. 4 (January 2005): 509–527, 523.

²² *ibid*, 523, quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem, "God's Grandeur".

Creation shares the joy of the people (e.g. Isaiah 55:12) but it also shares in the pain. Paul writes that “the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains” (Romans 8:22), and the Old Testament prophets often describe God’s judgement in terms of environmental destruction (Isaiah 42:14-15). An understanding of *mauri* in our own natural environment in Aotearoa holds together both the joy and beauty of the living things we treasure as well as the pain of degradation, pollution and loss.

(photo: tui painting)

Whakapapa: Whose we are

A Maori understanding of, and concern for, the natural world begins from a place of belonging through genealogy. *Whakapapa* literally means ‘layering’, and expresses the layers of relatedness in which connect a Maori person to *whanau*, home, land and to other living things.²³

Everything in the universe, inanimate and animate, has its own whakapapa, and all things are ultimately linked via the gods to Rangi and Papa. There is no distinction or break in this cosmogony, and hence in the whakapapa between supernatural and natural. Both are part of a unified whole. "The bond this creates between humans and the rest of the physical world is both immutable and unseverable" (Tomas 1994). Every Maori shares this descent from gods, goddesses, guardians and superhumans. Furthermore, as Hohepa (1994) remarks, "these multi-god/ess guardians and responsibilities, these ties with humans who have the divine spark of descent from gods, are not compatible with ... the Christian belief of an independent God who has no genealogical connection, and who exists in splendid isolation somewhere in heaven".²⁴

The criticism leveled in this statement quoted by Roberts et. al. that the Christian God is “independent”, existing “in splendid isolation”, is a harsh one, which would be refuted by all the ministers I know. The days are long gone of a ‘deist’ God who sets the world in motion and then withdraws like a disgruntled mechanic to leave us to it. Trinitarian theology emphasises the community of God overflowing in connection with Creation. The triune three-in-one makes space for the life of the universe in the loving interplay within the heart of God. Eco-theology fosters ways of thinking of and relating to God as passionately involved in the world. NZ minister Bob Eyles writes about the heart-level connection that he believes is an essential part of the Christian faith;

Few of us have the capacity to feel the pain of our planetary ecosystem – perhaps that is possible for God alone. We can begin to move in this direction, however, by starting with our family, our garden, our bush, our district..., by gradually learning to observe and appreciate its web of life, not from the outside as an observer, but from the inside, as a participant.²⁵

²³ Byron William Rangiwai, “A Kaupapa Maori study of the positive impacts of syncretism on the development of Christian faith among Maori from my faith-world perspective.” PhD thesis, University of Otago, June 2019.

²⁴ Roberts, “Kaitiakitanga”, 10.

²⁵ Bob Eyles, “Ecological Christianity.” *Candour*, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, 8 (July 2013): 3-4.

Whakapapa speaks of the interconnectedness between people and all elements of the tangible world. For Maori this spiritual bond finds little in common with a theology of dualism. In Christian history the natural world has tended to be seen in the same light as the physical human body. Anna Peterson acknowledges body-spirit dualism as a thread in the Christian religion, both historically and in the contemporary church: “ambivalence about the body and nature generally has remained a strong current in both popular and academic theologies.”²⁶ Feminist theologians have led the church away from this ambivalence towards a more ‘embodied’ or ‘incarnational’ faith. They have pointed out that valuing ‘spirit’ over ‘body’ is inextricably linked to valuing men over women. Sallie McFague proposed that we should see the whole world as ‘the body of God’, and argued that humans are not just spirits who happen to be in bodies but ‘inspired bodies’ within the larger body of creation.²⁷ This has a strong resonance with a Maori understanding of *whakapapa*.

Byron Rangiwai describes the way in which *whakapapa* connects him through his ancestry to both land (*whenua*) and faith (*whakapono*). Through one grandparent he is Ringatu, through another he is Catholic, and through another he is Anglican. Identity, belonging and spirituality are found in “a network of interconnected and interdependent matrices that intersect.”²⁸ I can relate to this sense of being born into a faith; I was part of the Methodist *Hahi* until I married into the Presbyterian Church. However, sociologists have pointed out that the 21st century has seen a break-down in the intergenerational transmission of denominational identity. My sons do not see themselves as Presbyterian, despite (or perhaps because of?) both their parents being ministers. Traditional institutions are ‘so last millenia’! Personal freedom is the gospel of our day, ‘be yourself’ the mantra. How will Maori young people value their cultural inheritance in a society dedicated to the worship of individual choice? The work of eco-mission has its own challenges; motivating the institutional church may require very different approaches than what is required to connect with younger generations.

Atuatanga: Spirituality

A Christian understanding of the universe begins with the twin claims that God is Creator and the universe is Creation. We love and care for the environment because God loves and cares for the magnificent world that he made and continues to sustain (despite human efforts to destroy!). Christian cosmology begins at the beginning with an act of creation ‘*ex nihilo*’, out of nothing. As John proclaims in his Gospel prologue, “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:3, NRSV). The biblical emphasis on God as Creator is radically monotheistic. Nature is affirmed but not worshiped. Other ancient religions saw the sun or moon as divine beings, as well as local features such as mountains. The Bible celebrates natural things as created and in their own way giving worship to God. Humans, however, kept on turning away from God to give priority to other things that offered the illusion of success or control, home-made idols and the gods of empires. Idolatry is thoroughly condemned throughout scripture. Prophets and

²⁶ Anna Peterson, “Christian Theological Anthropology and Environmental Ethics.” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 12/3 (2000): 237-261, 242.

²⁷ Sallie McFague, *God’s Body: An Ecological Theology*, Fortress Press, MN: 1993.

²⁸ Rangiwai, “A Kaupapa Maori study”, 19.

leaders called their people to find their identity in the God of covenant: “Choose whom you will serve” called Joshua (24:15). For ‘eco’ Christians, the moral imperative to act for the good of the planet comes from this commitment to serve God in our time and place.

Maori spirituality is pluralistic rather than monolithic. This makes Pakeha Christians uneasy. Is it OK to enter into a prayer which references Papatuanuku? If Maori and Pakeha are working in partnership on environmental projects, can we share *karakia* together? If so, is this a similar experience or are we just pretending to be on the same page? Can Pakeha relax and let go our need to understand and control?

First, let’s check our understandings of Maori cosmology, and then explore possible ways to relate to it from a Pakeha Christian point of view.

Maori spirituality also begins at the beginning with a creation narrative from which all else flows. Once the world was dark, locked in a close embrace between Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother). Their children had no room to move, and after much discussion and various attempts Tane managed to push his parents apart. The ‘first family’ included gods of the air and the winds, war, earthquake and forests. From these Atua descended all the elements of the universe, living things and forces of nature, people and demi-gods. *Whakapapa* connects Maori to all beings, both tangible and intangible.

For Maori, the world is alive with spiritual entities and personalities. These do not asked to be ‘worshiped’ as a Christian would understand this. The rituals of *karakia* and offerings of Maori *kawa* (ceremony) were about calming or satisfying the *atua* to keep things in balance. The purpose is to keep the world on an even keel by not upsetting anyone or causing offence. In Pakeha terms, this is more about ‘social protocols’ than ‘praise and adoration’. The goal is healthy mutual relationships in balance. The early missionaries did not find Maori words with which to translate the biblical words ‘worship’ or ‘glory’. For instance, in Exodus 9:1 God (through Moses) asks Pharaoh to “Let my people go, so that they may worship me.” (NRSV). In Maori this becomes “*Tukua taku iwi kia haere ki te mahi ki ahau.*” ‘Worship’ is translated simply as ‘work’. The missionaries added the idea of ‘glory’ into the Maori language in the transliteration ‘*kororia*’ (e.g. John 1:14). *Nga Atua* in Maori cosmology were not worshiped and glorified. So, honouring them in an authentic Maori way is not idolatry.

When Maori encountered Christianity many recognised deep truth, and readily accepted ‘The God of the Bible’, together with *Ihu Karaiti* (Jesus Christ) and *Wairua Tapu* (Holy Spirit). Byron Rangiwai describes how Maori can honour both traditional and Christian spirituality. His research respondents do not experience Maori or Christian beliefs as being in conflict. They hold together faith in ‘Te Atua’ (singular) with respect for ‘*nga Atua*’ (plural). He summarises the position of one priest he interviewed who “understood *nga Atua* to be our first revelation of God. While he does not practise the old religion, he practises his Christian faith as Maori within a framework of *Atuatanga*—which is described by some as Maori theology and others as Maori spirituality.”²⁹

Rangiwai found the understanding among Maori Christian leaders that “God was always with Maori in the form of *nga Atua*, and that God was revealed again in Jesus with the

²⁹ Rangiwai, “A Kaupapa Maori study”, 11.

arrival of Christianity to these shores.”³⁰ This is the claim that Maori cosmology forms a body of revelation that pre-dates the coming of the Christian Gospel but whose author is the same God. In a sense, *Atuatanga* is the ‘prequel’ to the Bible, a third Testament. This revelation is fundamental to Maori culture. One thing is for sure in my mind – no one has the right to ask Maori people to reject their indigenous spirituality. Together with their land and language it is theirs by right of inheritance.

However, I find myself wondering how Maori Christians can simultaneously hold a faith in the triune God together with faith in a multiplicity of spiritual beings. Part of me says (or perhaps it is my father’s voice in my head) ‘Why can’t they just choose? Which is it? – pick one!’ Western culture has raised to a level of unassailable ‘obvious’ truth the value of individual freedom based on personal choice. The Christian church, especially evangelical streams, have instituted this at the very centre of what it means to be Christian. I remember as a teenager at a youth rally in the Wellington Town Hall singing “I have decided to follow Jesus.” The peek moment in the Christian life was seen to be this moment of decision. And yet, even as a 14-year-old I remember questioning this with my friend on the way home. How could it be a genuine personal choice when you are in a hall filled with several hundred young people all eager to fit in? I suspect that our cultural idea of personal choice and freedom is more myth than reality, as our choices are so powerfully influenced by social and economic forces in which we are subtly (or not so subtly) manipulated as consumers. A consumer mentality has crept mostly unopposed into our churches also. The dominant western culture worships personal choice; our bicultural commitment invites respect for the ways in which Maori hold a ‘both-and’ faith.

The question for me is around allegiance. My Christian identity is oriented around the divine person of Jesus Christ. From the earliest times Christians affirmed that Jesus is Lord, and for me that means that he (together with Father and Spirit) is central to my life at every level. I am surrendered into God’s authority and purposes. As a Minister I am curious about every other priority that claims the attention of Christian people and shapes their values and decisions. I simply do not know how this is for Maori, whether they experience any points of tension in allegiance or authority between Christ and *nga Atua*.

I’ve always said that I am a committed monotheist. It helps me to acknowledge this is inherited (*tuku iho*) from my grandparents and my Methodist heritage, for whom God was God and earth was earth. I have come to learn that the Old and New Testaments of our holy scriptures includes a greater diversity of views of the singularity or plurality of God than many western Christians might realise. Despite an official conviction that there is only “one Lord, one faith ... One God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5-6):

- the plural first-person is used by God in Genesis 1:26: “Let us make humankind in our image”.
- the plural ‘heavens’ in the very first verse of the Bible “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1). This has been variously interpreted, from referring to the stars in the sky, to a multiplicity in the spiritual dimension.
- One of the more common names of God in the Old Testament is ‘Yahweh Sabbaot’, Lord of Hosts/Armies. These ‘angel armies’ are vividly depicted in the two dramatic Elisha war stories in 2 Kings 6 and 7 (where we find the phrase ‘chariots of fire’!).

³⁰ *ibid*, 111.

For Maori, this all makes perfect sense. Of course the spiritual dimension is full of personalities and powers. The stark monotheism of my Methodist heritage simply ignored these suggestions of a complexity of spiritual beings, atheistic about angels, demons or taniwha. Perhaps it was the poorer for it.

Pakeha may find it easier to relate to Maori pluralistic spirituality in terms of metaphor. Maori cosmology holds an extraordinary narrative richness. Keith Newman describes how “when you enter into this realm you are faced with a complex interweaving of hierarchies, responsibilities, domains and influences that connect with the cycles of nature, the earth, the cosmos and the supernatural world”. Newman cautions Christians against delving far into this complexity, but affirms that “I remain open to the metaphoric, the symbolic, the *tohutohutanga*, or opening up of deep truths through unpacking types and shadows about times and seasons and purpose and destiny and even poetic personification of the wind, sea and elements.”³¹ I am comfortable with, and enriched by, relating at a spiritual level with Maori *atua* at the level of ‘poetic personification’.³²

***Kaitiakitanga*: Care-taking**

Kaitiakitanga is central to our relationship with the natural environment. *Kaitiakitanga* means conservation and protecting as well as a more active idea of fostering.

It derives from three words: the prefix ‘*kai*’; the root word ‘*tiaki*’; and the suffix ‘*tanga*’, which all help to shape the meaning of this term. *Tiaki* in its basic sense means ‘to guard’ but also can mean, “to keep, to preserve, to conserve, to foster, to protect, to shelter, to keep watch over” (Marsden, 2003). *Kai* signifies the agent of the act, so a *kaitiaki* is understood to mean, “a guardian, keeper, preserver, conservator ... protector”. The suffix *tanga* “transforms the term to mean guardianship, preservation, conservation, fostering, protecting [and] sheltering”.³³

It can be translated as ‘stewardship’, but it is different than the western understand of ‘resource management’. Roberts et.al. suggest that the closest we can get to defining a ‘Maori conservation ethic’ in western terms is “to describe it as one which is based on a kin-centric world view, i.e., in which humans and nature are not separate entities but related parts of a unified whole.”³⁴

Kaitiakitanga “weaves together ancestral, environmental and social threads of identity, purpose and practice.”³⁵ It is different from ‘resource management’ because it cannot separate the material substance, function or utility of ‘resources’ in the environment from their spiritual value, identity and relationships. The primary purpose is to enhance the *mauri* of all that comes under its care.³⁶ It works through the cumulated wisdom of many

³¹ Keith Newman, “The Io Odyssey: Cautious considerations for Christians.” Unpublished paper, 1 May 2020.

³² An example of this is my version of Psalm 104, “A Psalm for Aotearoa”, <http://www.conversations.net.nz/psalm-104-psalm-for-aotearoa.html>.

³³ Phillips, “Mahinga kai - He tāngata”, 73.

³⁴ Roberts, “Kaitiakitanga”, 16.

³⁵ Phillips, “Mahinga kai - He tāngata”, 73.

³⁶ Kaitiakitanga “cannot be understood without regard to mauri.” Phillips, 105.

years and seasons, implemented through *rahui* (sanctions) and ritual, including *karakia*. These teach habits of respect for natural resources because of the spiritual forces within them, such as throwing back the first fish you catch as a gift to Tangaroa, or pausing for a brief prayer before cutting *harakeke* (flax) for weaving. *Rahui* is an important conservation tool, such as a ban imposed on food collection for a period of time to enable a resource to recover.³⁷ *Karakia* links people with creation and “enables us to carry out our role ... our part in bringing order into this universe.”³⁸

An important dimension through all this is the interplay of *tapu* and *noa*. These are not easy to translate into English; words like ‘sacred and profane’ miss the mark. *Tapu* and *noa* are a gut-level sense of whether something is ‘set apart’ or ‘open access’. Death creates *tapu*, eating creates *noa*. *Tapu* is like a fine mist that hushes voices and distills the light. *Noa* clears that away for everyday tasks of life. A Maori ‘conservation ethic’ holds all these together for the common good of earth and people.

How does this compare with a Christian conservation ethic? In Genesis 1:28 God blesses the first human beings and says to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV). How people have understood the word ‘dominion’ has had vast implications for human impact on the natural world. In 1967 Lynn White wrote an essay arguing that the idea of human dominion over creation led to the assumption that nature exists only to serve human needs. He accused Christianity of legitimating exploitation of the environment, and being partly to blame for the modern ecological crisis.³⁹ Responses to White’s argument have sharpened Christian thinking about humanity’s role in relation to the planet.

Theologians such as Douglas John Hall re-defined ‘dominion’ in terms of ‘stewardship; creation “is entrusted to humanity, who are responsible for its safekeeping and tending.”⁴⁰ Stewardship is a biblical concept, rooted in Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (NRSV). The word ‘till’ is more about ‘serving’ than digging, according to Calvin DeWitt, in a mutual way a ‘conserving’. The word ‘keep’ “conveys the idea of keeping the dynamic qualities of the thing being kept ... a rich, full, and fulfilling ‘keeping’.”⁴¹ The word ‘steward’ is equivalent to Jesus speaking about ‘tenants’, ‘servants’ or ‘slaves’ in his parables which emphasise human responsibility to God for caring for the land and the gifts they have been entrusted with (e.g. Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 20:9-19). Hall describes stewardship as “the vocation that God intended and intends for the human creature in the midst of God’s good creation.”⁴²

³⁷ “Rahui today are implemented over a polluted or relatively unproductive resource base in order that spiritual (*mauri*) and physical dimensions may be revitalised.” Kawharu (2000) quoted by Phillips, 114.

³⁸ Phillips, “Mahinga kai - He tāngata.” quoting Shires (1997), 110.

³⁹ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction (3rd ed)* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

⁴⁰ McGrath, 304.

⁴¹ Calvin B. DeWitt, “Biodiversity and the Bible.” *Global Biodiversity*, vol. 6, issue 4 (Spring 1997): 13-16, 13.

⁴² D.J. Hall, quoted in Clint Le Bruyns, “Re-placing Stewardship? Towards an Ethics of Responsible Care.” *Religion and Theology*, vol. 16 (2009): 67–76, 72.

There is an intriguing difference between Christian and Maori understandings: in traditional Maori usage a *kaitiaki* is not necessarily a person at all, but can be an element of the natural world which holds a particular role as a local 'guardian'. For instance, when an enormous 200kg sea turtle washed up on a beach in Banks Peninsula it was recognised by the local *hapu* as a *kaitiaki* of their tribal area. Te Papa national museum wanted the turtle for public display and scientific analysis. The *hapu* reclaimed it and buried it after full *tangi* and honour. This is not easy for Western science-based ecology to understand. Doesn't the public have a right to view and study such a natural wonder? In this case the *rangatiratanga* of local Maori won the argument and were able to follow local *kawa* (protocols) in relation to something of great local significance. The honouring of non-human *kaitiaki* is an expression of the Maori value that while people have a role in caring for the natural world, far more important are the countless ways in which the natural world cares for the people.

***Mahi Tahī*: Partnership**

Eco-theology is of its very nature also eco-praxis, faith in action. Likewise, Maori spirituality does not exist as a 'thing' in theory, but is known in the living of it, collectively more than privately. While people with a passion for ecology can work individually, the task of caring for Creation leads people to work collaboratively. Local groups take ownership of local projects, and as people experience success their goals get bigger, bringing community groups together into partnership. Partnership can be described in Maori as *mahi tahī*, working as one. In Christian theology this is a central characteristic of the Spirit of Christ, who forms people from different backgrounds, personalities and agendas into loving community (Galatians 3:28).⁴³ The conflicts of history and philosophy fade when sitting together over tea and cake, or when sharing spades and getting hands in the earth.

Chanel Phillips researched a Maori environmental group in Otago, interviewing people who had participated in a tree-planting project. Many of her interviewees mentioned 'community' as a major feature of their experience; "The community identity is about people having a connection to place and developing a relationship to place."⁴⁴ It is a connection with other people as friendships grow, i.e. *whakawhanaungatanga*. Maori cultural practices of *mihī*, *powhiri* and *poroporoaki* provide a framework in which community happens, which she describes as "a respectful platform to meet one another on."⁴⁵ The *manaakitanga* (care of others) of sharing food together is an integral part of this process.

These principles of being community while caring for the environment are foundational to A Rocha's vision for 'eco church' congregations. 'Fellowship' and relational care are 'hard-wired' into Christian mission, and most church projects include time for sitting down for a cuppa. In NZ, many non-Maori groups incorporate aspects of Maori *tikanga* as normal practice, such as taking care to welcome everyone at the beginning and thank and

⁴³ Jesus drew people into friendship groups across class, gender and racial barriers, eating with tax collectors and talking with women, and Acts 2 specifically mentions a wide diversity of people-groups sharing in Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

⁴⁴ Phillips, "Mahinga kai - He tāngata", 134.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 127.

farewell everyone at the end. Where Pakeha process collides with Maori *tikanga* is around how much time is allocated to relational connecting. A Pakeha 'functionalist' approach plans a practical project such as tree-planting in order to take up as little time as possible to get the job done. *Mihimihi* and *poroporoaki*, however, take as long as they take; you open up the floor for everyone to introduce themselves (*mihī*) and later to share about how the experience was for them (*poroporoaki*). It takes time. Also, in Maori culture *kai* is shared, and should be provided in abundance. The Pakeha custom of BYO lunchbox is anathema.

A Rocha promotes the importance of partnerships between churches and other groups in local conservation initiatives.⁴⁶ A Rocha Dunedin co-ordinator, Selwyn Yeoman's experience is that "Conservation projects heal wounded places, restore ecological diversity and renew the song of creation. They provide amazing opportunities to connect with communities, involve families and share wisdom inter-generationally."⁴⁷ Phillips also writes of the value of partnership between Maori and non-Maori groups finding common vision and working together: "this community engagement is all part of *whanaungatanga* and building 'positive' relationships."⁴⁸ She attributes positive relationships between community groups to "good foundations of trust and confidence" right from the start of working together.⁴⁹

Kupu Whakamutunga: Conclusion

This conversation has been going on through the 5 decades of my life, mostly in the background but sometimes with insistent urgency. Other people have delved deeper, read more, and talked longer into the night than I have. Others are just beginning, hesitant and confused. *Kei te pai*. It's OK. The conversation is not going away. Our nationhood in Aotearoa New Zealand is inescapably bound with each of these relationships: our relationships with each other, Maori and Pakeha and the rich diversity we are, and our relationship with the earth, this Land of the Long White Cloud, upon whom we are utterly dependent for our lives, our food and our homes, and whom we share with *tui* and *piwakawaka*, lizard and snail, fragile hidden grasses and mighty totara. We are also held in relationship with Te Atua, Creator, and the spiritual dimension that is also part of God's Creation. May we grow closer in each of these relationships, in faith and *aroha*. May we work together in trust, effective partners in the urgent and vital task of protecting our land and all who call it home.

Ma te Atua tatou e manaaki.

⁴⁶ 'A Rocha' (Portuguese for 'The Rock') is an international non-denominational Christian organisation dedicated to 'ecology and hope'. A Rocha Aotearoa NZ has regional branches and local conservation projects, and provides resources for the church. www.arocha.org.nz.

⁴⁷ Selwyn Yeoman, "Witnessing Christ in the Care of Creation." *Candour*, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, iss. 8 (July 2013): 5-8, 8.

⁴⁸ Phillips, "Mahinga kai - He tāngata", 135.

⁴⁹ *ibid*.

