

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOME INVASION

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Homes provide us with safety. They protect our identity and nurture our values. At times, our homes are threatened. The threat can be direct, as an armed person bangs on our door. Threat can also be indirect, as different values and new sets of beliefs challenge established patterns.

The image of home provides a way to think about the future of Christian faith. What resources are available when values are challenged, whether through the diversity brought by migration or the slow creep of secularism? How should we respond to home invasion?

There are some rich, yet surprising insights when we turn to New Zealand history. Maori call Aotearoa New Zealand home and have had to respond to multiple moments of home invasion. Threats have been direct, with guns and indirect, with the arrival of many diverse values, aspirations and beliefs. What insights for Christian faith are evident in the response of Maori to home invasion?

Home Invasion

In 1769, Maori first saw English visitors.¹ When Cook and his crew stepped onto the white sands of Te Whanganui-o-Hei (Mercury Bay), they were stepping onto the home of another. Over centuries Maori had developed a “custom of living.” This involved moving from block to block, using fire to farm the fern and cultivate their boundaries, “so that it might not be taken from us by some other tribe.” When Cook stepped onto the foreshore, for Maori he was stepping onto home.

One who had been watching Cook was Te Horetia, a twelve year old boy. In his account, there is fear at the sudden appearance of strange white visitors, who he called “goblins” (26). There is also curiosity and surprising benefits as food is shared and knowledge exchanged.

Over time, these strange white “goblins grew in number.” The sailors, were followed by sealers, whale hunters and missionaries. Finally settlers arrived, bringing with them very different approaches to farm and forest. By the 1860’s, all land, rural as well as foreshore, was under pressure.² The Crown gave Waikato Maori an ultimatum: “retain your land only as long as you are strong enough to keep it.”³

The homemaking theology of Wiremu Tamihana

One response to this direct threat of home invasion was provided by Maori chief, Wiremu Tamihana. He is a remarkable man, who over his life offered three distinct responses to home invasion by home-making. Each provide insights for us as Presbyterians today.

First, in response to the indirect threat posed by the rising settler tide, Tamihana built distinct local community. Tamihana, born around 1805, mission educated, built, upon the death of his father, Ngati Haua chief, Te Waharoa, Christian pa. The first was Te Tapiri. The second, named Peria after the people of Beria in Acts 17:10 (suggesting the desire to value Scripture) was, according to Te Ara, “a model Christian community.”⁴ Peria had a church, school, post office, orchards, gardens and a flour mill. The building of an ideal home is one response to cultural change. At other times in Maori history, for example at

Artist: Roelant Dewerse



Parihaka, building an alternative Christian community has been one response to home invasion.

Second, Tamihana sought to restructure leadership. This was a political approach to home invasion. Historically, Maori had organised themselves around hapu. During the late 1850s, Tamihana worked to organise Maori under a King. In explaining his actions, Tamihana drew on Deuteronomy 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 first half of the verse provides a Biblical mandate for the appointment of a king. The second half points to the need for a king from among Maori, not the Crown. This was a second response to home invasion, drawing on Scripture to re-imagine how Maori might work together in governing themselves.⁵

Third, Tamihana drew on Scripture in public speechmaking. When the Crown gave Waikato Maori the ultimatum regarding their land, the response by Tamihana was recorded in Great Britain’s Parliamentary Papers. He points to Ephesians, “Once you were far away, are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (2:13, KJV). The verse is addressing Gentiles as newcomers to the Christian faith. To paraphrase Ralph Martin, those who were once far away were those who once had no rights as citizens of God’s special nation.⁶ When used by Tamihana, he is suggesting that the Crown and the rising tide of British settlers are Gentiles. They were once far off and, by implication, once had no rights as citizens of this land of Aotearoa New Zealand. The second half of the verse in Ephesians

describes the offer of a new home, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus. This shows a remarkable vision. Home is made possible through Jesus. It is obtained not by history (who was here first) nor strength (only as long as you are strong enough to keep it), but by the ethics of Jesus.

A vision of home, today

Tamihana offers a remarkable vision of home. Under threat of home invasion, he establishes an alternative Christian community, reorganises leadership structures and engages in public speechmaking, using the Scriptures translated in his own language.

So what might Tamihana’s theology of home mean for those of us living in New Zealand today?

First, admire the bicultural idealism of Wiremu Tamihana, who believed that two peoples could live peacefully in this land, sharing one Christian faith.

Second, tell the truth. Talk of home invasion is never comfortable. Yet being honest about our past liberates us to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly before our God.

Third, value Scripture. At every turn, Tamihana was shaped by a Christian vision, of Beria in Acts 17, of leadership in Deuteronomy 17, and behaviour in Ephesians 2.

Fourth, value our own (New Zealand) theologians. In Tamihana, we have a home-made public theology of home. He shows us how to relate Scripture to the future of all people who set foot in New Zealand. We often think of home as defined by the picket fences at our boundaries. What Tamihana reminds us is that life in Christ defines how we treat newcomers.

1. Alex Calder, *The Writing of New Zealand: Inventions and Discoveries* (Auckland: Reed, 1993), 26-30.

2. In the mid-1840s, Waikato Maori were estimated at around 18,400. In contrast, the European population of Auckland was 2,754 in 1844. By early-1860’s, Maori population had declined, to around 10,300 in Waikato. Vincent O’Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800-2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 225. In contrast, the Government had assembled a fighting force of over 12,000 men by May 1864.

3. Wiremu Tamihana, “Reply: The Declaration Addressed by the Governor to the Natives Assembled at Ngaruawaha,” May 1861, GBPP, 1862 [3040], 73.

4. “Wiremu Tamihana Tarapipipi Te Waharoa,” *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t82/te-waharoa-wiremu-tamihana-tarapipipi> (cited 3 October 2017).

5. For more see 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).

6. Ralph Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991).