

Chapter One: God Was His Problem: The Theological significance of James K. Baxter¹

*'Perhaps a poet can tell us how we should go about theology.'*²

1. Introduction

This thesis is written within the field of theology. Its central concerns are therefore theological. Some thirty years after his death, comment on James K. Baxter is already extensive, and gathering pace. The major categories of such commentary consider Baxter from perspectives which are literary, biographical or what might loosely be called 'prophetic'. Many of them touch on themes which are essentially theological, both because of the universal nature of theology, and because of the centrality of Christian thought and life to Baxter. However, very few of the treatments are self-consciously theological.

While some essays consider 'Baxter the Catholic', these focus on his relationship with the institutional church rather than his own theological development.³ It is surprising, given that some of the major commentators on Baxter are theological graduates,⁴ that this aspect of his corpus is so poorly examined. It will be proposed in the thesis that, certainly in the latter period of his life, Christianity was the integrating factor in his life and work. It can be contended that without adequate cognisance of this fact, much of his literary output is destined to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Many commentators appear embarrassed by the blatant and apparently naïve fideism of Baxter's late material.

Because of its theological approach to Baxter, the thesis is not concerned primarily with his

¹ In a late poem, Baxter writes of himself: 'God was his problem; God and the universe'. 'Song for Sakyamuni', CP 500.

² Choan-Seng Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, London: SCM, 1988, p.xii.

³ See, for example, Elizabeth Isichei, "James K. Baxter: Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 13, (1995).; and Pat Lawlor and Vincent O'Sullivan, *The Two Baxters : Diary Notes* (Wellington, N.Z.: Millwood Press 1979).

⁴ Among these might be counted John Weir, Frank McKay, Vincent O'Sullivan, Eugene O'Sullivan, Russell Phillips

literary contribution, nor indeed his biography, except insofar as these inform an overview of his theological reflection. Theology, of course, is not static. Baxter developed greatly in his theological bent and sophistication over the course of his brief life. At times his views are self-contradictory, but this is not a fault which is unique to Baxter. Nevertheless, by limiting the focus of the study to the final few years of his life, we discover a mature and relatively consistent theological voice.

It will be contended here that James K. Baxter is a major contributor to the task of a New Zealand contextual theology, and that therefore his significance is at least as great for this land's Christianity as for its literature. He existed on the fringes of the established church. The church was keen to claim him for his social prominence, but uncomfortable with his stinging critiques and moral failings. No attempt will be made to 'redeem' Baxter or to sanctify him. The intention is to recognise him as a man who reflected deeply on what it means to follow Jesus in Aotearoa, even when he could not meet that demand in his own life. The 'stink of words'⁵ occasioned by his faith has an as yet unexplored significance for the shape of a truly contextual theology.

2. *Method and Scope*

In order to examine Baxter's corpus on its merits, the major part of this thesis will consist of detailed examination of his writings and their inherent theological content. His work will be considered thematically, using categories which might arise naturally from his own range of interests. This is to allow Baxter to speak for himself, without undue commentary. In the initial stages of the investigation, there will be relatively little critical interaction with the material. Such critique will be reserved for the final chapters, where an attempt will be made to evaluate the theological significance of Baxter. Particular attention will be given to the major concern of this study; the relationship of the poet's work to the task of contextual theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Specifically, the argument will be advanced that on the basis of considering his output, Baxter makes a major and unique contribution to the process of establishing a truly local theology, but falls short of being categorised as a

⁵ James K. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook*, Wellington: Price Milburn, 1971, p.17.

contextual theologian. In the history of development of post-colonial theology, he may be regarded as a primary 'funder'⁶ of contextual theology, with major importance for Pakeha theological reflection as it continues.

Although the entire corpus of Baxter material is considered, attention is focussed on the latter period of Baxter's life, commonly described as the 'Jerusalem period'. There is no arbitrary limit on the material examined, because to some extent there is continuity of major themes, many of which were present in his very early material. However, it remains true that the move to Jerusalem marked a departure for Baxter, as much for his theology as for his personal history. From 1969 on, his poetry and prose demonstrate a persistent obsession with his own journey of faith and the environment for it. Although the poetry of this period is publicly accessible,⁷ the majority of religiously significant prose manuscripts are held in restricted collections and have yet to be published.⁸ This thesis includes reflection on the prose material, which is vital to any comprehensive understanding of Baxter.

In the context of a substantial body of commentary on Baxter, the justification for this current investigation as a unique body of work is twofold. Firstly, as already touched upon, the majority of treatments of Baxter have not adequately considered his theological import. Of those that take his theology seriously, three studies should be mentioned specifically. An MA thesis by John Geraets, entitled 'James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality',⁹ considers the 'theology of communality' as the organising category of Baxter's late work. It is a degree in English, and primarily considers the poetic canon. Christopher Parr presented an MA thesis in Religious Studies at the University of Canterbury, entitled 'The Earth Lamp: James K. Baxter's Search for a Humanist Christianity'.¹⁰ While making a valuable contribution to the religious reception of Baxter, the thesis does not really consider contextual issues. Trevor

⁶ The word is used with specific intent to refer to the process of theological and semiotic undergirding of the Christian community's responsibility to critically reflect on its traditions, life and faith within the historico-cultural setting in which it finds itself. Such funding is a necessary but not exhaustive part of the contextual process.

⁷ The poetic collection in the public domain has recently been extended through the publication of a new volume: Paul Millar, ed., *New Selected Poems* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁸ Two major collections are those held by the Hocken Archives in Dunedin, and the McKay papers held in the Beaglehole Room of Victoria University. Both collections require specific permission for access.

⁹ John Geraets, "James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality" (MA, University of Auckland, 1978).

¹⁰ Christopher Parr, "The Earth Lamp: James K. Baxter's Search for a Humanist Christianity" (MA, University of Canterbury, 1979).

James' PhD thesis, 'Toward a Primal Vision: A Study of the Writings of James Keir Baxter',¹¹ is more comprehensive and does touch on Baxter as a contextual theologian, but once again works mostly with the poetry. Each of these studies attempts to identify an organising centre for Baxter's thought. The current investigation is explicitly theological and examines the material on its own terms.

Secondly, the present writer has had access to material from the Hocken and Beaglehole collections which is essential to an evaluation of Baxter's late period, and which has not been included in any major study of him to date. Phillips comments that 'before attempting to be definitive about Baxter these texts must be considered if one is to be in any way academically accurate about what Baxter wrote'.¹² It is access to and consideration of such texts which gives this study its validity and insight. They contain theological commentary without which it is impossible to make a legitimate evaluation of Baxter as theologian. In his late period, Baxter was a prodigious author of prose reflections which are both original and vital to a comprehensive understanding of his life and work. Consideration of these reflections is in and of itself sufficient justification for a detailed examination of his contextual contribution.

The framework within which this project is conducted is in accord with the argument advanced. This initial chapter considers introductory matters, including a brief biography of Baxter and a statement of the importance of contextual theology in the local setting. Then, within subsequent chapters, Baxter's own theological position is explored thematically, drawing predominantly on primary resources. Only after that position has been sympathetically established will a critical evaluation be attempted, in a chapter which considers Baxter in relation to historic expressions of the Christian tradition. A final chapter examines the central question of understanding the specific nature of Baxter's role in its significance for contextual theology. It is only at that point that a comprehensive survey of the preceding research allows identification of the unique contributions of Baxter under the headings of traditional theological categories.

¹¹ W.T.G. James, "Toward a Primal Vision: A Study of the Writings of James Keir Baxter" (PhD, University of London, 1977).

¹² Russell Phillips, "James K. Baxter: A Dialogue with His Later Theological and Philosophical Thought in the Context of Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 13, (1995): p.279.

3. ***The Life of James K. Baxter: An Introduction***

This brief account of the life of James K. Baxter is provided for those readers who either live outside of New Zealand, or who are not familiar with the life of one of its best-known citizens. It is not intended to be more than an introduction; nor will it be closely referenced. Several comprehensive biographies are available, along with a welter of lesser treatments of the poet's life.¹³ O'Sullivan notes that despite the various perceptions of the significance of Baxter, 'we are driven back constantly to biography'.¹⁴ But his life is important for other reasons than the pragmatic one of providing a bedrock of substantiality to a story which has tended to gain mythical status. It provides a hermeneutical aid to the interpretation of both his poetry and his theology.¹⁵ Without reference to his biography, for example, it is simply not possible to understand the writings of the Jerusalem period; densely illustrated as they are with biographical data. As much as literary trends might dictate a strict separation between author and text, with Baxter it is necessary to treat the complex interpenetration of life and commentary as together forming the text.

Baxter was born on 29 June 1926 in a Dunedin maternity home, the second of two sons. His parentage was of itself interesting. His father, Archibald Baxter, was an Otago farmer of Scots descent, himself famous for his conscientious objection during World War I. This was the subject of an autobiographical book, *We Will Not Cease*.¹⁶ Archibald suffered field punishment which amounted to torture for his beliefs.¹⁷ He was a self-educated lover of

¹³ The standard and official biography is that of Frank McKay: Frank McKay, *The Life of James K. Baxter* (Auckland: Oxford University Press 1990). This is supplemented by Bill Oliver's work, W. H. Oliver, *James K. Baxter : A Portrait* 2nd ed. (Auckland, N.Z.: Godwit Press/Bridget Williams Books 1994). Also of interest are shorter versions of the Baxter story: see Charles Doyle, *James K. Baxter* (Boston: Twayne Publishers 1976) pp.19-36.; Christopher Parr, *Introducing James K. Baxter* (Auckland, N.Z.: Longman Paul 1983).; James, "Primal Vision" pp.7-23., Paul Millar, ed., *Spark to a Waiting Fuse : James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn, 1942-46* (Victoria University Press, 2001) pp.19-128.; Lawlor and O'Sullivan, *The Two Baxters : Diary Notes*.; Wilhelmina Drummond, *James Keir Baxter : On His Human Development ; Educating Women for Public Life and Other Essays* 2nd ed. (Palmerston North, N.Z.: Nagare Press 1995). and Baxter's own reflections, particularly in James K. Baxter, *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press 1967) pp.121-155.

¹⁴ Vincent O'Sullivan, "The Two Baxters - or Only One?," 75-85 in *The Two Baxters: Diary Notes by Pat Lawlor*, ed. Pat Lawlor (Wellington: Millwood Press, 1979) p.76.

¹⁵ Doyle notes that unlike many artists, 'Baxter's life and work are interdependent'. Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.19.

¹⁶ Archibald Baxter, *We Will Not Cease* (London: Victor Gollanz Ltd 1939).

¹⁷ When I was only semen in a gland
Or less than that, my father hung
From a torture post at Mud Farm

poetry, with a particular interest in the English romantics. James' mother was Millicent Macmillan Brown, daughter of Professor John Macmillan Brown, founding lecturer in Classics (and later English and History) at the University of Canterbury. Millicent herself became a university graduate, and was a lifelong lover of books.¹⁸ The eldest son of Millicent and Archibald was Terrence (b.1922), who as a pacifist and conscientious objector was imprisoned during World War II.¹⁹

James grew up in Brighton, a small coastal settlement south of Dunedin. The semi-rural environment, with its backdrop of craggy hills, sweeping beach, lagoon, river, caves, rockfaces and dunes, impressed itself indelibly on the young Baxter. This, combined with his father's love of poetry and classical mythology, provided a stock of images which would inform his work for the rest of his life. He began his poetic career by writing his first poem at the age of seven.²⁰ In 1935, when Baxter was nine, the family moved north to Wanganui and he was enrolled at a Quaker school, St Johns. They were not there long, sailing early in 1937 for England, settling in Salisbury. James and Terrence attended a Quaker boarding school, Sibford, situated in the Cotswolds. The family travelled the continent together in the holidays, and eventually returned to Brighton in NZ in 1939. Baxter was for a short time sent to board at his old school in Wanganui, but eventually rejoined the family in their new house at 15 Bedford Parade. Throughout this unsettled period, he continued to produce poetry.

By 1940, James was attending King's High School in Dunedin. There, partly because of his disinterest in sport, and preoccupation with literary pursuits, he was something of an outsider. Baxter spent four years at the school, in the top stream of students. He did not enjoy the educational process, and was extremely critical of it in years to come. On an almost daily basis, he was producing verse. By 1942, he was corresponding regularly with poet Noel Ginn, a fellow detainee with Terrence Baxter in Defaulters' Detention.²¹ Their correspondence reveals Jim to be a precocious and remarkably gifted poet. At the end of 1942, he passed

Because he would not kill.

James K. Baxter, 'Pig Island Letters', CP 281.

¹⁸ Millicent Baxter, *The Memoirs of Millicent Baxter* (Whatamongo Bay: Cape Catley Ltd 1981).

¹⁹ Millar, ed., *Spark* pp.64ff.

²⁰ Baxter describes the process and includes a fragment of the first poem in Baxter, *Man on the Horse* p.124.

²¹ For a comprehensive study of this correspondence, see Millar, ed., *Spark*.

University Entrance, and following a further year at High School, enrolled to begin studies at Otago University for the start of term 1944. His first accomplishment there was his winning of the Macmillan Brown prize for poetry, an award named after his grandfather.

Remarkably, by the end of 1944, when Baxter was just nineteen, his first collection of poetry, *Beyond the Palisade*, was published by Caxton Press to critical acclaim. It was to be the beginning of a prodigious output of publication, and corresponding recognition of his craft. He left university after just one year, and set about accumulating life experience as raw material for his poetry. In 1945, after a brief stint working in an iron foundry in Green Island, Baxter washed up in Central Otago, working on a sheep station. The experience of mountain country at close hand was to inspire some of his greatest poems. Eventually finding his way back to Dunedin, Baxter developed what was a growing drinking problem over the years 1946-7. He also explored sexual relationships with several women, and met Jacquie Sturm, who would later become his wife. At the end of 1947, he moved to Christchurch, as did Jacquie. There Baxter fitted easily and noisily into the literary circles and his incipient alcoholism bloomed.

Three major events marked 1948. His collection *Blow Wind of Fruitfulness*²² was published, he was baptised in the Anglican church, and he married Jacquie. His conversion, of which he writes little, was assisted through the reading of Christian writers, with C.S. Lewis being of particular significance. The marriage to Jacquie, on 9 December in Napier, was the beginning of a relationship which would continue in one form or other until his death.²³ Following the wedding, the couple moved to Wellington. A daughter, Hilary, was born to them in June 1949. Baxter continued to write, and after a short period of abstinence, began to drink again. He worked for a period as a postman, but was sacked for being drunk on the job. During the next year, Jacquie continued her university studies and Baxter recommenced his degree through Victoria University. His first love, as always, was poetry; but in 1951 he enrolled at the Wellington Teachers' College to train for primary school teaching, a two-year course.

²² James K. Baxter, *Blow, Wind of Fruitfulness* (Christchurch: Caxton Press 1948).

²³ I was a gloomy drunk.
You were a troubled woman.
Nobody would have given tuppence for our chances,
Yet our love did not turn to hate.

'He Waiata mo Te Kare', CP 539.

During that year he was the star of the New Zealand Writers' Conference, held in Christchurch.²⁴

A second child, John, was born in 1952; the same year he completed his teaching qualification. Rather than move immediately to teaching however, he spent a further year of study at Victoria University, during which time he published the fine collection of poems, *The Fallen House*.²⁵ It was a mixed academic year, and Baxter failed English III, probably due to conflicting interests. At the beginning of 1954, he took up a teaching position at Epuni School in Lower Hutt. He struggled somewhat as a teacher, lacking motivation to enforce discipline, but persevered. During this period, the bouts of drinking intensified, and were accompanied by episodes of sexual indiscretion. He once again failed English III, to the embarrassment of the University. Late in 1954 he began attending Alcoholics Anonymous, which was to prove a significant step in his rehabilitation.²⁶ Baxter maintained his association with the movement for the remainder of his life.

Finally in 1955, Baxter completed his BA. Part way through the next year, he resigned from Epuni school to take up a position as sub-editor at the School Publications branch of the Department of Education. During 1956, Baxter appeared to consolidate his personal, family and working lives. Another turning point, however, was to disrupt this settled period. The fairly nominal Anglican became increasingly interested in Catholicism in 1957, eventually in September beginning instruction at St Mary of the Angels in central Wellington. His interest was devotional primarily, with a strong attachment to Mary as intercessor for such hopeless cases as his own. Baxter was naive and receptive in his attitude to the Catholic faith, and demonstrated all the enthusiasm of the new convert.²⁷ Eventually he was received into the church on 11 January, 1958. In retrospect, this was one of the major events of his life. His faith would take many turns, but it would continue to be the integrating substratum of his life and work.

²⁴ It was during his lecture entitled 'Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry' [published as James K. Baxter, *Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry* (Christchurch: Caxton Press 1951).] that Baxter claimed that the vocation of the poet was to 'remain as a cell of good living in a corrupt society, and in this situation by writing and example attempt to change it'. Baxter, *Recent Trends* p.18.

²⁵ James K. Baxter, *The Fallen House* (Christchurch: Caxton Press 1953).

²⁶ The programme was not immediately successful however: McKay notes that in 1955 Baxter was drunk for a fortnight with his Auckland friend Bob Lowry. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.*

²⁷ Lawlor and O'Sullivan, *The Two Baxters : Diary Notes* p.17f.

Unfortunately, Baxter had neglected to mention to Jacquie that he was receiving instruction in Catholicism, and so his conversion came as a huge shock to her. It was another in a series of adjustments which she was called upon to make following Baxter's transformation from alcoholic to keen A.A. member. The turn to the Catholic church represented a continuing failure in communication, and in October 1957 the couple separated. James hoped for a reconciliation, but Jacquie was more interested in maintaining her care for the children. Baxter received a Unesco Fellowship in 1958 to visit Japan and India. In September of that year he flew out to begin his extended period of leave, spending the majority of the time in India. Jacquie and the children joined him there, in a successful attempt to restore the marriage. It was during their time there that Baxter was first profoundly affected by the obvious poverty, and it caused deep reflection which was to shape his spirituality in coming years.

The family returned to New Zealand in April of 1959, and Baxter resumed work at School Publications. On the surface domestic life was harmonious, but underneath it the poet experienced an ongoing disquiet. Nevertheless, the ensuing years through to 1966 marked the most settled period for Baxter. He continued to write poetry, and produced both radio plays²⁸ and a novel, *Horse*.²⁹ In 1963 he resigned from School Publications and began work as a postman, considering it less demanding of his creative talents. He stayed three years in the job; a conscientious if slow deliverer of the mail. The culmination of this period was the superb *Pig Island Letters*,³⁰ which in many ways introduced the biographical self-reflection which was to mark his later output.

Baxter had applied in 1965 for the Burns Fellowship at Otago University, and was awarded it for 1966. In January of that year the family returned to his ancestral home of Dunedin. Whatever ambivalence he may have felt about the homecoming, Baxter took to his new position with vigour and wrote prolifically. When the Fellowship was extended for the year of 1967, he began writing plays in earnest under the tutelage of Patric and Rosalie Carey, the proprietors of the Globe theatre where his works were produced. He also wrote increasingly

²⁸ James K. Baxter, *Two Plays : The Wide Open Cage and Jack Winter's Dream* (Hastings: Capricorn Press 1959).

²⁹ Eventually published; James K. Baxter, *Horse* (Auckland, N.Z.: Oxford University Press 1985).

³⁰ James K. Baxter, *Pig Island Letters* (London: Oxford University Press 1966).

for Catholic publications on matters of faith, as well as giving some lectures to seminarians at Holy Cross College in Mosgiel. After two years as Burns Fellow, in 1968 he was appointed by the Bishop to the Catholic Education Office where he wrote articles and catechetical material. With access to the Catholic library, this was a period of wide reading and reflection on his faith.

On the domestic front, things were deteriorating. The unease which Baxter felt about the ordinary patterns of life intensified.³¹ Family life was troubled, and the poet was feeling confused about his vocation. Around April of that year, he had a dream which he experienced as a divine revelation.

Then I went to sleep. And when I woke in the morning the first thought in my mind - was 'Jerusalem' - meaning not the city in Palestine, but the mission station on the Wanganui River. And either immediately or very shortly after a linked thought came into consciousness - that I should go to Jerusalem without money or books, there learn the spoken Maori from a man whom God would provide for me - whose name might or might not be Matiu - and then (God willing) proceed quietly and slowly to form the nucleus of a community where the people, both Maori and pakeha, would try to live without money or books, worship God and work on the land.³²

It was on the basis of this vision that early in 1969 he left wife and children in Dunedin to make his way north. He paid a brief visit to Jerusalem before continuing on to Auckland. From this point on he allowed his hair and beard to grow, adopted the Maori name of Hemi, and began to go barefoot. In Auckland, after a period staying with friends and working at the Chelsea Sugar Refinery, Baxter moved into a community in Boyle Crescent, Grafton, which was populated mainly by drug users. There he attempted to establish Narcotics Anonymous, and began the practice of public meditation in Vulcan Lane or the Auckland Domain. He was influenced by the hippie movement and its revolutionary values and lifestyles. But the dream of Jerusalem still captivated him, and in September of 1969 he had moved down there. He had

³¹ ...I have accepted God's bribe,
To be content with not being dead'
James K. Baxter, 'The Bargain', CP 421.

³² James K. Baxter, private correspondence, quoted in McKay, *Life of J.K.B.*

to go to Wellington to gain permission to use a cottage belonging to the Sisters of Compassion, and while there stayed with Jacquie and the family, who had moved back from Dunedin. Then and over the next few years he entertained the impractical hope that Jacquie might join him at Jerusalem.

In the initial period in his new home, Baxter was mostly alone. He devoted himself to the practice of contemplative prayer and the learning of Maori, and to a large extent lived the life of an ascetic. It is from this period that the magnificent *Jerusalem Sonnets* were produced, written for his friend Colin Durning.³³ The poems have often been regarded as Baxter's finest work, and their mixture of vivid imagery and mystical insight caused some to regard them as 'the first great statement of what we could call a truly indigenous expression of Christianity'.³⁴ Over time, the word spread that Baxter was establishing a community at Jerusalem, and an unlikely collection of people began to assemble. By early 1971 there were some forty people there, and on the weekends the numbers would swell. Some saw themselves as permanent members of the community, while others came for short term visits. They were mainly young people who might be regarded as 'drop-outs' for one reason or another. Baxter interpreted the gathering community as the handiwork of God. The philosophy and spirituality of this phase of Baxter's life is to be found in his classic mixture of prose and poetry, *Jerusalem Daybook*.³⁵

Largely through the attention of the media, the Jerusalem community came to national attention. Baxter himself drew a great deal of public attention and scrutiny. From his base at Jerusalem, he made itinerant forays around the country to fulfil speaking invitations; often surprising people with his bedraggled and barefooted appearance, and his proclivity to enthusiastically embrace perfect strangers. His message was one of penetrating critique of the materialist and apathetic culture of society, delivered from a standpoint of radical Christian humanism. It was also a period when he joined forces with others in denouncing publicly domestic racism³⁶ and involvement in the Vietnam war. Baxter's comprehensive social critique began to gather coherence in various unpublished papers, as well as more accessible

³³ James K. Baxter, *Jerusalem Sonnets* (Dunedin: Bibliography Room University of Otago 1970).

³⁴ Eugene O'Sullivan, "James K. Baxter: Prophet and Theologian," *Accent* October 1986 p.34.

³⁵ James K. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* (Wellington: Price Milburn 1971).

³⁶ Baxter was involved in a protest at Waitangi, organised by Nga Tama Toa, in February of 1971. He writes of this experience in James K. Baxter, "The Young Warriors". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/126, Dunedin, 1971.

texts such as *Six Faces of Love*³⁷ During this period, he frequently stayed at Newman Hall, a Catholic theological hall in Auckland, where he made use of the library and joined theological discussions.³⁸ The experimental community at Jerusalem was a practical outworking of his Christian faith, a fact attested to by the internal evidence of his writings at the time.

The public profile of Baxter himself and the community created difficulties for local landowners, including the Maori residents of Jerusalem. However ill-founded, the community gained a reputation for drug-taking and free love, and there were genuine concerns as to the sanitary conditions which existed there. Baxter defended the venture, but when Maori requested him to close the community, he agreed immediately. By September of 1971, he had moved down to Wellington, staying briefly with his family in Ngaio. But the old feeling of captivity returned, and so he moved into an empty house in MacDonald Crescent, squatting there and establishing a community. He became a vigorous advocate for the poor and dispossessed of the city. Pressured by the Council into leaving, Baxter yearned once more for Jerusalem, and managed to negotiate a return which would allow him a maximum of ten people at any one time. Thus, in February of 1972, the second phase of the community, a little more settled and disciplined, began. It was during this time that he produced *Autumn Testament*,³⁹ another mixture of poetry and prose.

Intuitively conscious of his approaching death, Baxter deepened his mystical journey through poverty and meditation. In the early part of the final year of his life, he had experienced an enlivening of the Holy Spirit through an independent church in Masterton. This, combined with his existing sacramental theology, led to a new embrace of Christian humanism, described in *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit*.⁴⁰ His health was failing, and the undiagnosed heart condition brought with it periods of depression. This was laced with an increasing sense of failure, as he abandoned hope of reconciliation with Jacquie, and found the limited community at Jerusalem too restrictive for his ideals. He left, and arrived in Auckland in September of 1972. Catholic Priest Terry Dibble described him as 'despondent' and 'quite

³⁷ James K. Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* (Wellington: Futuna Press 1972), originally delivered as radio talks in March of 1971.

³⁸ Phillips, "Dialogue," p.271.

³⁹ James K. Baxter, *Autumn Testament* (Wellington: Price Milburn 1972).

⁴⁰ James K. Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* (Karori: Futuna Press 1973).

depressed'.⁴¹ It was in that city that he died of a heart attack, on 22nd October. He was just 46 years of age, and his death was an occasion of national mourning. The funeral was conducted at Jerusalem, where he was given the honour of a Maori burial.

Such is the substance of Baxter's biography. The legacy, however, is more than this. Various characterisations portray him as poet, prophet, activist, theologian, critic, playwright, troublemaker, cultural icon or derelict; demonstrating the breadth of his interest and a corresponding resistance to categorisation. Baxter was a conscious myth-maker, and enjoyed the interplay of diverse public personae. Vincent O'Sullivan wonders in awe how it could be that:

...a man who was probably New Zealand's best poet, just as probably its best literary critic, certainly as astute a social observer as we have had, and in a fuller sense than any other of our writers, constantly engaged with the daily life of his country - how that man could move as naturally through the ageless configurations of myth as through a city street, could turn the existential privacy of being a modern Christian into his most absorbing and most public literary theme, could adopt social values that set him apart from most of his contemporaries, and yet do these things in a way that made him as national a figure as a successful politician or a well-known sportsman.⁴²

How his presence and writing influenced the theological development of his homeland is the assessment which this thesis seeks to determine.

4. *Theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand*

It is not the intention to give here a comprehensive history of Christian theology within post-colonial New Zealand, but rather to provide an overview by means of which to establish the concern of the current investigation with contextual theology. Christian theology

⁴¹ Frank McKay, "Interview with Terry Dibble". Unpublished Manuscript, Frank McKay Collection, 2/33, Wellington, 1984.

⁴² O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?."

came to this land in two phases, distinct but overlapping.⁴³ The first was the missionary movement, part of the broader nineteenth century missionary movement originating in Europe, which arrived with the goal of evangelising the indigenous population. The second and subsequent phase was that embedded within the colonial matrix of European settlement. In both cases, the theology may be characterised as 'received' theology which Darragh portrays as a response to faith 'developed in quite different circumstances from the ones in which we ourselves live'.⁴⁴ The missionary phase was remarkably successful, but was eventually smothered by the settler church. Maori Christianity, forced into unorthodox forms through colonial racism, developed some interesting cultural forms of the faith.⁴⁵ But settler Christianity, with its imported and predominantly British polity and ecclesiology, dominated the mainstream church and its theology.⁴⁶

A 1966 edition of *Landfall* reflected on the state of European religion in this country. Merlin Davies, in surveying the progress of Christianity among New Zealanders, comments:

Religion has conserved some values from the past and contributed too little in shaping things to come. The stimulus for most theological thinking in New Zealand has come too exclusively from overseas; too rarely has it been a response to the New Zealand situation here and now. No religious faith has become truly indigenous.⁴⁷

Lloyd Geering agrees that there 'is little one can point to that is truly indigenous'⁴⁸, while P.J. Downey notes the 'inescapable fact' that 'New Zealand religion is derivative'.⁴⁹ And Dennis McEldowney quotes J.A. Froude to the effect that:

⁴³ See Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, eds., *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating Aspects of New Zealand Church History*, Third ed. (Palmerston North: Dept of History, Massey University, 1997).

⁴⁴ Neil Darragh, *Doing Theology Ourselves: A Guide to Research and Action* (Auckland: Accent 1995) p.17.

⁴⁵ It might be argued that such derivative churches as Ringatu and Ratana represent an authentic contextualisation of the gospel for Maori. Thus James Belich: 'In sum, what we may have here is a new Maori religion of many variants, which converted European Christianity as much as it was converted by it.' James Belich, *Making Peoples - a History of the New Zealanders: From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Penguin 1996) p.223.

⁴⁶ See Neil Benfell, "The Shape of the New Society," 73-89 in *Mission and Moko: The Church Missionary Society in New Zealand 1814-1882*, ed. Robert Glen (Christchurch: Latimer Fellowship, 1992).

⁴⁷ W. Merlin Davies, "Church and Nation," *Landfall*, no. 76, March (1966): p.22.

⁴⁸ Lloyd Geering, "The Church in the New World," *Landfall*, no. 76, March (1966): p.27.

⁴⁹ P.J. Downey, "Being Religious in New Zealand," *Landfall*, no. 76, March (1966): p.32.

Our religious traditions, like our poetry, are divorced in the southern hemisphere from their natural associations. They are exotics from another climate, and can only be preserved as exotics.⁵⁰

Frank Nichol laments the fact that '[t]heology must be one of New Zealand's least indigenous activities'⁵¹, and John Harré completes the chorus with his observation that in the failure of Christianity to provide a symbolic unity for New Zealanders, 'we cling to a unity of church and polity with Britain, and our individual identity as a cultural unit remains elusive'.⁵²

Some of the reasons for this lie in the history of settlement. Despite the best intentions of the colonial authorities, it seems that the imported faith of the migrants failed to be successfully transplanted. Two of the planned settlements, those of Canterbury and Otago, had overt ecclesiastical associations in Anglicanism and Presbyterianism respectively. But this fact is easily over-interpreted, and Wakefield's motivations in instigating the settlements were largely pragmatic.⁵³ Christianity never really 'took' in its new soil. Certainly it formed part of the social continuity supporting migrants, and was not insignificant.⁵⁴ But as Merlin Davies argues, it has had little abiding influence.

New Zealand culture, the New Zealand way of life, has been coming to birth without very much religious influence. The denominations have been transplanted here in the antipodes, doing good in many ways - without them New Zealand would certainly be very greatly deprived - and yet the common life of this country has not in fact been inspired by anything approaching an integrated religious faith, nor been greatly and positively influenced by religion at all.⁵⁵

In consequence, the cultural mainstream tolerates but is largely disconnected from its religious institutions, which remain stubbornly 'foreign'.

⁵⁰ Dennis McEldowney, "Ultima Thule to Little Bethel," *Landfall*, no. 76, (1966): p.50.

⁵¹ Frank Nichol, "Theology in New Zealand," *Landfall*, no. 76, (1966): p.49.

⁵² John Harré, "To Be or Not to Be?: An Anthropologist's View," *Landfall*, no. 76, (1966): p.38.

⁵³ Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin 1959) p.91.

⁵⁴ Belich notes that the settlers were 'indifferent, even antagonistic to organised religion' but that Pakeha were 'not an unChristian people' though 'not intensely Christian either'. Belich, *Making Peoples* p.438f.

The way in which Christianity functions as 'offshore capital' is common to many post-colonial societies, where it causes a chronic impediment for the ongoing viability of faith, as described by Darragh.

This is the tendency to make use of theological ideas which were developed in the place and time of migrant origin but which are no longer appropriate to the new generations in a new country. Thus these new generations become not the producers or "doers" of a theology within their own context but simply the consumers of the theologies and ideas originating elsewhere. The formulations of their theological beliefs, their statements of theological issues, their basis for christian action in the world, their church structures, their catechetical programmes, their attitudes to mission, their seminar speakers, the books they read, etc. ape those of distant even though ancestral cultures. Several generations continue to be dependent for their theological ideas on the theology of their country or culture of origin.⁵⁶

It may be due to this phenomenon that a number of commentators have regarded the nominal faith of the society as very much a veneer which is not culturally embedded; the form of religion without the substance of it.⁵⁷

In such societies, a complex form of contextualisation is necessary. It is different in character than that of the mission fields, because in colonised countries the structural and theological framework of the church already exists, albeit in a frequently dysfunctional form. The fresh appropriation of symbols is not possible, as the existing ones, whether Christian or cultural, all have a prior history of interpretation. Darragh highlights the difficulty by distinguishing between *explicit* and *implicit* theology. In Aotearoa-New Zealand, the explicit theology is the transplanted variety, which has its origins in Europe and (latterly) North America. It suffers

⁵⁵ Davies, "Church and Nation," p.22.

⁵⁶ Neil Darragh, "Theology from Elsewhere," *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies* 2, no. 1, (1991): p.2.

⁵⁷ Keith Sinclair comments: 'It would be misleading to imply that the New Zealanders are a very religious people - some of them go to church when they are christened, many when they marry and more when they die. The prevailing religion is a simple materialism. The pursuit of health and possessions fills more minds than thoughts of salvation.' Sinclair, *History of N.Z.* p.288.

from dislocation or what Darragh describes as 'non-fit'.⁵⁸ The implicit theology, or culturally embedded and 'common' theology, is not regarded as Christian nor the subject of adequate critical reflection.

Contextualisation is a late twentieth century theological response to the separation of faith from culture.⁵⁹ Spindler describes it as follows:

Even more, it means that the gospel itself receives its shape in the total culture of the people among whom the church is planted and in the nation of which the church is essentially an integral part. Successful inculturation [contextualisation] may be said to occur when the gospel and the church no longer seem to be foreign imports but are claimed in general as the property of the people.⁶⁰

That being the case, there are still two major ways of pursuing contextualisation within a post-colonial environment. One is to seek to make the explicit theological product of the existing church comprehensible to the surrounding culture. It is this approach which Frank Nichol advocates.

In every country Christian theology is concerned with the essential nature of the Christian message. But New Zealand may expect from its theologians an expression of that message, whether in the structure of the Church or in the dogmatic formulation of the faith or in the style of the Christian life, which has a characteristic and appropriate shape and direction.⁶¹

In essence, this is a legacy from the missionary movement, and contains a hidden premise that the nature of the gospel is already fixed, and that what is required is a complex cultural

⁵⁸ Darragh, *Ourselves* p.17.

⁵⁹ In its Third Mandate, The WCC-funded Theological Education Fund (TEF) sounded the call in 1972 for 'contextualisation', and the term entered common usage at that point. It may be described as a methodological variant on the doing of theology which takes context seriously.

⁶⁰ M.R. Spindler, "The Biblical Grounding and Orientation of Mission," 123-143 in *Missiology, an Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, ed. F.J. Verstraelen, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) p.139f.

⁶¹ Nichol, "Theology in N.Z.," p.49.

translation of it.⁶²

Another approach, however, can be formulated by extending Darragh's notion of 'implicit' theology.⁶³ This is to recognise that any culture has its theological perspectives, independent of, though sometimes informed, by the church.

Ordinary people do not ask theological questions theologically. They ask and talk about God mostly in non-theological terms and hidden in what is asked or said about everyday matters.⁶⁴

This being the case, it may be useful theologically to identify and make explicit that which is implicit, in order to understand fully the dimensions of the cultural context. The task of the theologian in such an approach may be to sift the culture for its insights and anxieties, doing some serious cultural analysis.⁶⁵

In fact there is no neat distinction between these methods. In a society which has been the recipient of Christian symbols, there will already be some interaction between those symbols and the host culture, subtly shifting the religious discourse of it. And already by the second generation of Christian presence in a land, the local environment will have begun to shape the way in which Christianity is practiced and spoken of. The situation is muddy; there is no purity of either gospel or culture. Given, however, the consensus of commentators that Christianity still retains a marked remoteness from Pakeha culture, the agenda of contextualisation remains substantially unfulfilled.⁶⁶ Most of the work done on the project

⁶² See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* ed. Robert J. Schreiter *Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1992) pp.30-46.

⁶³ Darragh seems to reserve 'implicit' theology to that held unconsciously by people of faith - 'People who identify themselves as Christians (*sic*) spontaneously think and feel about who they are and what they are doing as Christians.' Darragh, "Theology from Elsewhere." But it is fruitful to consider the implicit theology of an entire culture, many participants in which would not consider themselves Christian.

⁶⁴ Gerald P. Fitzgerald, *Christ in the Culture of Aotearoa-New Zealand* ed. Helen Bergin (Dunedin: Faculty of Theology, University of Otago 1990) p.1. Neil Darragh explains: 'From casual conversations over a meal to full blown arguments over current political issues, we continue to show that we are nearly all engaged in doing theology. We don't usually call it theology of course. The theological part of these conversations is more often under the surface rather than laid out on the table.' Darragh, *Ourselves* p.7.

⁶⁵ Bevans describes this approach as the 'anthropological' model; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* pp.47-62.

⁶⁶ There are theologians who have begun the task; among them might be named Maurice Andrews, Neil Darragh, Gerald Fitzgerald, Clive Pearson and Peter Matheson.

thus far has been from the side of professional theologians, who understandably have concentrated on the reworking of the Christian tradition in such a way that it has cultural resonance.⁶⁷ But there is a need to devote an equal amount of effort on exegesis of the culture, and to engage in critical correlation between explicit and implicit theologies.

In regard to the task of cultural exegesis, attention needs to be given to those voices which are acknowledged articulators of the culture and are therefore 'insiders', rather than attempting a detached analysis. Schreiter notes the role of 'gifted individuals' who are able to give voice to that which is unspoken by the wider community.⁶⁸ There is little doubt that James K. Baxter is one of those 'gifted individuals'. As both a cultural icon and a Christian activist, Baxter contains within himself and his work the very correlation with which theology ought to concern itself. He is a prophet, critic and narrator of life in Aotearoa; as well as being a public Christian and a theological commentator. The interest of this thesis is in considering the contribution which he makes to the ongoing theological endeavour, and in evaluating his role within the wider call to contextualisation of faith in this land.

but who, Lady, in these lands will sing you
outside the ordered Liturgy?

'Traveller's Litany', CP 139

5. Conclusion

James K. Baxter's religious vision is considered here in relation to its contribution to the task of contextualisation in Aotearoa-New Zealand. While Baxter has been subject to considerable scholarly analysis, there remains a lack of theological investigation in regard to the poet and his work. This thesis uses a variety of sources, including a great deal of previously unexamined material, to reflect on the nature of Baxter's theological worldview and to consider its relevance to contextual theology. His life represents a prominent and prophetic challenge to cultural orthodoxies, stemming from a profound commitment to

⁶⁷ For example, M.E. Andrew, *The Old Testament in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Wellington: Deft 1999).

⁶⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1985) p.17.

Christian humanism. In the context of Aotearoa-New Zealand, where Christianity is separate from and arguably outside of its cultural environment, Baxter may be a significant figure for the contextualisation of theology. It is the task of this thesis to examine the nature and extent of Baxter's contribution to contextual theology.

Chapter Two: Hara¹ - The Sickness of Soul in Aotearoa-New Zealand

1. Introduction

The genesis of Baxter's theology lies in a sense of dislocation and alienation.² Various referred to as 'the gap', 'the void', 'the wound', 'the abyss' or 'Original Sin', this sense of primal estrangement is for Baxter both personal and corporate. Before ever it became the subject of his theological reflection, an underlying sense of loss permeated the young poet's experience:

Yet a sense of grief has attached itself to my early life, like a tapeworm in the stomach of a polar bear... It could be that the root of it all was no more than an early perception of the state that theologians call Original Sin.³

It is necessary to appreciate Baxter's mythologising of his own biography⁴ in order to understand that such primordial gloom is deeper and more evocative than adolescent depression. As he matures, his vision expands to include:

enough in society around him to propose as at least feasible that the gloom flows from out there towards himself, and not the other way.⁵

¹ A Maori word often translated as 'sin', but which has a wider field of meaning including 'offence'; throughout the analysis of Baxter's theology, Maori terms are used as categories, in keeping with his own proclivity for borrowing from that language. Baxter's justification is 'Since Maori is a sacred language / Dignified by poverty and the absence of lies', James K. Baxter, 'Poem for Eugene', *Accent*, Vol.1, No.5, October 1986, p.37.

² 'The prime matrix for the poems is clearly that sense of deep existential pain and unrelatedness – Angst – which permeates his thought, and which he retrospectively was able to correlate with his religious convictions.' James, "Primal Vision" p.24.

³ James K. Baxter, "Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet," 121-155 in *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) p.121f.

⁴ 'He was mythologising his life; and that's what a writer does... What happens is either meaningless to me, or else it is mythology.' Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.122. See also O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?."

Traditional Christian theology has generally incorporated the judgment that the natural world and human society are somehow skewed, and consequently in need of redemption. In his contextual approach, Baxter locates such angst as it reveals itself within the structures of life in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It will be the purpose of this chapter to describe the categories used by Baxter to articulate this pain.

2. *Alienation from the Land*

For us the land is matrix and destroyer,
Resentful, darkly known...

‘Poem in the Matukituki Valley’ CP86

If there is in Baxter a strong sense of estrangement from the land, it grows from an almost primitive and naïve longing for innocence through reconciliation with the natural order.⁶ The inevitable distancing from his childhood vision⁷ is a symbol for Baxter of the Fall; the heart-wrenching separation of humanity from creation.⁸ But in his characteristic approach, he articulates the universal theme of separation from nature within the specific context of Aotearoa-New Zealand. It is the peculiar sense of Pakeha alienation from the land which haunts both poetry and prose.

The origins of this essential disconnection are both historical and contemporary; stemming from a utilitarian approach to the land⁹ which diminishes love for it:

⁵ Vincent O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* ed. James Bertram *New Zealand Writers and Their Work* (Wellington: Oxford University Press 1976) p.13.

⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.52.

⁷ 'There is no longer a place for me
Under the trees where we climbed as children,
Accepted by the sky, accepted by the earth'
'The Return', CP, p.594.

⁸ 'This earth was never ours...' 'Haast Pass', CP, p.63.

⁹ 'Because the stars, the trees and the night sky
Are the enemies of homo fabricator,
Man the builder.'

'The Workers', Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.44.

They have taken the piupiu from the body of the land
Baring those wild timid limbs and thighs

Not in love, but in order
To see her as a thing. The crooked tree

On the cliff face is an old woman mourning
At the tangi of her daughter...

'Tangi' CP 449

Baxter laments the poverty of the 'founding fathers with their guns and bibles' who 'added bones and names/ to the land' but little else, leaving a legacy of settlements 'longing for the poet's truth/ and the lover's pride'.¹⁰ The consequence is an estrangement which forever pervades Pakeha experience:

Those peaceful New Zealand towns, centred upon a Post Office, a grocer's store, a petrol station and a War Memorial, are strange places to sleep in, if you stretch out on a bench in your oilskin, before the dawn shows itself above the scrub hills like a terrible unhealed wound.¹¹

An education system which 'implants a logical lens in the skull'¹², and a desire for mastery¹³ over the land result in a ravaged landscape and spiritual aridity:

Those who turn the world into a desert have to suffer the pains of the desert...If the

¹⁰ 'New Zealand (for Monte Holcroft)', CP, p.276.

¹¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8f.

¹² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.37.

¹³ 'The majority culture is founded on the dominance of that part of the human soul which can be called the animus - the part of oneself that says, 'I am; I have; I want' - in Martin Buber's terms, that part of the 'I' which regards everything else as 'It', living in a universe comprised of a series of objects grasped and possessed by a process of conceptualisation.' James K. Baxter, "Things and Idols". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/172, Dunedin,

peace of the soul is lost, what can one do but go mad?¹⁴

It is the residual sadness of being shut out from the self-evident majesty of a vibrant country which marks Baxter's work; the exclusion from Eden.¹⁵ Thus the physical vista is dominated by a spiritual alienation which is vaguely threatening. 'Remote the land's heart,' he adjudges, and:

Therefore we turn, hiding our soul's dullness
From that too blinding glass: turn to the gentle
Dark of the human daydream, child and wife...

'Poem in the Matukituki Valley', CP p.86f.

Spiritual disconnection from the land brings fear and an atmosphere of menace which renders human intruders mute.

Men shut within a whelming bowl of hills
Grow strange, say little when they leave their high
Yet buried homesteads. Return there silently
When thunder of night-rivers fills the sky
And giant wings brood over loftily and near.

'The Mountains', CP p.8f.

Pakeha experience is that of standing outside of the natural order, both daunted and attracted by 'His flawed mirror... that too blinding glass'¹⁶, and yet unable to attain harmony or lasting peace - 'a communion/ With what eludes our net'.¹⁷ Baxter recognizes the alienation as a peculiarly Pakeha phenomenon:

¹⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.52.

¹⁵ 'There is nothing Wordsworthian in this young man confronted by the beautiful, almost empty landscapes of his early poems... What bears down with insistence... is the individual aware constantly of his loneliness...' O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.15.

¹⁶ 'Poem in the Matukituki Valley', CP p.86f.

¹⁷ 'Poem in the Matukituki Valley', CP p.86f.

...the land who is the mother of the Maori people, but whom the Pakeha settlers and Government have turned into an old prostitute to be bought and sold.¹⁸

In Baxter's strongly mythological framework¹⁹, such historical betrayal of the land is a source of physical and spiritual disconnection.

...our hills, our forests; the alien sun
stares through silver and green on us; for here
even our fear,
our love loses its focus: the sad cretin
walks abroad in the rotten
hearts of the failing towns.

'Prelude NZ' CP p.16f.

It renders (Pakeha) inhabitants inarticulate and orphaned; a people who are 'in' yet not 'of' the land, sentenced to 'lifelong separate pain'.²⁰ Their fragile civilization is of little consequence:

This gullied mounded earth, tonned
With silence, and the sun's gaze
On a choir of breakers, has outgrown
The pain of love.

'At Akitio' CP p.184f.

But a deep sense of grief and isolation is the spiritual price paid by those who have walked upon but not loved the land; who have ravaged the earth with their 'hard, sod-cutting hands, so

¹⁸ James K. Baxter, "The Young Warriors". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/126, Dunedin,

¹⁹ 'What happened to him, as he said, made sense *only* as myth; life as a journey, with its gamut of checks and incentives, despondency and enlightenment, is what dominates his thought, and finds shape in his poems.' O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.58.

²⁰ 'Travelling to Dunedin', CP, p.366.

like our own'.²¹

3. *Amnesia and Alexithymia*

The word 'alexithymia' is a therapeutic term describing the inability to locate, label, or express emotions.²² Baxter discovers within the collective unconscious of Pakeha a disconnection with history and its consequences which has severely cramped the capacity for emotional and spiritual response. There is a disjunction between the presenting attitude of well-being - 'We antipodeans are an innocent people'²³ - and an altogether darker sub current of 'curious deadness'.²⁴ The cause of this neurotic condition, for Baxter, is a communal amnesia over the history of colonisation, including a disregard for the consequences of the Land Wars.²⁵

Our forgetting is too like amnesia. I think the god of death takes charge of us in spite of our innocence. We are unable wholly to opt out of history.²⁶

But the attempt to shut out responsibility for participation in ambiguous events diminishes the capability for the full range of human existence. It is of course, an ultimately flawed attempt at denial:

By a process like osmosis, like the seeping of water through gravel, the calamities in which we have not participated reach into our dreams... The dead move in their concrete cabins. They want us to weep a little, to let them know we know they have died.²⁷

²¹ 'Travelling to Dunedin', CP, p.366.

²² The term was coined by Dr Peter Sifneos in 1972. See P. Sifneos, "Affect, Emotional Conflict, and Deficit: An Overview," *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 56, (1991).

²³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

²⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.35.

²⁵ 'There are those other corpses that lie under our fat green fields. The corpses of the Land Wars. The three hundred fighting men of Tuwharetoa faced the canon with muskets at Te Ngutu o Te Manu with the same legendary death nimbus as the Spartans at Thermopylae.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

²⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

²⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8f.

In what is perhaps a defining statement for Baxter's perception of the Pakeha condition, he mourns the communal neurosis:²⁸

Suffering can be creative if it finds a voice. But our innocence denies us the privilege of religious suffering. The sterile plastic flower on the tombstone slab signifies an anguish blocked off from self-understanding.²⁹

Thus the amnesia and alexithymia are closely related; the failure to recall historical trauma smothers the emotional and spiritual springs from which flow the waters of life. In Baxter's melancholy view, such poverty of imagination creates 'a culture kept alive by the drug of death.'³⁰ That such wilful ignorance contributes to the black hole at the core of the Pakeha soul is a central tenet of Baxter's contextual understanding of the condition of angst.

The evil which Baxter recognizes in New Zealand, the sense of death, relates back to the New Zealander's failure to develop a living tradition related to his (sic) situation. This lack of history - the 'Promethean sin' - is the cause of his painful sense of estrangement from 'home'.³¹

Isolation is not simply a geographical fact, but a spiritual state: 'But what can a tribesman do when he has no tribe?'³² Disconnection from the land is augmented by dislocation from the past; a lacuna in tradition which breaks a colonial people free from the anchor of their heritage, and leaves them adrift on a sea of anxiety.

4. Accidie³³

²⁸ A contextual interpretation, perhaps, of the traditional Christian understanding of Original Sin: 'The capacity to correlate the domestic with the cosmological is an essential feature of [Baxter's] treatment of the Fall.' James, "Primal Vision" p.36.

²⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.9.

³⁰ 'Dunedin Habits', CP, p.339f.

³¹ James, "Primal Vision" p.46.

³² James K. Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," in *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) p.28.

³³ The conventional spelling 'accidie' is used here, even though Baxter prefers and uses the variant 'acedia'.

The term *accidie* is used by Baxter as a symbol of the emotional and spiritual consequences of separation from land, history, self and God. It is arguably the major theme of both his poetry and the theological reflection which underlies it. *Accidie* represents a kind of contextual 'mark of Cain'; the tangible consequence of the Fall as played out within New Zealand society. While technically a reference to something akin to spiritual sloth, in Baxter's usage '*accidie*' has a much wider frame of reference:

The expressions of anonymity, death, loneliness, silence, suffocation and triviality all fill out the spectrum of *acedia*.³⁴

The cloying 'gradual suffocation' of civilized Pakeha life is a kind of waking death which seeps into the national psyche:

...I will
Define it more precisely: Say, as if
The groaning sound behind the mind stopped
And when we looked there we found the prisoner dead,
His mouth stuffed with rags. This Nobody,
Ourself, remains, a perfect citizen,
Tourist, voter, ice-cream-eater,
Unable ever to wake again.

'Mining Town' CP, p.433f.

Baxter portrays the routines and responsibilities of dutiful life as a fragile protective wall against the free play of more powerful, passionate and creative forces. By submitting to societal consensus and playing out prescribed roles, men and women relinquish the very essence of their humanity.

If you and I were woken suddenly
By the drums of Revolution in the street -
Or suppose the door shot open, and there stood

³⁴ James, "Primal Vision" p.71.

Upright and singing, a young bull fighter

With a skin of rough wine, offering to each of us
Death, sex, hope, - or even just an
Earthquake, making the trees thrash, the roofs tumble,
Calling us loudly to consider God -

Let us admit, with no shame whatsoever,
We are not that kind of people;
We have learnt to weigh each word like an ounce of butter;
Our talent is for anger and monotony -

'The Fear of Change' CP, p.404

It is this numbing of the soul and consequent abdication of passionate encounter which disturbs Baxter most; he describes 'the devil of acedia' as 'the most subtle as well as the most brutal of the masters of Hell', and contends that he wages a 'private war against that spirit'.³⁵ In doing so, he fights an enemy which employs communal consensus and conformity as a putative barrier against the darkness and unpredictability of the collective shadow. Baxter speaks of a 'desacralised, depersonalized, centralized Goliath' which demands 'collective obedience' and 'numbs the soul wherever he touches it'.³⁶

For single vision dies. Spirit and flesh are sundered
In the kingdom of no love. Our stunted passions bend
To serve again familiar social devils.

'Elegy at the Year's End' CP, p.135

In his poetic and theological vision, accidie is a complex and multifaceted condition, worthy of more detailed examination.

³⁵ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.15.

³⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53f.

(a) Dimensions of Accidie

(i) Marriage and Family

Although a participant in the state of marriage himself, Baxter views the strictures of conventional family life as both a product of and contributing to accidie. Nowhere is his cynicism so apparent as in 'Ballad of Calvary Street'; a poem which brilliantly combines faith and domestic culture. In suburban New Zealand, amidst trellises and gnomes, 'National Mum and Labour Dad' find themselves stranded and 'go slowly mad'.

The love they kill won't let them rest,
Two birds that peck in one fouled nest.

Why hammer nails? Why give no change?
Habit, habit clogs them dumb.

'Ballad of Calvary Street' CP, p.213f.

Though warning others of the perils of mythologizing women,³⁷ Baxter seems at times to view the gender with a certain degree of suspicion.³⁸ While he purports to enjoy their sexual power, he is deeply troubled by their submission to domesticity:

Her patience with the children, her sweet breath,
Her durability, her polished nails,
Her voice that never rose into a shout,
Her thrift, her strict obedience to the curfew,
Her sex presented like a box of dice
Each Saturday...

³⁷ See James K. Baxter, "The Virgin and the Temptress," 65-89 in *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967).

³⁸ 'She [woman] becomes the snake-haired Medusa, the wielder of the double-bladed axe; or else the domestic deity, tyrannising from the hearth, emasculating by triviality, imposing a deathlike order upon appetite.' Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.95.

'The Perfect Wife' CP, p.342

The lure of accidie is often associated by Baxter with access to sexual encounter - 'she makes her planned surrender'³⁹ - with the cost being entrapment in domestic captivity. Marriage thus functions as voluntary imprisonment in return for anticipated sexual love; a hope gradually eroded by time:

It seemed they had made a pact
To drown together, impatient of Love's slow
Guttering to death, and what life lacked
For two fettered in wedlock, wild
To wound each other...

'The Surfman's Story' CP, p124f.

The destroyer of love is characterized as 'the kitchen god'; the dark deity of convention who is 'such a strong and permanent principle of order'.

He has no time for the Dusseldorf Venus, the one with the big hips, the mother of civilization, and tells her she is a whore. He is rarely on speaking terms with Dionysus the god of wine. But he has an uneasy truce with Eros, the pretty god of love, as long as he stays well clothed and sings in opera... When love begins to fade and smell of the cemetery it no longer offends his deep sense of propriety.⁴⁰

While a good part of this cosmology reflects Baxter's own battle with inner tensions,⁴¹ it also

³⁹ 'The Minute of Danger', *New Zealand Poetry Year Book*, 1964, p.48.

⁴⁰ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.74.

⁴¹ Oliver says of Baxter, 'He needed the shelter of a domestic stronghold; but he was not committed to domestic life. It pointed up the contrast between a humdrum reality he could not reject and a desirable ideal he could not attain.' Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.97. This is well illustrated by Baxter's weary irony in 'Pig Island Letters':

'Look at the simple caption of success,
The poet as family man,
Head between thumbs at mass, nailing a trolley,
Letting the tomcat in...'

CP p.282.

represents a consistent expression of his pessimistic outlook on suburban New Zealand life as a form of purgatory.

A car, a fridge, a radiogram,
A clean well-fitted diaphragm,
Two-and-a-half children per
Family; to keep out thunder
Insurance policies for each:
A sad glad fortnight at the beach
Each year, when Mum and Dad will bitch
From some old half-forgotten itch -
Turn on the lights! - or else the gas!

'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting' CP, p.396f.

Family life, far from fulfilling its potential as a community of love and acceptance, is a symbol of isolation, emotional distance, dark sub currents, withered passion and private suffering; the visible face of a deep spiritual malaise. To Baxter, it resembles most 'a gradual suffocation'.⁴²

(ii) Materialism

Keith Sinclair pronounced the prevailing religion of New Zealanders to be 'a simple materialism' in which 'pursuit of health and possessions fills more minds than thoughts of salvation'.⁴³ Baxter endorses this perspective, regarding materialism as a form of civil religion:

Sometimes I have said publicly that people in this country worship the Dollar Note,
Respectability and the School Cert exam instead of the Father, the Son and the Holy

⁴² James K. Baxter, 'Mining Town', CP, p.434f.

⁴³ Sinclair, *History of N.Z.* p.288.

Spirit.⁴⁴

In his writing and speaking, 'the dollar note' becomes a cipher for the crippling allegiance to a system which is ultimately dehumanising; 'our frantic pursuit of the dollar note, which is in a sense the god of our civilisation.'⁴⁵ Baxter claims that money 'deadens whatever it touches',⁴⁶ and that it is 'a heavier drug than pot or alcohol'.⁴⁷ Because of this religious overlay, it becomes necessary to desacralise money through a ritual act: 'It would be a significant act to publicly wipe one's arse on a ten dollar bill every New Year's morning'.⁴⁸

Once again it is the spiritual condition, of which materialism is a symptom, which concerns Baxter most. The love of money and hunger for possessions is an ultimately vain attempt to fill an inner void, and one which represents a disordered view of the world.

The majority culture is founded on the dominance of that part of the human soul which can be called the animus - the part of oneself which says, 'I am; I have; I want' - in Martin Buber's terms, that part of the 'I' which regards everything else as 'It', living in a universe comprised of a series of objects grasped and possessed by a process of conceptualisation.⁴⁹

A tributary to accidie, materialism traps its victims in employment where they must sell their souls in order to possess minor rewards.⁵⁰ The effect is one of emotional anaesthesia; a 'hellhole of materialism in which your souls are being put to sleep like pet dogs or cats'.⁵¹

The square eye in the corner of the money dungeon
As a substitute for lives of communication

⁴⁴ James K. Baxter, "Talk to Training College Students". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/180, Dunedin,

⁴⁵ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.44.

⁴⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.44.

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.29.

⁴⁸ James K. Baxter, "A Handbook for the Christian Militant". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/175, Dunedin, 1972.

⁴⁹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁵⁰ 'He [Pharaoh] gives them good houses and many luxuries. In return he buys them and owns them from the crown of their head to the soles of their feet.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

And the noise box jabbering so loud and kind
To deaden the scream at the centre of the mind -

Him and her have had to pay down all but nothing
To get them one world-shaped enormous plush lined coffin

'Ballad of the Junkies and the Fuzz' CP, p.446f.

Baxter speaks of 'the very deep spiritual difficulties' which are the consequence of 'a society as determinedly materialistic as our own'.⁵² The concept of possession is extended into a realm in which it has no currency. The physical accoutrements of life gain an ultimacy which is illegitimate, leading to an 'idolatry of material possessions'.⁵³

But the glass-fronted houses above the bay will supply no ritual, nothing to join the intellect or body to the earth it came from - only TV aerals, trucks of bricks, washing hung out to dry, ice cream cones stacked behind the corner of a shop - the trivia of a culture that has ceased to understand itself.⁵⁴

Pakeha society remains enmeshed in this force field of consumption, 'the fictitious worlds of advertisements for soap powder' which produces 'depersonalisation'.⁵⁵ Only among the young, it seems, is there any hope of some different possibility for human existence:

Many of the young adults I know well, react very sharply against the civilization that says to them - 'A hundred dollars is twice as good as fifty dollars. Your first business in life is to get money and prestige - and pass as many exams as possible, so that you can get more money and prestige.' They vomit up the materialist frame of action that we try to foist on them.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁵² James K. Baxter, "Varsity Talk". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/168, Dunedin,

⁵³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁵⁴ Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.153.

⁵⁵ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁵⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.18.

It is among this tribe that Baxter carries out his experiment in communal living, in an attempt to counteract the conformity of materialism.⁵⁷ Through such 'orthopraxy'⁵⁸ he seeks to open a pathway to renewing the life of the spirit.

(iii) Education

A key element in Baxter's understanding of accidie is that of desacralisation; the process by which men and women are distanced from mythological encounter with the creation. The primary mechanism responsible for achieving this undesirable consequence is identified as education.

Education implants a logical lens in the skull. Whoever looks through that lens can see nothing sacred. The Mass is an event in comparative religion. A Maori tangi is an event in comparative anthropology. Sex is a physical union of parts of the body. Death is a statistical occasion.⁵⁹

While maintaining a positive view of education as such,⁶⁰ Baxter maintains a sharp dualism regarding the character of different types of learning:

There are two types of learning which seem to be mutually exclusive - the first being the discovery of a sacred pattern in natural events; the second the acquisition of the lens of abstract thought, which sees nothing sacred in heaven or on middle earth.⁶¹

⁵⁷ 'It is necessary for us to share our material possessions... If we are to rebuild the sacramental universe our civilisation has shattered to pieces - I see no way of doing it except by sharing the things we possess. Then we are using them as God wishes them to be used.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

⁵⁸ 'Karl Rahner said to us, 'You have orthodoxy. Where is your orthopraxy? Where are your works of mercy and social justice?' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook*.p.37. In reference to his own education and his resistance to the process, Baxter claims: 'I was already unconsciously erecting my defences around the core of primitive experience, that ineducable self which I like to call a dinosaur's egg. Unfortunately the abstract analytical processes which the schools were able to offer me - and ram down my throat, if necessary - have the side-effect of neutralising this kind of experience and making it inaccessible to the conscious mind.' Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.131.

⁶⁰ 'In fact I don't rubbish education.' Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁶¹ Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.132.

His own preference is a romantic one for a non-institutionalised model which is shaped according to the interests of the learner.⁶²

Education is communication - it is learning what you need to know... It could be learning to pray. It could be learning to make love. It could be learning to fix a motorbike. It might come from a book. It might not come from a book.⁶³

In Baxter's thinking there is a distinction between 'Higher Learning' (the educational system) and 'Lower Learning', which he describes as 'learning who one is'.⁶⁴ His own interactions with tertiary institutions in particular were ambiguous and produced in him cynicism. He resolutely polarised formal education and that which was to be gained through more unorthodox means:

A female medical student taught me another kind of knowledge in her Castle Street lodgings... God also, whom I had not met till then, revealed Himself to me one day when I had reached the middle of a disused railway tunnel, in the grip of a brutal hangover. But was any of this a necessary part of the Higher Learning? It is hard to say. Aphrodite, Bacchus and the Holy Spirit were my teachers, but the goddess of good manners and examination passes withheld her smile from me.⁶⁵

A related and significant critique of the educational system which Baxter makes is in regard to its conservative function in indoctrinating citizens for future conformity. Because the formal system of education is generated by a society cut off from spiritual qualities such as sharing and communal love, it simply reinforces the pervading accidie which diminishes human existence.

When I say that the educational system is de-sacralised, I do not mean that religious instruction is necessary or even desirable. I mean that schools, or classes in schools,

⁶² 'What kind of education would I have preferred? Perhaps - till ten years old, on a farm in the South Island mountains or the Urewera country, learning to handle a horse and a dog and a gun; then, for a year or two, during puberty, in a Maori pa; then perhaps on the coastal boats... Once could still have learned to read and write.' Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.137.

⁶³ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁶⁴ James K. Baxter, 'Essay on the Higher Learning', pp.61-64 in *The Spike*, quoted in J. E. Weir, ed., *Collected Poems: James K. Baxter*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.xxiii.

⁶⁵ James K. Baxter, 'Essay on the Higher Learning', p.xxii.

have insurmountable difficulty in generating a true community spirit, when home life is not communal - I mean, there are no guests sleeping on mattresses on the floors of the homes the children come from - and the aims of the society at large are narrowly acquisitive and individualistic.⁶⁶

Education is thus expressive and reproductive of the soul-sick community which it represents. In the later stages of Baxter's theological thought, when socio-political issues become for him vital to interpreting experience, he regards schools of every sort as controlling, oppressive and dehumanising.⁶⁷ They function to reinforce a materialistic worldview which contains structured injustice.

Teachers do this because they are slaves of a highly dishonest society. They are employed, directly or indirectly, by the hard middle class core of that society to ensure that the children grow up with the same fantasies and prejudices as the parents.⁶⁸

Education does not have the power to awake people from their state of accidie because it is itself deeply enmeshed in a structured indifference to the deeper currents of life, humanity and spirituality.

(iv) Conformity

The third member of Baxter's unholy trinity is that of 'respectability';⁶⁹ a restrictive template which engenders conformity and strips the 'natural man' of passion. Middle-class sanction produces 'bourgeois neurosis':

[T]he edge of falseness, the thin fog of complacency, the intellectual blindness of a

⁶⁶ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁶⁷ 'Schools are institutions. The educational system itself can justly be regarded as a gigantic institution. It is centralised, desacralised, and in a large measure depersonalised.' , Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁶⁸ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁶⁹ ' If we have to go, because we offend the idols of the majority culture - money, respectability, education - then I suppose we will have to go. I try to avoid offending more than I can help. I realise idols are very dear to those who possess them. Unfortunately, in the towns, where the effect of these idols is omnipresent, I find my soul gets exhausted, I lose my joy, I find it intensely difficult to meditate.' Baxter, "Things and Idols".

person who has forgotten who he is - the extreme vulnerability to the devil of boredom.⁷⁰

A materialist society clings to cultural values which both represent and reinforce the common view of that which is acceptable.⁷¹ In the process, those who differ from the norm are duly demonised.

The problem is that the majority culture has its graven images - work, cleanliness, chastity, tidy clothes, polite speech, and sometimes church-going. Some of them carry a moral connotation. Some do not. But if we go away from these idols, then we belong to the devil's party, and no good can be expected of us.⁷²

Baxter is himself a transgressor of national conformity - 'a coarse man by intention'⁷³ - and so stands outside the bounds of the civic community. He speaks of the inevitability of this 'in a society as determinedly materialistic as our own', lamenting that those who transgress the social code 'get hurt and exhausted by continual clashes with the expectations of our neighbours'.⁷⁴ Those who are exiled to the wrong side of the fence through their unwillingness to accept a rigid conformity are viewed as a threat to the civic order.

To put it bluntly - how do you yourselves regard the boy who drives his motorbike too fast, or the girl who seems to be quite unaware of the dangers of sex? Do you regard them as a kind of plague? Or do you regard them as enemies who endanger an otherwise satisfactory order?⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

⁷¹ 'We have to ask ourselves what we mean by - "being good". Do we mean - being a neat child, somebody easy to control, somebody who'll create no disturbances... ?' James K. Baxter, "The Lion and the Lamb". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/165, Dunedin,

⁷² Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁷³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26. Baxter notes: 'The most anxious critics see me as a threat - but not just me or the Jerusalem community, the whole universe is a threat to them, with its earthquakes, storms, death, sickness, failure, evil, its succession of unpredictable, uncontrollable disasters. If I died tomorrow, their anxiety would still remain.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.13.

⁷⁴ Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

⁷⁵ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.22.

Conformity is another aspect of accidie; the 'death by inches'⁷⁶ which besets humanity when divorced from creation and creator:

A man's work becomes a Persian wheel
Where he goes round and round like a blind camel.
A woman's house becomes her cage
Where she sits barren, plagued by the noonday demon.

'Works and Money', CP p.236.

It is not that people set out intending to choose captivity, but by osmosis of the prevailing culture, 'Men and women can sell themselves in subtle ways, for security, and poison their lives in so doing'.⁷⁷ Common wisdom teaches the 'secret of survival, to be patient,/ suffer, and shut no doors', until dutiful citizens 'Nourished at compliant breasts, wish only/ To drink with friends, own a launch'.⁷⁸ At times Baxter himself has been tempted by compromise:⁷⁹

...I can smoke, type letters, wind

The cuckoo clock, drink lukewarm coffee
In my scrubbed house - I have accepted God's bribe,

To be content with not being dead,
His singing eunuch.

'The Bargain', CP p.421.

A key issue in the triumph of conformity is a neurotic desire for safety, and avoidance of risk.

⁷⁶ James K. Baxter, 'Pig Island Letters', CP, p.283.

⁷⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁷⁸ James K. Baxter, 'At Hokianga', CP, p.182.

⁷⁹ He confesses: 'For the sake of communal good - the order of a household, work, conjugal tenderness and patience, the care of children - I have let the sea flow away from me and not tried to follow it.' Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.153f.

The kitchen god embodies the crude, unshaped conscience of the tribe. He is pre-eminently a god of safety... Many proverbs come from his simple wisdom - *A stitch in time saves nine; Waste not and want not; Good walls make good neighbours; Marry in haste and repent at leisure; There's no smoke without a fire...*⁸⁰

To this end, children are closely guarded and indoctrinated so that they might uphold received orthodoxy.⁸¹ All social agencies, including the church, promote among young people adherence to a conservative code.

Their spiritual advisers - that is, parents and teachers - have said to the boys - 'Get a short back and sides. Get a good job - that is, a job with a good salary. Dress neatly. Speak politely. Play football. And go to Church if you can.' And they've said to the girls - 'Dress neatly. Speak politely. Above all, don't swear. Get a new perm when your hair looks untidy. Keep your virginity till you're married - or if you can't manage that, at least make sure you're on the Pill. And go to Church if you can.' Nothing about love. Nothing about mercy. Nothing about the sharing of material goods.⁸²

In the interests of maintaining such social order, the authorities tell lies 'for the sake of a supposed safety'. But this is of no help to adolescents struggling to find their way:

The practice of lying, for whatever reason, leads eventually to a crippling deadness of spirit. By lying, we cease to be able to help them, mistake bogs for solid ground, and lose our own way in the dark.⁸³

The end result is a generation who are 'not free'; who have 'not chosen to be where they are or

⁸⁰ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.73. Baxter frequently lists such litanies of aphorisms or qualities associated with acceptable behaviour; e.g. 'The bourgeois family man - ape in an overcoat, donkey with a crown of thorns - will always have the burden of maintaining most of the values of civilised life. His necessary virtues - amiability, patience, prudence, punctuality, whimsicality, thrift and caution - enable him to make many difficult adjustments and deep the rudder of the boat steady in a rough sea...' Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

⁸¹ 'When children grow up and come into their teens, the elders - and I include myself in that category - make a gigantic effort to persuade them that what they had done before because we made them do it - like being hard-working, polite, chaste, clean in their habits - they should now continue to do of their own accord.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.24.

⁸² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.19.

⁸³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.36.

do what they are doing'.⁸⁴

Lack of freedom is regarded as a vital issue for Baxter.⁸⁵ He regards freedom as a precondition for response to God or neighbour, and the absence of it is a sign of the great gulf between Pakeha experience and harmonious spiritual existence.⁸⁶

But the terrible aspect of our lack of freedom is the fact that we are not free to act communally, when communities are everywhere ceasing to exist, and only a desacralised, depersonalised, centralised Goliath remains to demand our collective obedience.⁸⁷

Baxter is ill at ease in a setting in which he discovers a 'Calvinist ethos which underlies our determinedly secular culture like the bones of a dinosaur buried in a suburban garden plot - *work is good; sex is evil; do what you're told and you'll be all right; don't dig too deep into yourself*'.⁸⁸

Lack of personal freedom is further limited by the social order which enslaves workers and diminishes their humanity.⁸⁹ Thus the conformist citizen is bound by compliance with a system which makes no place for dignity or conscience.

Obedience, politeness, and the normal quota of work required: a boss can justly ask for these. More than this is slavery. When a man bows his head and licks the boss's arse, out of fear of losing his job for some other reasons than incompetence or incapacity, then his joy in work leaves him and misery takes its place. The food he eats tastes like sawdust in his mouth. He cannot sleep happily with his woman. He has

⁸⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.36.

⁸⁵ He is careful to qualify what he means by freedom: 'If I say that contemporary society is unfree, I do not mean simply that one can't do what one feels like. Communal freedom is never absolute. To be free from the technological and military obsessions of modern society would mean only to enter a gap, a limbo, an area of unrelated personal isolation, if there were not also the freedom to co-operate with and relate to other human beings...' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

⁸⁶ Baxter laments 'a culture that cannot understand itself because it dare not accept its own spiritual strangulation and need of mercy'. Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.48.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

⁸⁸ Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.125.

become a slave.⁹⁰

Marriage and family, materialism, education and conformity are all expressions of accidie; the spiritual desert which lies in the heart of Pakeha existence.

5. Poverty and Injustice

It may seem surprising that Baxter should develop the theme of poverty in his theological schema, given the context of the comparatively affluent late sixties / early seventies period.⁹¹ But while poverty has an essential economic element, for Baxter it is a broader concept, more in keeping with the biblical term *anawim*, and often featuring social exclusion.⁹² He uses a threefold analysis of poverty within New Zealand.

Three kinds of poverty-

nga pohara: the poor;

nga mokai: the fatherless

nga raukore: the trees who have had their leaves and branches stripped away...

But it is nga raukore, according to Maori scripture, to whom God opens the Kingdom of Heaven.⁹³

It is this last category that Baxter feels special affinity for, the spiritual orphans of a dysfunctional civic community. They are the ones he counts as the treasure of his Jerusalem community.

⁸⁹ Baxter adopts Marxist analysis of the social order in the latter period of his writing: '[T]he Marxist critic is often the most incisive one...' Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

⁹⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹¹ Baxter is aware that: 'The country is affluent. Yet most of the people live in anxiety and some are destitute', Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹² 'Again and again the affluent Western white middle class Christian speaks of the poor as These People. "How are we to help These People?" The penniless, the squalid, the drug-users, the homosexuals, the urban street gangs, the workless and those who flee from work, the alcoholics, the jailbirds, the mental hospital patients, the lonely and despairing old - How are we to help them and make them like us?' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21.

God protects them because they have no other protector. It is them who our critics urge me to expel from the community - the sick, the unemployable, the habitually vagrant, and all those who are preoccupied with the science of being and not the science of doing... But I will never take their advice, If nga raukore were pushed out, the blessing of God would go away with them, and the fountain of the community would be blocked up with stones.⁹⁴

Poverty, thus understood, has a dual significance (as it often has in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures). On the one hand it is a crippling social evil, and thus a call to the establishment of justice:

How can I live in a country where the towns are made like coffins
And the rich are eating the flesh of the poor
Without even knowing it?

'Ode to Auckland', CP p.600.

But there is also an element of spiritual openness which is both the consequence and blessing of the condition of poverty. Thus Baxter can make the seemingly outrageous claim that 'The poor are freer than the rich',⁹⁵ and argue that 'Poverty is the door broken in the wall between man and man and man and God'.⁹⁶ In this view, 'Poverty is availability',⁹⁷ especially the voluntary poverty undertaken by Baxter himself. There is a certain idealising of the condition, but it is based on the concept that poverty enables a detachment which restores the possibility of true human existence.⁹⁸

Baxter is not blind, however, to the structural problems of a society which creates poverty,

⁹⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21f.

⁹⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45. This comment is a reflection on Baxter's time in India, where poverty made a deep impact upon him. Frank McKay reports: 'His wife told me that after India writing was no longer the main thing in his life. His chief concern became people and how to help them.' McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.175.

⁹⁶ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.16.

⁹⁸ Trevor James comments: 'Already the theme can be seen to emerge: that the poor and lonely are open to God and to one another in such a way that there has come to exist, at least potentially, a community of finitude, of loss, which discloses truth and value for those who are able to see.' James, "Primal Vision" p.97.

and in the latter stages of his writing develops an increasing intolerance of social injustice. The interpretive framework he uses for discussion of inequity and oppression within New Zealand society is that of the biblical account of the exodus.⁹⁹ The domestic economy is portrayed as a contemporary representation of Egypt under the Pharaohs, with the condition of the majority being that of blind slavery.

'You are free men under me,' says Pharaoh to his overseers. He persuades them that they are not his slaves. He gives them good houses and many luxuries. In return he buys them and owns them from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet.¹⁰⁰

It is the covert nature of this oppressive system which makes it most iniquitous. Although the 'slaves' are compliant, their captivity is none the less real. An extended passage will demonstrate Baxter's social analysis:

Four inventions of Pharaoh: destitution in the midst of riches, the brothel, the slave market and the whip. Destitution does not have to be absolute. A slave's dole for the workless will keep them alive so that they will creep back, when they are needed, to lick the boss's arse. The brothel does not have to be obvious. Men and women can sell themselves in subtle ways, for security, and poison their lives in so doing. A moderate pornography is part of the atmosphere of Egypt. As long as women are undressing in front of the cameras for money, Pharaoh can have a peaceful mind. There is no part of human behaviour that his money cannot buy.

The whip does not have to be visible. Fear of the loss of material security is a whip that coils around the bowels and the brain. The slave market is omnipresent. It is most powerful at the intellectual level where a man employed by Pharaoh dare not speak the truth for fear of losing his job or his promotion.

The pyramids are an invisible structure. They rest on the backs of the people.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ This is of particular interest given the parallel use of the motif in South American expressions of Liberation Theology; a phenomenon which will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

From this it is clear how alienation, accidie and oppression work in concert to establish the conditions of enslavement and docility.¹⁰² The Pakeha system, without which 'the pakeha is a crab without its shell',¹⁰³ is based on injustice and so replicates injustice throughout the community. The unredeemed community is destined to remain productive of poverty, exclusion and inequity.

6. *Racism*

Baxter's identification of a racist strand in the domestic society is unexceptional by present standards, but was somewhat more prophetic in the context of his times.¹⁰⁴ According to the poet, 'A hidden racism is part of the pattern of the majority culture'.¹⁰⁵ Once again, this shadow on the national psyche is both symptomatic and a product of the deeper alienation and amnesia of Pakeha concerning a dubious history. The illegitimate seizure of land smoulders in Maori imagination,¹⁰⁶ and demands some act of repentance on the part of Pakeha:

I had explained to Nga Tama Toa that I came with them fasting, because - 'Kua whakanui te puku o te pakeha' - because the pakeha's belly had grown big with swallowing the land; and since I am pakeha, this act of spiritual reparation is necessary.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² 'He [Pharaoh] does not tell his slaves that worklessness and anxiety and near-starvation are part of the essential structure of the pyramids.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰³ James K. Baxter, *A Walking Stick for an Old Man* (Wellington: CMW Print. 1972) p.14.

¹⁰⁴ In a relatively conservative moment, Baxter qualifies the charge of racism thus: 'To my mind, there is a real separation between Maori and European, the causes of which are essentially cultural rather than racial, though the ignorant may seem them in cultural terms, and indeed part of a culture may be the mythical attitudes held by an individual towards his own and other races.' James K. Baxter, "The Maori View of Life and Death," 54-66 in *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: NZ Tablet, 1969). p.54.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14. The racism in New Zealand society, while evident, is cloaked in secrecy; Baxter speaks of 'the facade of vague hypocrisy that covers inter-racial and inter-cultural relations in this country.' Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

¹⁰⁶ 'I think many Maori people will not be content until there are massive reparations both in land and in money for the wholesale seizures of the Land Wars. That wound has never healed in the Maori mind.' Baxter, "The Young Warriors". Note also Baxter's revolutionary recommendation: 'Let the people who need the land take it and use it. In so doing they should accept Maori leadership, because the land was taken by the capitalist Pharaoh from the Maori people during and after the Land Wars.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

It is also grounds for Maori militancy,¹⁰⁸ and Baxter supported the early emergence of this within Nga Tama Toa. Not only have the people been deprived of their land by a government 'that devours the Maori lands like a dog gnawing a loaf under a table',¹⁰⁹ but their culture is also under pressure from racist policies.

The Maori members of Nga Tama Toa, who have been through the pakeha schools, know very well that they have been robbed of their Maoritanga by a system of education which is used consciously or unconsciously by the Government as an instrument to exterminate the Maori culture. This breeds the rage that comes to people who are being robbed of their cultural identity.¹¹⁰

Baxter laments this discrimination, in which Maori 'are having the Maoritanga squeezed out of them drop by drop, as a man squeezes a lemon'. This is done under the guise of integration, which is in effect 'a ruthless and inexorable assimilation'.¹¹¹ Losing Maoritanga is equally as devastating as the loss of land, because it weakens the ability of the victims to resist, and results in 'spiritual castration'.¹¹² The education system in particular plays an instrumental role in the dispossession of Maori.

Te Whiti once said - 'Don't send your children to the pakeha schools. They'll come back and steal the shoes off your feet. And they have often fulfilled this prophecy, through the Maori Affairs Department, squeezing the last remnants of land from Te Morehu, as a cloth nearly dry is squeezed in the wringer to get out the last drops of water.'¹¹³

There is no doubt in Baxter's mind that racism has produced a situation of genuine inequality

¹⁰⁸ 'The Maori revolution is not something that might one day happen. It has been burning like a slow fuse ever since the Land Wars.' Baxter, *Walking Stick*.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁰ Baxter, *Walking Stick*.

¹¹¹ Baxter, *Walking Stick*.

¹¹² 'If "social adjustment" means the loss of the hard core of militancy, then adjustment is spiritual castration. The present labour of the pakeha churches, pakeha schools and pakeha jails, is to castrate spiritually the Maori boys and girls.' Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.7.

¹¹³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.20.

for Maori,¹¹⁴ but a simple redressing of the balance will be inadequate to restore what has been lost.

Equality is a bus that the Polynesian never quite catches. But is an equal seat at a table much use when the table is loaded with rotten kai? ...a full share in the power structure, if it were obtainable in a secretly racist society, would also mean the status of a well-paid slave in the pyramid structure of a department or a business firm.¹¹⁵

Baxter suggests that assimilation be resisted, explaining: 'I would prefer to see them tear down the pakeha ladder and put a Maori ladder in its place'. This is because 'The pakeha ladder is worm-eaten. It may even crumble under its own weight'.¹¹⁶ Achievement within an oppressive system is only possible through absorbing the tainted values which underpin it.¹¹⁷

Pakeha themselves are hobbled by their own prejudice.¹¹⁸ Enmeshed in materialist and desacralised poverty, 'The pakeha lacks the strength to overturn his (sic) own money-centred culture and return to a communal base.'¹¹⁹ The only hope for salvation lies in learning from a resurgent Maoritanga:

In a society incapable of understanding itself, on account of its obsessive attachment to material security, it is a section of the Maori population who are teaching their fellow New Zealanders what it is to be free men. There is still time for the lesson to be learned.¹²⁰

In an oft-repeated theme, Baxter characterises Pakeha as the younger brother (*tuakana*) in

¹¹⁴ 'In the economic sphere the crucial test of whether or not racial prejudice exists in this country turns on whether a Maori finds it harder (given equal qualifications) to get a good job than a European does. My experience in many towns leads me to the definite conclusion that it is in fact harder.' Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.60.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.9.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.10.

¹¹⁷ 'The European who has approached the Maori, and offered him in ignorance the benefits of a technological culture, may frequently have resembled the fox in the fable who had lost his tail in a trap, and who tried to persuade the other foxes to have their tails lopped off too.' Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.55.

¹¹⁸ 'In his heart of hearts the average pakeha knows that he is weak, lonely and stupid... The vigorous communal life of a marae brings his weakness home to him.' Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

¹¹⁹ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

¹²⁰ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

relation to Maori, counselling 'the kind of humility that may enable us to see ourselves as learners rather than as teachers'.¹²¹ The spiritual aridity of Pakeha culture stands to be immeasurably enriched through renewed relationship with Maori.

We pakehas have to bow the head and learn from our elder brother. Then the water may begin to flow in our dry watercourses.¹²²

In the absence of such humility and partnership, pakeha are condemned to remain in 'that more or less anti-communal secular abyss which constitutes our towns and suburbs, and to which we Europeans are thoroughly used as we are used to many other evils'.¹²³

7. Conclusion

Pakeha spiritual reality is conditioned by a fundamental flaw in the structure of being. While this is certainly understood by Baxter to be a universal condition consequent upon human existence (in theological categories, the Fall),¹²⁴ he identifies the unique characteristics which constitute the experience in Aotearoa-New Zealand. In this interpretation, it becomes a kind of fundamental angst; a spiritual and physical isolation from the land and its narrative history, which in turn generates fear, anxiety and loneliness. Pakeha turn away from the void ('hiding our soul's dullness'¹²⁵), finding false shelter in a socially constructed world of materialism, convention and structured injustice. The spiritual cost of dissociation and amnesia is enormous, with the various forms of accidie constituting symptoms of the deeper malaise.

Already, in categorising Pakeha angst, Baxter has begun to suggest that redemption lies in the

¹²¹ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.55.

¹²² Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". Note also, 'The Maori is the elder brother; the European is the younger one - at least in the matter of a grasp of communal values. Let us not try ignorantly to reverse the roles.' Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.55.; and 'Yet, if he acknowledged his weakness, instead of disguising it with aggressive racism, he might find his true role, in the loving relationship of a younger brother to an elder brother who has a vastly wider range of social intelligence.' Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

¹²³ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.59.

¹²⁴ Baxter acknowledges the traditional teaching of the Fall, dividing its consequences into moral effects - 'the proneness to sin which affects the whole of the human family' - and involuntary evil - 'various forms of sickness or incapacity and death itself'. James K. Baxter, James K. Baxter, "The Church and the Alcoholic," 18-40 in *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: NZ Tablet, 1969) p.18.

¹²⁵ 'Poem in the Matukituki Valley' CP p.86f.

restoration of that which has been lost. Given the context of Aotearoa-New Zealand, this will include reconciliation with the land, with history, and with Maori. Only then can a sacred sense of identity, harmony and communal belonging flourish, and genuine justice be established. It is to Baxter's positive theological reconstruction we now turn.

Chapter Three: Hiruharama - Return to Innocence

*If that Jerusalem which is unshakeable friendship
with God has not been established first in the heart,
how can the objective Jerusalem of communal charity
be built so as not to fall?*¹

1. Introduction

The complex relationship of Pakeha to the land is felt by Baxter as a fundamental violation of relationship which leads to separation. The consequence is one of exclusion, full of resonance with the Biblical story of creation in which transgression leads to the experience of being shut out of the primeval garden. Such spiritual and physical isolation can only be met by a corresponding move to re-establish relationship; to restore a lost harmony with the natural world. Baxter's personal longing for partnership with creation is universalised and mythologised to echo the deeper human quest for atonement and redemption. The land of Aotearoa has suffered an assault which Baxter renders sexual in connotation, and the resulting shame of participation deprives the colonists and their progeny of ease or peace. As with Adam and Eve exiled from Eden, the Pakeha heart is restless as it longs for that which is lost.

While it is possible to trace the poet's utopian longing from his earliest years, it is the journey to Jerusalem which marks for him a personal pilgrimage toward redemption. Here is the attempt to re-engage with creation as a means of reconciliation. Baxter seeks the ultimately impossible return to innocence through a deliberate act of ascetic relinquishment, hoping thereby to purge his own soul, but more importantly perhaps, to also thereby offer a vicarious way forward by means of a symbolic and prophetic act. In his moments of blissful achievement of union with nature, and in his much more common realisation of its constant distance from him, Baxter expresses a spirituality of the land which is deeply influenced by both Maori and mystical traditions. His life and reflection suggest that any Christian theology

¹ Inscription on frontpages by Baxter, *Jerusalem Sonnets*.

which is to be of relevance must be grounded in relationship with the localised natural world which in some sense generates it.

This chapter examines Baxter's journey toward the land, and its significance for the development of a contextual theology. The means of doing so will be to investigate a number of indicative themes which recur in Baxter's work.

2. *Paradise Lost*

The most obvious and universal of analogies used by Baxter is that of the Fall. The biblical story results in banishment of humankind from the primeval garden and subsequent estrangement from their former state of harmony and innocence. This myth speaks for Baxter of the universal human condition in which:

...the Fall has flattened us
And rammed us in the grit...

'A Ballad for the Men of Holy Cross', CP 338

For Baxter, the Fall is not simply an affirmation of orthodox Christian belief however. It is an element of his own experience which he feels keenly, and which the theological framework of Catholicism provides mythological scaffolding for. His early idyll of childhood, which he often characterises as Edenic in character, is chastened by an inner sadness. That despair of spirit is caused by the simultaneous desire to be at one with nature, and a sense of unbridgeable separation from it.² In his own analysis, the general sense of sadness came from an early experience of grief that rose ultimately from the loss of Eden.³

While longing for 'the garden and the talking water / Where once a child walked and

² Trevor James discerns within Baxter a 'note of fear of an unnamed menace from the creation' which is 'an essential element of estrangement from it. However, there is more than fear in estrangement from creation. There is also the simple face of difference that prevents man from ever spanning the gap of consciousness that divides him from the inanimate - or purely animal - creation.' James, "Primal Vision" p.39.

³ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.46.

wondered' ('Virginia Lake', CP 74), he is forced to reconcile himself with the 'odour of mortality' ('Haast Pass', CP 62f.). The childhood paradise is hidden beyond a veil of indistinct memory and remains inaccessible: 'But I remember the bay that never was / And stand like stone and cannot turn away' ('The Bay', CP 44f.).

Very early in his career as a poet, and preceding his overt appropriation of Christian faith, Baxter is using the biblical language of the Fall to express his intuition of exile from the natural order. Thus he locates his 'labyrinthine grief' as awakened by the urge for 'the undestroyed / Fantastic Eden of a waking dream' ('Virginia Lake CP 74). He mourns that 'Time slew the first Adam / In me' ('Temple Basin', CP75). And yet he hopes for 'Leisure to stroll and see Him unafraid / Who walked with Adam once in the green shade' ('To My Father', CP65f.). There, beyond reach, lies the:

...perpetual day
Where the bronze horses standing in a field
Lean on the wind and graze the hours away
Eden yet green for them and earth their shield.

'Prometheus', CP35

The sense of lost innocence and yet the subsequent hunger for it is an abiding theme in Baxter's life and work; one which springs from his inner conflict but which he takes to be a universal characteristic of the human condition. Christian mythology provides for him the symbols and language to give voice to it.

A significant element of redemption, in Baxter's understanding, is the return to a state of primeval innocence. While he is for the most part resigned to the impossibility of this within history, there lurks within his imagination an unquenchable desire to possess it.⁴

Yet some have said (not fools, nor ruled by money)

⁴ The ambiguity of this attitude is noted by James: 'In that it is estranged, a theological unease is evident and the redemptive possibilities with the creation are forever qualified. In that a relation still remains, the creation abounds in symbols which penetrate the psyche and it is present as a reality essential to man's wholeness. ' James, "Primal Vision" p.77.

Beyond this dying world and the prison house
Of Purgatory, a land lies

Lovely for human eyes, where smashed love, broken vows,
Are healed again. Water must
Exist (they say) to answer thirst;
Our thirst is great. That second Paradise
We measure by the first.

'The Town under the Sea', CP 253

He finds within himself (and by implication, within humanity) the stunted core of what he describes as 'natural man':

...that is, in theological terms, the fallen Adam who remembers, as if in a dream, his first state. He endorses the dying words of Dylan Thomas: 'I want to go back to the Garden of Eden.'⁵

This contributes to a dualistic schema in which Baxter contrasts natural (or bohemian) man with 'bourgeois man', a creature subject to such neuroses as:

- the edge of falseness, the thin fog of complacency, the intellectual blindness of a person who has forgotten who he is - the extreme vulnerability to the devil of boredom.⁶

The natural man is the despoiled vestige of humanity's highest end; the bourgeois man the sinful compromise with life outside of Eden. The artistic life is a means of nurturing the natural man, and a sign of hope to a disinterested society.⁷ Baxter therefore interprets his own creative endeavours as being theologically significant. His struggle to reclaim that which is

⁵ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

⁶ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

⁷ Doyle comments: 'Memory of Eden gives the natural man his consciousness of himself as man-beast, and his drive to rebel against the society which otherwise encourages all that is basest in humanity, particularly inertia and indifference. Acedia is the dread affliction to be fought.' Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.92.

primitive and primal within him is part of a crusade to remind a drugged population of its forgotten potential:

Men are sleepwalkers by nature. It is part of the result of the Fall of Adam and Eve. We can live for years without knowing we are alive... I think a poet is concerned to record, for himself mainly, but also for others, those rare moments when he is alive and awake.⁸

3. *Pakeha Exile*

The universal nature of exile from Eden does not blind Baxter to the local expression of it within New Zealand. Through all his writing there is an underlying dis-ease which is generated by a strange remoteness of the land of Aotearoa and Pakeha exile from it.

The vastness and inhuman quality of our inland plateaus and those wastes of water that surround us, like a house that will never be lived in, are likely to make our best landscape poems death-poems.⁹

We live under the stare of 'the alien sun'¹⁰ cowering from a majesty which is as much threatening as inviting: Baxter claims 'This earth was never ours'¹¹, and that it is a 'country made for angels, not for men'¹². The settlers are unable to settle. A direct consequence of their own assault on the land is an alienation from it.¹³ 'What has my country done,' asks Baxter,

That she should be

⁸ James K. Baxter, 'Writing and Existence', pp.16-19 in *Education*, August 1963. Quoted in Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.72.

⁹ James K. Baxter, "Poetry in New Zealand," *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand* 2, (1946): p.113.

¹⁰ James K. Baxter, 'Prelude NZ', CP p.17.

¹¹ James K. Baxter, 'Haast Pass', CP p.62f.

¹² James K. Baxter, 'Ferry from Lyttelton' CP p.571.

¹³ 'Our pioneer fathers while laying waste the bushland wiped out also the spiritual flora and fauna of Polynesian animism...' James K. Baxter, 'Fire and Anvil' p. 30. Charles Doyle notes that Baxter felt that Pakeha had failed to make a home in the natural environment: '...the land remaining a "cold threshold land" still overshadowed by "the weight of an earlier and prehistoric isolation." Brooding nature is felt as indifferent or hostile, ground of man's suffering and defeat.' Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.90.

A land without a sun
Beside a polar sea.

'Winter Morning' CP 43

Doyle notes that in Baxter's understanding, the primal Edenic harmony with the earth is corrupted in colonial settlement. Rather than being a sympathetic environment, '...New Zealand's natural environment was experienced by the pakeha intruder as remote, impersonal, indifferent, an obstacle to his material possession of the land.'¹⁴

Because of the desire to profit from and master the land, Pakeha are condemned to living in alienation from it; exiled as it were from the healing balm of reconciliation. James notes that for Baxter there is some interplay between the notion of the Fall and the specific circumstances of Pakeha settlement:

...the estrangement imposed by sheer distance from 'home' is a 'Second Fall'.
Compared with the Polynesian's rootedness in the land, his developed theology that is intimately related to the environment, the European is alien, weak, and feeble.¹⁵

Baxter's somewhat romantic view (which at times comes close to the myth of the 'noble savage') is that tribal and animistic societies such as Maori are more easily able to 'inhabit' the land because of their sacral connection with it.

It turns perhaps on the ancient bond - *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* - which a Naga tribesman may understand better than a diplomat of the United Nations, who, in the person of his forefathers, tore out the communal vision of those who love the sacred earth in order to achieve the knowledge of technological power which does not love but uses her, and remains in itself barren.¹⁶

In this representative statement, we find the substance of Baxter's complaint about Pakeha

¹⁴ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.90.

¹⁵ James, "Primal Vision" p.35.

¹⁶ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

alienation from the land; it is primarily due to a lack of sacral connection to the earth, and a consequent utilitarian approach to creation. The settlers view land as a means to an end, and so are willing to scarify and burn it in the interests of productivity.¹⁷ While to Pakeha this represents an acceptable trade-off, for Maori it is an assault on the life-giving mother; the equivalent of a sexual assault which can only be responded to through lament:

They have taken the piupiu from the body of the land
Baring those wild timid limbs and thighs

Not in love, but in order
To see her as a thing. The crooked tree

On the cliff face is an old woman mourning
At the tangi of her daughter.

'Tangi', CP 449

Through their animism¹⁸, Maori feel a connection to creation which is denied to the majority of Pakeha. In Baxter's understanding, they are closer to the redemptive Edenic state than the colonists in their 'civilised' settlements could ever be.

Perhaps the Maoris, to whom many references are made in these pages, attributing spiritual powers to the Wilderness, refusing to fell a tree until the deities of the bush had been propitiated, were wiser than their European successors. The springs of thought and feeling did not dry up in them, and they have remained to a large degree

¹⁷ The founding fathers with their guns and bibles,
Botanist, whaler, added bones and names
To the land, to us a bridle
As if the id were a horse: the swampy towns
Like dreamers that struggle to wake,

Longing for the poet's truth
And the lover's pride.

James K. Baxter, 'New Zealand (for Monte Holcroft)', CP 275f.

¹⁸ The term 'animism' is used by Baxter and will be employed here, though 'primal religion' is the preferred term in contemporary discourse.

unruled by the stiff hands of a clock. A very few Pakehas also - fishermen, deer-cullers, back-country shepherds, gold prospectors - have established a true relation to the Wilderness and been able to inhabit the country they were born in.¹⁹

The secularised view of the universe which is promulgated through the Pakeha education system, strips life of its mystery and meaning. Those formed within it are cut off from life-giving connection with their natural surroundings.²⁰ The functional orientation toward creation causes a clouding and distortion of the soul, and so may be regarded as a consequence of the Fall.²¹ The loss of sacrality is the fundamental cause of Pakeha abuse of and alienation from the natural world.

Well - we all live in a house God made for us - this earth with its rivers and trees and mountains and oceans. And we cut down the trees for no good reason, and fill the rivers with sludge, and destroy through greed the fishing beds of the ocean and carve up the mountains to make roads for tourists who will give us money. We ruin the ecology of the world because of our frantic pursuit of the dollar note, which is in a sense the god of our civilisation.²²

It is not surprising, then, that for Baxter the road toward restoration of harmony lies in the reclamation of the intended and natural relationship between humanity and the surrounding world. For Pakeha, as we shall see later in this chapter, this involves learning from Maori an orientation to life and land.

4. *Bridging the Unbridgeable*

The starting point for understanding Baxter's theological orientation, therefore, consists of a sophisticated interpretation of the consequences of the Fall for humanity. That mythic event

¹⁹ James K. Baxter, *New Zealand in Colour* (Wellington: AH & AW Reed 1961) p.2.

²⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.37.

²¹ 'Certain destructive and irrational tendencies in the minds of modern people rise up because they have neglected to keep a sacred relationship with the world of nature.' James K. Baxter, "Notes on the Goodness of the World". Unpublished Catechetical Material, Part 3, Dunedin, 1967.

²² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.44.

explains the tragic distancing and disharmony of existence, the universal character of which is accentuated in Pakeha experience and felt acutely by the poet himself. The window of hope in such a bleak universe is provided for Baxter by the conviction that the Fall has not been absolute; that there remains within humanity a vestige and memory of that earlier blessed state. He is aware of course that Eden cannot be restored within history. But he hopes for some movement in that direction. In an illuminating passage on the 'natural man', Baxter reveals the source of his optimism.

If, as the Catholic thinkers have always taught, the Fall was not complete, and the natural man, though wounded, is still the earth lamp who holds the oil of grace - then the only viable solution is a difficult humanism which works towards an understanding of the passions without being overthrown by them.²³

In practical terms, this means for Baxter the recovery of and indulgence of such passions as provide bridgeheads of primal experience, and which serve to deconstruct the sanitising effects of civilisation. He describes this as a 'radical revolt', a 'cutting the apron strings of the social nursery'; a process which involves 'a direct knowledge of those aspects of human nature which a neo-Calvinist would ignore or repudiate'.²⁴ To locate and exercise the instincts of the natural man is to travel some distance toward bridging the post-Fall exile and alienation. Baxter consciously cultivates the 'Bohemian' aspects of his character, not in order to shock, but to shake off the shackles of puritanism which he regards as holding him back from spiritual consummation. Although he understands that it is unattainable, and that the gulf or 'gap' of separation is ultimately unbridgeable, it is for him a lifelong quest which culminates in the journey toward Jerusalem.

The torment and ambiguity of this desire for Eden is contained in Baxter's understanding of sexuality. At once the cause and product of the Fall, sexual passion is the natural impulse which offers a hint of harmony, if not salvation. Thus for Baxter, early sexual encounters offer a taste of that first paradise with its untainted beauty:

Your mouth was the sun

²³ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

²⁴ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21f.

And green earth under
The rose of your body flowering
Asking and tender
In the timelost season
Of perpetual summer.

'Let Time be Still', CP 52f.

In sexual union, the pathway to that idyllic land of Eden is opened, allowing the participants a momentary glimpse of what life is intended to be. In that sense, the passion is redemptive.

That I was Adam, loosened by your kiss,
From time's hard bond, and you,
My love, in the world's first summer stood

Plucking the flowers of the abyss.

'On the Death of her Body', CP 224

Often the settings for such trysts are outdoors, amidst the wild energy of New Zealand landscape. In his poem 'The Track', Baxter discovers serenity in such a location:

There was little more than the sound
Of the creek below, my hand laid on your breast
A moment; but enormous quiet pressed
Upon me there out of the air and ground.

Following the liaison, there is the symbolic hint of salvation provided for the poet, as

Over the foggy town
Clouds dividing showed a glint of blue from the East.

'The Track' CP 68f.

Not all experiences are so blissful, however. On another occasion of carnal exploration in the outdoors, Baxter discovers in the act itself a kind of healing of creation:

The honey of your moving thighs
Drew down the cirrus sky, your doves about the beach
Shut out sea thunder with their wings and stilled the lonely air.

'Tunnel Beach' CP 53.

But 'rising' from the adventure he finds his 'heart wave eaten', and rather than the soothing doves, he sees only 'combers grinding / Break sullen on the last inviolate shore'. The release and union which comes through sexuality is partial and tragic, the glimpse of Paradise only bringing a reminder of mortality and separation. The 'thigh-encompassed wound'²⁵ which holds the potential to fling the 'impossible gate wide open'²⁶, so quickly becomes a 'scar whitened where the wound was'²⁷.

Nevertheless, given the confines of mortality, Baxter's road of 'difficult humanism' explores the territory of sexuality as a means of recovering the sacral energy of created existence. Any coarseness is 'by intention'²⁸, and a strategy of resistance against the cloying conformity which society would foist upon us. The 'rebellion of artists' is not 'childish and gratuitous'; it is 'the inevitable accompaniment' of their vocation.²⁹

The obscene mysteries of sex and death confront the shivering ghost of Adam: if you rob him of his coarseness you rob him of his courage.³⁰

Though it might seem disingenuous, for Baxter the entry of forbidden territory in sexual

²⁵ James K. Baxter, 'Let Time be Still', CP 52f.

²⁶ James K. Baxter, 'To Understand What Is', CP 573f. There Baxter states: 'yes, by way of the wound / We understand what is.'

²⁷ James K. Baxter, 'To a Travelling Friend', CP 182f.

²⁸ James K. Baxter, Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26.

²⁹ James K. Baxter, "The Creative Mask," 35-55 in *The Fire and the Anvil: Notes on Modern Poetry* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1955) p.52.

³⁰ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.52.

experimentation is closely linked with his spiritual longing for that which has been lost:

The belt undone, the man in his hot skin
Entering what he should not enter,
A woman, a door, a gap in the high stone wall
That constitutes life -

'Safety', CP 395.

It is not only through the transgression of societal boundaries or the exaltation of sexual unity that hints of the forgotten paradise might be regained. There is in Baxter a strong sense of seeking the primitive, a hunger for the lost innocence which the Fall has occasioned. Another important aspect of his pursuit of the lost Eden is that of encounter with the natural world. Urbanisation, with its dull children bureaucracy and domesticity, has served to wall off the joy and vigour of creation from Adam's Pakeha offspring.³¹

The sound of the opening and shutting of bankbooks,
The thudding of refrigerator doors,
The ripsaw voices of Glen Eden mothers yelling at their children,
The chugging noise of masturbation from the bedrooms of the bourgeoisie,
The voices of dead teachers droning in dead classrooms,
The TV voice of Mr Muldoon,
The farting noise of the trucks that grind their way down Queen Street

Has drowned forever the song of Tangaroa on a thousand beaches,
The sound of the wind among the green volcanoies,
And the whisper of the human heart.

'Ode to Auckland', CP 597f.

Isolated from the generative power of unmediated nature, the 'natural man' atrophies and

³¹ Eugene O'Sullivan notes Baxter's tendency to 'look on cities as the source of the main evils in our present world', O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.35.

suffers from accidie.³² There he would suffer and die, were it not for the grace of God which has left a vestige of memory; a primitive core capable of awakening to wonder. The means of stimulating this sleeping awareness is that of re-engagement with neglected creation. James notes that in Baxter we find 'the sense that on rare occasions the Creation can penetrate man's dulled mind with a faint intuition of the unity that has been lost.'³³ The poet never loses his childhood awe of play amid the rugged beauty of the Brighton coastline, and in some ways his biographical journey is a quest to return to such innocence.³⁴

We raced boats from the banks of the pumice creek
Or swam in those autumnal shallows
Growing cold in amber water, riding the logs
Upstream, and waiting for the taniwha.

'The Bay' CP 44f.

While aware that it can never be recaptured ('I remember the bay that never was'), Baxter holds that the encounter with nature has the power at least to close the gap between humanity and God. Doyle quotes an unsourced paper of Baxter's in which he describes an attitude to life which might be capable of attaining a limited but 'natural' paradise:

A sense of absolute value in what is happening; a sense of being in relation to other people and to things; a sense of endless possibilities of fruitfulness; and above all, the habit of natural contemplation, of letting the mind rest upon, draw nourishment from, the images of nature perceived as an organic whole - as far as such a condition is possible after the Fall of Man.³⁵

³² 'Depersonalisation, centralisation, desacralisation: the three chief scourges of the urban culture. One has to look squarely at the Medusa's head that turns so many into stone before one can even begin to smile again.' Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.6.

³³ James, "Primal Vision" p.42.

³⁴ See 'Makara Beach', CP 223f.

³⁵ James K. Baxter, speaking in Auckland 1963, unsourced, quoted in Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.75f.

Increasingly, Baxter begins to see Arcadian simplicity as part of the road to redemption.³⁶ If the distancing from the land on the part of Pakeha is rendered as a form of rape³⁷, then the way to reconciliation is through a more tender seduction and embrace. Baxter is explicit about his attempts to overcome the post-Edenic separation through romancing creation:

...my own dream, my way of hiding myself from death, from the lack of spiritual support in all created things, is to turn to the least demanding and most supporting reality, Gea (*sic*), the earth itself, the oldest of the tribe of gods. The sandhill cone is her breast, the mats of cutty-grass cover her ancient vagina - my words, if they are to make sense, depend on her and return to her as the symbolic ground of existence - away from her I feel lost...³⁸

Here he combines a number of themes: the gulf created by the Fall, the journey towards creation, the sexual embrace of the earth, the contextual specificity of Aotearoa and the role of the bohemian poet. It is in these terms that we best understand important aspects of Baxter's pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

5. *Hiruharama*

And this is Hiruharama, the dark

Crucible of the alchemist

Where what is not can marry what is -

'Morning in Jerusalem', CP 519f.

The contention of this thesis is that the late period of Baxter's life, and in particular the Jerusalem era, is a defining time in which the various strands of his work and experience

³⁶ 'While the idea of redemption, of what it consists, is expressed cumulatively, in various passages and images, it retains an ultimate coherence. In the background there is the idea of Eden, of a primal wholeness toward which man must return...' James, "Primal Vision" p.201.

³⁷ James comments that 'Baxter interprets the desecrated nature of Western society as a process of sexual violation'. James, "Primal Vision" p.42.

³⁸ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.25f.

combine to produce a genuinely original vision.³⁹ Though he speaks of his call to Jerusalem in religious terms, using the language of dream and vision⁴⁰, it can also be understood as the natural culmination of his innate longing for the return to innocence. By a process of subtraction or kenosis, he seeks to strip away all that keeps him from union with the created order. It might not be Eden, but he hopes for as close an analogy to it as mortal life will allow. Jerusalem allows exactly the potential for reconciliation that he has anticipated.

...I think the road
To Jerusalem leads back inside
The belly of a mountain and river,
As it were, to a mother's kitchen
Where all creatures are friends
Because they come from the earth's body

And God's whim.

'Five Sestinas, 5. Letter to Peter Olds (2)', CP 588f.

James confirms the developmental significance of the period to Baxter, when he describes 'the whole context of Jerusalem' as that of 'a *mythological* return to Eden'. He notes as 'especially important' Baxter's 'conscious identification of the final stage, Jerusalem, with Eden'.⁴¹ In the ascetic environment of his new abode beside the Whanganui river, the poet finds the voice of God speaking to him once more through creation.

His mercy is perfectly signified by the sun and the calm autumn trees loaded with fruit and the great cliff of tree ferns that rises mound after mound behind this house. The maternal richness of nature is part of the redemptive equation which our measuring, grabbing mind can never grasp.⁴²

³⁹ Parr evaluates the period thus: 'Books and words were no longer enough - they became part of a much larger poem called Jerusalem.' Parr, *Introducing James K. Baxter* p.42.

⁴⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.; see also McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.237.

⁴¹ James, "Primal Vision" p.217.

⁴² Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

If the middle stages of his life are marked by the loss of a childhood paradise, the final years might be described as a return to it. Baxter's irrepressible urge for the mythic transforms his experience in Jerusalem into a redemptive journey. The dimensions of that claim must now be explored. Some of the themes to be suggested here will be explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

(a) The Path of Contemplation

Thomas Merton describes contemplation as 'a pure and virginal knowledge, poor in concepts, poorer still in reasoning'.⁴³ It is a form of devotional simplicity, which Merton characterises as a vocation more than a practice:

Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being.⁴⁴

In this sense Baxter might be described as a contemplative, and his journey to Jerusalem understood as an experiment in attaining such enlightened innocence. There comes a honing of his religious and poetic sensitivities to the point where every aspect of life in Hiruharama is an act of devotion and charged with transcendence. In his first period of residence in the settlement, Baxter was mostly alone. From his experience and solitude came the 'Jerusalem Sonnets', originally sent in batches to his friend Colin Durning.⁴⁵ Doyle suggests that here Baxter 'reaches his consummation' with a synthesis between art and life:

He lives like a Desert Father, in poverty, doing back-breaking fieldwork, lice in his beard, crabs in his crotch, scourging his body, discovering that "to be is to die / The death of others."⁴⁶

The life of prayer and work is sustained through an engagement with the English mystics,

⁴³ Thomas Merton, *The Seeds of Contemplation* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke 1972) p.4.

⁴⁴ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* p.1.

⁴⁵ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.258.

⁴⁶ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.155f.

supplied by his de facto spiritual director, Eugene O'Sullivan.⁴⁷ In true contemplative fashion, Baxter combines attention to concrete detail with religious passion, giving his poetry an overt spiritual fascination.

Dark night - or rather, only the stars
Somebody called 'those watchfires in the sky' -

Too cold for me the thoughts of God - I crossed
The paddock on another errand.

And the cows were slow to move outside the gate
Where they sleep at night - nevertheless I came

As it were by accident into the church
And knelt again in front of the tabernacle,

His fortress - man, His thoughts are not cold!
I dare not say what fire burned then, burns now

Under my breastbone - but He came back with me
To my own house, and let this madman eat,

And shared my stupid prayer, and carried me up
As the mother eagle lifts her fluttering young with her wings.

'Jerusalem Sonnets' (10), CP 455f.

Physical work of even the most mundane sort ('my outdoor lavatory / Has taken me three days to build' Jerusalem Sonnets (5) CP455f.) becomes an occasion for mediation on the purposes of God.

⁴⁷ O'Sullivan recounts that 'Baxter had read and assimilated everything I gave him on the English spiritual tradition with its great basis of humaneness in the writings of Cassian, and it was this that he was translating into an indigenous New Zealand spirituality.' Eugene O'Sullivan, Unpublished Lecture, transcript in possession of author.

Meditation and manual labour
Are one thing - the rain in my face on the hill
Does more to simplify the soul of this poor madman
Than Karl Rahner could, and the grub-hoe in my hand
Is squaring out perhaps the walls of Jerusalem.

'Letter to Father Eugene', Unpublished, Hocken MS 975.25

It is worthwhile noting the particular genre of material produced by Baxter in the Jerusalem period. While he continued his lifelong composition of poetry (despite his lament that 'The bright coat of art / He has taken away from me' CP 473), both *Autumn Testament* and *Jerusalem Daybook* are dominated by prose reflection. This is not simply a stylistic device, but one which Eugene O'Sullivan suggests marks a significant religious development:

I think at that point Baxter was very much moving into being the mystical writer as well as the poet. Someone who is telling his own experience as a Christian, putting it in a journal of poems in a way that all the great mystical writers did.⁴⁸

As such, O'Sullivan argues, he is using a methodology associated with predecessors such as St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich.⁴⁹ Baxter's experience of creation in Jerusalem has become revelatory, and thus his meditations upon it take on a devotional and confessional character.

To go forward like a man in the dark
is the meaning of this dark vocation;

So simple, tree, star, the bare cup of the hills,
The lifelong grave of waiting

'Te Whiore o te Kuri', CP 565f.

⁴⁸ Eugene O'Sullivan, "Unpublished Lecture". Transcribed Recording, Auckland, 1985. Transcript in possession of author.

⁴⁹ O'Sullivan notes the quotation from St John of the Cross in sonnet 38 from 'Jerusalem Sonnets' - 'I am dying now because I do not die'. O'Sullivan, "Unpublished".

(b) Founding a Tribe

One of the crippling effects of urban existence for Baxter is the destruction of the tribal bond in which people discover the meaning of their own humanity.⁵⁰ For many years he bemoaned this state of affairs while feeling trapped in an isolationist existence fostered by domesticity. In the final years of his life, he attempted to create an alternative within the confines of New Zealand society. In an opening reflection on community (addressed to Tim Shadbolt) in *Jerusalem Daybook*, he reveals his desire to bring his dreams to reality: 'It is one thing to have ideas. It is another thing to change one's style of life.'⁵¹ Later in the same book he makes his motivation for the move to Jerusalem even more explicit:

This book resembles more a bucket of water taken from the creek than a logical explanation of a mode of living. It is one thing to propose a philosophy. It is another thing to try to found a tribe.⁵²

This intention of founding a community was there from the very first intuition of call to move north,⁵³ even though it would be some time before the vision came into being. In his early period of mostly solitary existence in Jerusalem, he is preparing a trap 'to catch a tribe'. Of it he says:

They say it is best

To break a rotten egg in the creek
To get eels - I think I am that egg

And Te Ariki must crack me open

⁵⁰ 'But what can a tribesman do when he has no tribe? Even the church, with her great care for the soul and respect for the body, and her gift of sacramental life before, during and after death, cannot give another thing, what the Maoris call *aroha*, the powerful bond of love that springs from a tribal matrix.' Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

⁵¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁵² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

⁵³ In a letter quoted by Frank McKay, Baxter describes his calling as including the injunction to 'proceed quietly and slowly to form the nucleus of a community where the people, both Maori and pakeha, would try to live without money or books, worship God and work on the land'. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.237.

If the fish are to be drawn in at all.

'Jerusalem Sonnets (35)', CP 455f.

The task is not his alone. While he might provide a focus and gathering point for people through his physical relocation to Jerusalem, the achievement of community he understands to be the work of God.

Communities are seeds planted by Te Wairua Tapu. In a community, I becomes Us. God became Us to share our destitution. When I becomes Us, we are joined to God in a hidden fashion, and persons are more themselves, not less themselves.⁵⁴

In Baxter's understanding, community is not an end in itself.⁵⁵ It is a means of recovering humanity; of beginning the journey back toward Edenic identity and the recovery of sacrality. The sacrament and discipline of communal living, involving 'the principle of sharing',⁵⁶ has the power to penetrate 'the rind of a lifelong egotism'.⁵⁷ The creative power of what Baxter terms the 'Love of the Many'⁵⁸ is only attained through a difficult path of self-encounter which is a part of the gift of community.

Community life turns some people into misanthropes. They come to Jerusalem with the hopeful expectation that here at least they will find a garden of harmony and love. They find themselves confronted, without insulation, by themselves and their fellows, no doubt prepared to love, but radically clumsy, weak, discordant. If one can bear the pain of that truth, it is possible, I think, for the first time to begin to love.⁵⁹

Baxter sees Jerusalem as a kind of laboratory for the discovery of this redemptive communal

⁵⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

⁵⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that he reacts slightly against Tim Shadbolt's push for communes, seeing them as 'works of Caesar'. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

⁵⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁵⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

⁵⁸ See Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* pp.39-46.

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

love.⁶⁰ While he identifies many contributory aspects of shared life as being significant, the chief among them is the practice of sharing possessions.⁶¹ Through starving the materialistic and individualistic roots of contemporary life, communal ownership allows the recovery of that which has been lost to humanity. In the following significant passage, Baxter articulates the essential connection which exists between community and the return to innocence:

If we are to rebuild the sacramental universe our civilization has shattered to pieces - I see no way of doing it except by sharing the things we possess. Then we are using them as God wishes them to be used.⁶²

He further explains how sharing and primal existence are linked, and how they produce a renewed appreciation of the created realm:

The most important principle is the sharing of material goods - because when we say 'Ours' instead of 'Mine' we are beginning to love in a thoroughly practical way - and because poverty lays the soul open to God and gives great beauty to all that one looks upon.⁶³

The founding of the tribe of Jerusalem restores humanity in another sense, which is that of providing inclusion, identity and belonging to those who find themselves isolated in Pakeha society. Baxter most frequently describes his tribe as 'nga mokai' (the fatherless or orphaned), but also as nga raukore (trees which have had their leaves stripped away) and nga pohara (the poor). Describing them as 'the sick, the unemployable, the habitually vagrant, and all those who are preoccupied with the science of being and not the science of doing',⁶⁴ he seeks to build a small ark of refuge where they might experience love. In anguish at the overwhelming numbers of those he wants to care for, Baxter cries 'Am I the only man in the country who cares whether these vivid, passionate young ones live or die?'⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Baxter speaks of 'the haphazard community that has grown up where I live', explaining that in that setting, 'I have been engaged for some time, with the help of God, in an experiment that involves the Love of the Many.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

⁶¹ 'The one essential thing is to accept the principle of sharing'. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁶² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

⁶³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21.

⁶⁵ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

Baxter's own role in forming the community is significant; a fact which he is aware of:

To 'be aroha' is simply the movement of the mother hen spreading her wings above the chickens. She may have lice in her feathers. But the chickens come to her for shelter because they know she will die first before letting them be killed.⁶⁶

He sustains the fledgling community, acting as something of a patriarch to the scattered children who have made their pilgrimage of hope to Hiruharama. Through his availability to them and to God, the fertile soil is provided for the Love of the Many to be established.

a thousand and one,
the tribe of nga mokai
who put their fingers
inside my ribcage
like the flame-red flower
of the nasturtium
on the rubbish heap
below the pa

'He Waiata mo taku Tangi', CP, 505f.

(c) Learning from Maori

Despite a mono-cultural New Zealand upbringing, Baxter gradually developed a long-standing sympathy toward Maori. His awareness of Maoridom was naturally enhanced through his marriage to Jacquie Sturm.⁶⁷ We have already noted Baxter's opinion that Maori animism provided a better framework for viewing the world than the secular one of Pakeha.⁶⁸ Through his sense of call to Jerusalem, however, there comes an intensification of his interest

⁶⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28.

⁶⁷ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.152f.

⁶⁸ See p.56 of Chapter 3 above.

in taha Maori.

And either immediately or very shortly after a linked thought came into consciousness - that I should go to Jerusalem without money or books, there learn the spoken Maori from a man whom God would provide for me.... I was to learn spoken Maori, and assume as far as possible a Maori identity - this because the Maori is in this country the Elder Brother in poverty and suffering and closeness to Our Lord - and it is suitable the pakehas should learn from him not vice versa.⁶⁹

This charge Baxter fulfilled, adopting the Maori version of his name - 'Hemi' - and taking to Jerusalem as one of very few possessions a Maori Bible.⁷⁰ His speaking and writing is subsequently peppered with te reo Maori, with many of his works appearing in print complete with glossaries of Maori terms. It is not simply the language which fascinates Baxter, however; he is most interested in learning the culture, which he views as having the potential to lead Pakeha out of their materialistic slumber.⁷¹ In his struggle against the deadening 'Goliath' of contemporary society which 'numbs the soul', the poet chooses five stones to fit in his Davidic sling. He uses for ammunition 'spiritual aspects of Maori communal life': arohanui, manuhiritanga, korero, matewa and mahi.⁷²

Two images frequently used for Maori by Baxter are those of the elder brother and the Maori face of Christ. In the former motif, the reference to the biblical story in Luke 15:11-32 would have been intended, with the suggestion being that Maori have remained at home in the world, while the Pakeha younger brother has been on a sojourn in a far land. It is the responsibility of Pakeha therefore to give respect and preference to Maori, and in humility to learn how to live.

We pakehas have to bow the head and learn from our elder brother. Then the water

⁶⁹ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.237.

⁷⁰ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.257.

⁷¹ 'Yet he believed that the communal life of Maori people in certain parts of the country preserved the values which Pakeha society has lost.' McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.257.

⁷² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.54. For further examination of these categories, see below p.113 and p.124ff.

may begin to flow in our dry watercourses.⁷³

The latter reference, to the Maori face of Christ, will be the subject of closer attention in a subsequent chapter. It is sufficient at this point to note that Baxter had an innate sense of the incarnation of Christ being made manifest within the cultural context of Maoridom.⁷⁴

Part of the heritage of the Jerusalem settlement which attracted Baxter was its status as a Maori community. By immersing himself in that environment he is heeding his own injunction to learn from Maori culture. It is part of his overall quest for restoring the sacrality of the universe, through counteracting the obfuscation of the Pakeha education system.

How could he [the Maori prophet] have been able to hear the voice of Ihoa and equally the voice that speaks from the ground, the voice of Te Whaea and of Te Morehu, the people, if his brain had been filled with the rubbish of our schoolrooms?⁷⁵

In the course of his time in Jerusalem, Baxter's theological perspective is articulated in Maori terms, through such categories as nga mokai (the fatherless), arohanui (Love of the Many), Te Morehu (the people), nga pohara (the poor), Te Whaea (the Source) and Wahi Ngaro (the Void). It is not limited to linguistic adaptation, however; he begins to inhabit Maori understandings and intuitions in a way which is unusual for an outsider. A Maori commentator was able to say: 'Only a few foreigners, men like James K. Baxter with the soul of a poet, can enter into the existential dimensions of Maori life.'⁷⁶

The unrealised hope is for Hiruharama to become a synthetic community in which the traditions of Maoridom and Christianity might cross-fertilise each other in such a way as to produce something genuinely new and full of hope.

⁷³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁷⁴ 'The Maori church in this country is like a river that flows underground. Te Kouti (*sic*), Te Whiti, Rua, Ratana and certain others are her prophets and fathers. The face of Te Ariki, the Maori Christ, has a special sweetness and a special strength. It is for us to wash that face in the places where it is being smashed by the blows of the hostile and the ignorant.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁷⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.19f. In similar vein, Baxter asks 'Yet how can nga mokai learn the Maori oral tradition if their noses are continually stuck in pakeha books?' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.44.

⁷⁶ Maori Marsden, "God, Man and Universe: A Maori View," in *Te Ao Hurihuri*, ed. M. King (Wellington: Hicks Smith & Sons, 1975) p.219.

But what I see in the Jerusalem community is a house half built. The foundations were contributed by the church and the pa. These foundations may seem at war with each other. Yet the deepest traditions of the Church do not contradict the communal life of Maori people. It is only our Western cultural emphasis that makes it seem so. Bernard and Francis can live at peace with Te Kouti (*sic*) and Te Whiti and Ratana... I hope that tukutuku panels and painted rafters are part of Te Atua's plan for us. I hope that Te Ariki and Te Whaea will stand in the middle of the house, and look at us with Maori faces.⁷⁷

(d) Into the Darkness

The journey to Jerusalem (which is always as much mythic as it is geographical) is for Baxter a journey into darkness. It is a self-conscious pilgrimage toward the womb of death, and simultaneously toward union with God. Baxter seems remarkably prescient as to his impending early death,⁷⁸ even to the circumstances of it.⁷⁹ He is not resistant to it, and in some senses seems to almost welcome the final resolution of the contradictions which have marked his life.

My soul wants to go into God, into the night sky, and be lost there. It cannot happen yet. One cannot be entirely poor. That is where the pain lies.⁸⁰

The voyage into the gathering gloom is a necessary and spiritual one for a man who has been consumed by a passion for God. Jerusalem marks the culmination of a journey which has been building in intensity and significance.

but if I come to God
it will be by a road
where there's not even starlight, -

⁷⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

⁷⁸ See McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* pp.277-279.

⁷⁹ 'But I think I might die without company'. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.23.

only the voice of rivers,
Rakaia, Rangitata,
Ohau, Clutha,
and now the Wanganui
who washes my body
before its burial,
will say nga karakia
mo Hemi te tutua.

'He Waiata mo taku Tangi (for Eugene)', CP 505f.

The process is one of kenosis and stripping away; the removal of all that has been familiar to the poet, including the 'bright coat of art', [p]rayer of priest or nun', 'songs of His house' and '[r]ule over myself'.⁸¹ His experience at Jerusalem is 'teaching him how to let go of life'.⁸² Baxter's 'dark vocation' is to 'go forward like a man in the dark'.⁸³ The journey is an inescapable consequence of the pursuit of faith.

To love man leads to a broken heart. To love God leads to a dark night. To love God and man together leads to the Crucifixion.⁸⁴

Though at times he is fearful of darkness,⁸⁵ he recognises that it is only through willingly entering it that he will find that which he seeks.

Heaven is light

And hell is darkness, so the Christmen say;
But this dark is the belly of the whale

⁸¹ James K. Baxter, 'Jerusalem Sonnets (37)', CP 455f.

⁸² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.46.

⁸³ James K. Baxter, 'Te Whiore o te Kuri', CP 565f.

⁸⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.37.

⁸⁵ 'Yet I am a timid man, and the three burdens he requires our souls to carry - great pain, great cold, great darkness - do often make me afraid.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.14.

In which I, Jonah, have to make my journey
Till the fear is gone.

'Autumn Testament (46), CP541f.

Eugene O'Sullivan traces here the parallels with both Eastern and Christian mysticism, in 'God known in the darkness'.⁸⁶ In this understanding, darkness is understood as bearing presence rather than being marked by absence. Baxter develops the category of 'Wahi Ngaro' (literally 'the Void') to represent the God-filled darkness into which he feels himself called.⁸⁷ He notes that the church retreats from this void 'like a woman / On her hillock of ground', but he finds that his own journey into Wahi Ngaro - '[t]he limitless, the silent, the black night sky' - causes him to 'forget the name of God'.⁸⁸

The darkness contains that which is preternatural and therefore feared both by orthodox Christianity and Western society. But the path to redemption lies in that direction. In *Autumn Testament* Baxter gives an illuminating account of the spiritual path which he pursues.

At Hiruharama we go beyond the conscious shell of knowledge, that part of the soul which says - 'I want; I have; I am' - into the darkness of the anima, the yin principle in the mind which may be compared to the night itself.. It is necessary to make this journey. The anima is the area familiar to Maori thought, the place of fear, the passive night from which dreams come, where one encounters the spirits of nature and the spirits of the dead. At times the journey may be agonising. It may demand the last ounce of oneself, to go beyond oneself, to walk the waters of availability to all things and all persons. But there is always peace beyond the agony. We wait to be turned into entire creatures. At the centre of the darkness we wait for the spiritus to shine, the light that the disciples saw on the Mountain of Transfiguration.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ O'Sullivan, "Unpublished".

⁸⁷ 'Against the expressions of the institutional Church Baxter chooses the myth of Jonah and the language of mysticism to express the darkness of God. Both the 'belly of the whale' and the dark journey up the hill image the theme of a return to the centre of being, the abyss of Wahi Ngaro.' James, "Primal Vision" p.175.

⁸⁸ James K. Baxter, 'Autumn Testament (4)', CP 541f.

⁸⁹ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

This is revealing in that it shows the way in which mysticism, taha Maori, Jung and Buber⁹⁰, Catholicism and the Jerusalem experience have intermingled to produce a consistent and vigorous voice on spiritual pilgrimage. It is a perspective which has been borne out of personal discipline and the willingness to confront inner fears. Baxter reports how in the early period of his residence in Jerusalem, he would make himself enter a dark and broken house which he suspected was haunted:

I would force myself to go in through the bramble, alone, at midnight, right into the dark door of the house - my heart pounding, sweat running off my body. To retreat to the area of the animus - to cast aside the experience of fear as being irrational - this would have been useless to me, because to transcend my own culture, to make a journey to the Maori side of the fence, I had to go beyond rational concepts, into the preternatural area.⁹¹

He regards the animus as the grasping and objectifying aspect of the soul, on which '[t]he majority culture is founded', and which impoverishes human experience through limitation of experience and emphasis on the intellectual. In his view, this explains why 'a world dominated by the animus (as the world of modern education in particular tends to be) drifts inevitably towards atheism'.⁹² It must be left behind in the journey towards encounter with God. The fruitful path is the one which leads into the dark world of the anima, and inevitably toward the shadow of death. Paradoxically, this also leads to a quasi-atheism; albeit one which restores the fully sacral world which Baxter hungers for:

When prayers, thoughts, desires, are bundled away in their necessary grave, it might seem that one has become an atheist. Trees are trees, hills are hills, men are men. There is no supernatural nimbus to tell us that God is present with and within his creation. Yet it is precisely then that the right thought, the right response, springs out of the void of the heart, and it is a 'prayer' to clean a drain or swear at some good friend.⁹³

⁹⁰ Baxter discusses Martin Buber in relation to the the animus in Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹¹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹² Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹³ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

(e) Hints of Eden

One of the central motivating desires of Baxter is that of the return to Edenic innocence. James notes that in the poet's schema of redemption, there resides a constant background of 'the idea of Eden, of a primal wholeness toward which man must return'.⁹⁴ Jerusalem represents for Baxter a movement toward simplicity; an optimistic attempt to recover the 'natural man' through proximity to creation. It is saved from a utopian naiveté only by his stubborn realism and sense of humour. He is under no illusions that what he seeks is readily available.

To become Adam in paradise one has to go the long way home, back through the eye of the needle, through the gap at the centre of the soul. It takes a lifetime.⁹⁵

He finds himself 'butchered by my longing for the apparently impossible harmony which will come at the end of all things'. Through the grace of God, however, Jerusalem allows him to 'know it now as a naked seed in the ground'.⁹⁶ Hiruharama is a crucible of hope, '[w]here what is not can marry what is'.⁹⁷

Two episodes in the life of the community serve to illustrate in what sense Baxter discovered hints of Eden in that setting, as well as describing the limitations of such intimations. In the first, he describes an incident from the latter phase of the community when the 'open' policy has been forcibly restricted at the request of local Maori. Baxter is 'gorging' on ripe blackberries near the communal garden, when he discovers another member of the community nearby.

I looked up and saw a remarkable sight. Cam was digging the garden. She had no clothes on. She was naked to the hot sun and the hot wind, frowning a little as she

⁹⁴ James, "Primal Vision" p.201.

⁹⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.55.

⁹⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40.

⁹⁷ James K. Baxter, 'Morning in Jerusalem', CP p.519f.

shoved the spade into the loose ground.⁹⁸

His first reaction is neither erotic nor disapproving. Rather he experiences a numinous moment in which the cycle of creation comes full circle.

I have rarely seen anything so beautiful. She resembled our young mother Eve digging the ground in the garden of Eden before the Fall of Man, before the day of the serpent. A sense of awe took charge of me, and my first impulse was to go away and leave her to it.⁹⁹

This is something of the fulfilment of Baxter's dream. However, the moment passes quickly and he finds it necessary to remind her of the offence nakedness might cause to local Maori. At the very instant in which primal creation brushes everyday existence, the reality of the Fallen world intrudes. In consequence, 'Cam put her clothes on', 'the garden remained undug', and Baxter concludes that Cam and her partner 'will have to shift on'. Though he is distressed that this should be the outcome ('as if I had gratuitously trodden some beautiful dragon fly'), he concludes that '[f]igleaves are essential'. Eden may be there to be glimpsed, but it is not ready to be inhabited.

A second event, described in *Jerusalem Daybook*,¹⁰⁰ offers similar insights and also contains a reflection on nudity. Jerusalem has been troubled by the offence caused to pa people by some community members swimming naked at the local water hole. In response, Baxter has led them in a korero - 'that mind-clearing and problem-solving mode of discussion which is traditional among Maori people'. The outcome is an agreement that clothes will be worn in the swimming hole, and that those who wish to swim naked can do so at the rapids some distance from the settlement, where they will not be visible to locals. So it is that Baxter himself finds himself wading into the rapids with no clothes on, in the company of his friend Dave. Baxter respects the taniwha ('the personified spirit of this area of the river'), commenting:

I would not urinate in the river, or throw cigarette butts into it. That would be to show

⁹⁸ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹⁹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

¹⁰⁰ Described in Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* pp.50-53. The following unsourced quotations are all from that passage.

a lack of love and respect for the taniwha.

He sees the mythic taniwha as a manifestation of that sacral relationship between Maori and their environment which heightens their perception of the spiritual dimension of life.

I think the taniwha is an atua, a spirit, a principle in nature and in the human soul. His existence belongs to matewa, the area of dreams and omens and hidden spiritual relationships to the dead and the living and our non-human environment.

Baxter ponders the comment of an old Maori woman who suggested that were the Government to build a proposed hydroelectric dam on the river, the taniwha would destroy it. He does not anticipate 'a huge water lizard' rising up to destroy the dam. But he can imagine the children and spouses of those working on the project ending up in drug abuse and psychiatric illness. This is the Pakeha curse:

Those who turn the world into a desert have to suffer the pains of the desert. The revenge of the taniwha, the desecrated life principle, is invisible but no less potent on that account. If the peace of the soul is lost, what can one do but go mad?

Thus far this is a statement of Baxter's orthodoxy; that the functional approach of Pakeha to the land separates them from it and results in spiritual exile. But then he returns to the experience of swimming in the rapids, and makes something of a confessional statement to his companion.

'Man, you know, this world will do me. When I was a child I loved the world, the one God made, water, air, earth, trees, what have you. Then it seemed I had to die outside it, sitting with a box of cigars in front of the TV set and waiting for the undertaker, stuck in a million worries like an old horse in a bog.'

This is both an accurate statement of Baxter's view of his own pilgrimage, and a representative statement of the Pakeha angst outlined in the previous chapter. But now, the journey to Jerusalem and the healing waters of the Whanganui river have worked a miracle.

'But, thank God, I'm back in the first world again. It'll do me, brother. It's bare as a pig's arse, but it gives me a sense of peace.'¹⁰¹

He has encountered the paradisiacal world of his childhood; the unmediated beauty of creation as it was intended to be regarded. And yet, once again, the experience is not unqualified. Immediately after recounting his moment of satori, Baxter recognises its limited and conditional character.

'All the same, nobody can be a child again. The pain won't go away. We're joined to the others, the ones we love. We have to share their troubles and live and die with them.'

The Fallen nature of existence is not extinguished; Jerusalem never quite becomes Eden - at most it allows a taste of it. At the conclusion of this revealing passage, Baxter emerges from the water to see another of the community members, Red Steve, naked on the river bank and playing the flute - 'with an expression of wild, joyful absorption on his face, and this irregular, babbling music flowing from his flute'. The poet draws together his experiences and reflections in a final paragraph.

I grant my mind is often full of pain for many reasons. But it was good to see Red Steve on the river bank. I knew I was looking, for that moment at least, at the rarest thing in the world. A free man. Freedom is intensely beautiful. It is the purpose for which we were made.

This is the outcome of the journey to Jerusalem: a venture into the twilight zone where the primal wonder of creation touches mortal existence, allowing not only Baxter but other members of the community to experience 'the purpose for which we were made'. The transfiguration of such moments is temporary, and does not remove the pain of existence. But it is as close to fulfilment of Baxter's search for that which he (as representative Pakeha) had

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Autumn Testament* (5), CP 543:

'And later I walked barefoot over the smooth boulders,
Thinking, 'There need be no other Heaven

Than this world"...

hoped for in the experiment of Jerusalem.

He has discovered that even in the intense privation and serene beauty of the Whanganui settlement, redemption and angst lie side by side.¹⁰² In some ways the broken nature of existence is symbolised for Baxter by the problem of dogshit. The following declaration, with its rather severe juxtaposition of the divine and the mundane, is his way of making a theological statement.

God lives among us. When we share our kai, it is often like the meal of fish and bread Te Ariki prepared on the lakeshore for his friends. God also dies among us. The faults of the community are like dogshit on the paths. Each day there is more of it, to be spaded over or spaded under.¹⁰³

The 'faults of the community' are not something external to Baxter, but part of the human condition in which he shares. The aspiration to regain Eden has no power to create it: 'I contribute to those faults. I am like a dog who drops his dung where others have to walk.'¹⁰⁴ In the end, the only path to adopt is that of acceptance : 'I suffer the dogshit'.¹⁰⁵ Recognition of the mixed nature of the world - at once sacramental¹⁰⁶ and full of pain and distance - brings peace if not transformation.

One can only offer

Shit, fleas, wet, cold, birds, dogs, pain, love,

Along with the white disc Father Te Awhitu raises,

And share a cigarette on the steps outside,

Warming one's legs in the sun - When the old kumara

¹⁰² Vincent O'Sullivan describes this as 'the terminal point of Baxter's thought'; where 'Baxter now locates despondency and illumination in the same place. the emphasis is not on progression, not on present gloom and the possibility of future joy, but on the God who encompasses within Himself such extremes that the individual man might come to him at any stage.' O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.51.

¹⁰³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28.

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28..

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.32.

¹⁰⁶ James, "Primal Vision" p.220.

Stops fighting the frozen soil, he does get a blessing.

'The Problem of Keeping Dogs', CP 502.

Creation is valued and accepted on its own terms, flawed and majestic at the same time. Eden is not some utopia to be awaited, but a reality present in the world which humanity might be blessed enough to glimpse from time to time.¹⁰⁷ Revelation comes not through seeing some special quality hidden within the created order, but rather by recognising that '[t]rees are trees, hills are hills'.¹⁰⁸ Pain is the accompaniment of love, and the secret of joy is not escape but acceptance.

To ask for Jacob's ladder
Would be to mistake oneself and the dark Master,

Yet at times the road comes down to a place
Where water runs and horses gallop

Behind a hedge. There it is possible to sit,
Light a cigarette, and rub

Your bruised heels on the cold grass.

'Te Whiori o te Kuri', CP 565f.

6. Conclusion

Baxter's quest for innocence, represented both by the myth of Eden and the halcyon days of childhood, is finally resolved through his journey to Jerusalem. Rather than having 'to die outside' that realm of sacral simplicity, his voyage toward creation has found him 'back in the first world again'. His deepest intuitions coupled with a sense of God-given vocation are thus

¹⁰⁷ 'The point is not that the creation 'reflects' God: it is rather that the Creation is what it is, and this has to be stressed despite the dangers of being tautological.' James, "Primal Vision" p.218.

validated. By stepping out of the confines of Pakeha accidie; by refusing the conformity and paranoid solitude of suburbia; by entering the darkness rather than retreating from it; by locating himself amid the natural rhythms of rural life; by learning the spiritual cosmology of Maori; by embracing the Love of the Many through community: Baxter finds his way 'back through the eye of the needle' to the transcendent glory of human existence. In the sense of cultural representative or 'homo religiosus'¹⁰⁹, he forges a path of reconciliation which stands as an invitation for other pilgrims in search of contextual salvation.

At the very point of possession, however, comes the realisation of distance from it. Jerusalem brings clarity and moments of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*¹¹⁰, but it does not deliver Baxter from his own failings nor those of the community. Alongside revelation there is inescapable sadness and pain; the 'dung' which fouls the paths of Jerusalem. He is as much responsible for the Fall as any other. In the end, his existential quest arrives at a point of Catholic orthodoxy (if a somewhat more panentheistic version of it). What is significant, however, is not that he should confirm the position of the magisterium. It is that this theologising is wrung out of the raw experience of a Pakeha man in pursuit of God within the specific context of Aotearoa. Jerusalem may be a myth, but it is also a place beside the Whanganui river. Baxter speaks the language, names the places and inhabits the world of a specific cultural people who are unused to hearing theology in their own terms. In so doing he is breaking new ground, and 'squaring out perhaps the walls of Jerusalem'.

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

¹⁰⁹ See O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.76f.

¹¹⁰ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* trans. John W. Harvey 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press 1950).

Chapter Four: Nga Pohara - The Blessed Poor

1. *Introduction*

In the latter years of Baxter's life, poverty becomes a defining category for both his thinking and living. He leaves behind a relatively secure lifestyle in order to associate more fully with those sections of the community which he regards as disadvantaged. In doing so, he adopts what he calls a 'uniform of poverty'¹ which identifies him as being on the side of the poor in their struggle against materialist society. A conspicuous relinquishment of possessions, including the abandonment of shoes, marks his path of privation. The primary motivation for adopting this strategy is his sense of Christian vocation, as he seeks to give expression to a militant faith.

But God may touch a man here or there - no less a sinner than his fellows - and say to him - 'It is your business to be visibly poor - to do without everything you can do without - shoes, a barber, a house of your own, a fire to sit at, a desk to write at, some varieties of food and occasionally all food, the approval of neighbours, your own certainty of being in the right - but above all, the sense of comfort. A comfortable servant might begin to serve comfort instead of me.'²

Poverty is never for Baxter a mere economic category. As with every other element of his life and experience, it is heavily mythologised and spiritualised. Behind every concrete expression of poverty is the call to nurture the impoverished Christ. In the company of the poor there is to be found an honesty and mutuality which foreshadows the great celebration of the kingdom of God. When the poor are neglected by an indifferent society, the judgement of the warrior Christ against oppression has already begun. Among the outcast there are hints of what it means to be fully human; they are God's protectorate and revelatory tribe. Through this 'high' view of poverty, Baxter sees it as a means of escape from the deadening labyrinth of materialism. If Pakeha society is being crushed under the weight of meaningless possessions,

¹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.16.

then he hopes that through the voluntary appropriation of poverty and identification with the poor, a way may be found to freedom.

2. *The Nature of Poverty*

The starting point for understanding Baxter's views on poverty is that of its opposite. Wealth and comfort are regarded by him as prime ingredients in the sickness of soul which characterises the wider community.³ He regards New Zealand as a 'hellhole of materialism' in which 'souls are being put to sleep like pet dogs or cats'.⁴ The mindless consumption of goods is a distraction from the task of becoming fully human, and serves to blind citizens to their communal responsibility and their spiritual vocation. It produces people who are preoccupied with their individual comfort, and so incapable of giving or receiving love. This attitude of life is so deeply ingrained that it is hardly recognised by those anaesthetised by it. They not only disregard the genuine poverty of those excluded from their consensus of wealth, but they fail to see their own endemic spiritual poverty.

Baxter's response to poverty is not therefore primarily political or economic. Although at times sympathetic to and tempted by Marxism, his attitude to what he understands as a fundamentally spiritual problem is guided by a religious vision. In Christianity he finds both a theological framework and a devotional motivation for his own journey toward poverty. It is not that he fails to understand the systemic mechanisms which engender poverty, nor that he cannot recognise the instruments of state by which it is maintained. It is simply that he regards the condition as a consequence of the failure to love and to share, and that he has little confidence in political solutions to conquer such disease of the heart. Baxter finds it impossible to separate either his own poverty or that of others from faith and spirituality, and it is ultimately misleading to attempt to divide them in the interests of understanding.

With that qualification, some analysis can now be made of Baxter's nuancing of the category

³ 'In India Sikhs who have no food in their stomachs fight and die because of a passionate concern for their religion and their culture; but here men who are internally loaded with chicken and mutton watch TV commercials advertising more chicken and mutton to develop ulcers because their sons have scratched the paint on their new cars.' James K. Baxter, "Property and Poverty," *Otago University Review*, September (1968): p.28.

⁴ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

of poverty.

(a) The Poor as Outcast

Baxter frequently makes indicative lists of those he regards as constituting the 'poor'. They are '[t]he penniless, the squalid, the drug-users, the homosexuals, the urban street gangs, the workless and those who flee from work, the alcoholics, the jailbirds, the mental hospital patients, the lonely and despairing old'.⁵ They might also include 'the bums and the streetgirls and the winos'.⁶ It is clear from these descriptions that the main focus is on social exclusion rather than income-earning ability, even though the two are often related. It is the experience of isolation from the civic community which is the determining factor for Baxter.⁷ In this he is in keeping with a biblical perspective on poverty.

In the Hebrew Bible the economic dimension is never lacking, but often the primary perspective is social - 'the poor' are the 'weak', 'dependent', 'powerless', 'inferior' and 'oppressed' who have been pushed to the margins of society, without influence in their own country and among the great empires of the day.⁸

In the same way in which Christian scripture uses the motif of 'widows, orphans and aliens' to represent all marginalised groups within the community, so Baxter adopts his own threefold category as a rubric for those who have become outcasts. In keeping with his move toward localisation, he employs Maori terms to which he assigns specific meanings:

Nga pohara - the poor

Nga mokai - the fatherless⁹

⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁶ James K. Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," *Marist Messenger* XL, no. 3, March (1970): p.7.

⁷ This understanding may have been filtered through Baxter's own self-understanding of being an outsider and not quite belonging: 'I think that various factors combined early to give me a sense of difference, of a gap - not of superiority, nor of inferiority, though at times it must have felt like that, but simply of difference - between myself and other people.' Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.123.

⁸ Athol Gill, *The Fringes of Freedom: Following Jesus, Living Together, Working for Justice* (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer 1990) p.215.

⁹ Vincent O'Sullivan suggests that the term originally meant 'animals, or the youngest members of a family', but that Baxter reworked it to signify "'the fatherless ones", his own tribe'. Vincent O'Sullivan, "Urgently

Nga raukore - those who are like trees that have had their leaves and branches stripped away.¹⁰

While nga pohara is a catchall phrase which embraces all of those sub-groups identified above, the latter two terms are expanded by Baxter, and are of special significance in relation to the Jerusalem community. Of nga mokai, he explains: 'In a sense the young people become orphans when their parents are unable to adjust to their motions towards independence'.¹¹ This symbolic orphaning is further described by Baxter as a deficiency in parenting which springs from materialism. He argues that nga mokai's spiritual advisers, 'that is, parents and teachers', have dished out a combination of politeness and respectability as if that constituted a means of living. But in doing so they fail their children.

Nothing about love. Nothing about mercy. Nothing about the sharing of material goods. Quite often the young adults have been presented with a set of mediocre social rules as a substitute for Christianity by instructors who are, in a muddled way, Christian.¹²

Having rejected such rules as inadequate for the navigation of life, the young people are left without any guidance other than that which they can fashion for themselves. Somewhat reluctantly, Baxter finds himself in the role of tribal patriarch.

Nga mokai are not my children. I am not their father. Yet I do stand in the shoes left unoccupied by the parents who have been unable, on account of their anxieties, to shift gear, as their children grow up, from the role of authority to the role of friend. These ones don't want a boss. But they do want a parent who doesn't reject them as soon as

Creating a Past: Remarks on James K. Baxter," in *The Writer's Sense of Place: Essays on South-East Asian and Australasian Literature* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1987) p.99.

¹⁰ James K. Baxter, "Notes on Community Life". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/120, Dunedin. See also Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21. In 'Confession to the Lord Christ', Baxter lists the poor as 'the drug-users, the homosexuals, the boobheads, the porangi from the mental hospitals, and in particular the Maori ones who were crushed here on earth like iron between the hammer and the anvil'; James K. Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ". Unpublished Manuscript, Frank McKay Papers, Beaglehole Room, Victoria University, FM 22/4/16, Wellington, 1972.

¹¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21.

¹² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.19.

they are independent.¹³

Nga mokai, the fatherless,¹⁴ are a rudderless generation cast upon the ocean of life and left to find their own way.

The final category in Baxter's tri-fold description of the poor is that of nga raukore: 'the ones who are like trees that have had their leaves and branches stripped off by the heavy winds of the world'.¹⁵ He sees them as those who have been afflicted in their journey through life and spiritually damaged because of it. They also suffer ostracism from society because they do not conform to conventional behaviour or morality. Their number includes 'the sick, the unemployable, the habitually vagrant, and all those who are preoccupied with the science of being and not the science of doing'.¹⁶ The term seems to have come to Baxter from his reading of the Maori Bible, and in particular the Beatitudes where Christ declares 'Ka koa koutou, e nga raukore [rawakore]' (Blessed are you who are poor - Luke 6.20).¹⁷

The gathering of these outcasts to Jerusalem is regarded by Baxter as a special form of blessing from God, and indeed vital to the spiritual welfare of the venture.

But it is nga raukore, according to the Maori scripture, to whom God opens the Kingdom of Heaven... If nga raukore were pushed out, the blessing of God would go away with them, and the fountain of the community would be blocked up with stones.¹⁸

Those who would be regarded as social deviants by the civic community are welcomed by Baxter as sent from God. 'The bludgers and parasites are God's gift to us, our sacred guests, jewels hidden in a ball of mud'.¹⁹ When an alcoholic couple visit Jerusalem, get drunk and

¹³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26.

¹⁴ 'Some have called me Father. Some have even called me Mother.' Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

¹⁵ Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

¹⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21.

¹⁷ See also Baxter, "Notes on Community Life".

¹⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21f.

¹⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.43.

urinate on the mattress, Baxter finds revelation in their presence and declares: 'Thank God for them and their gift.'²⁰ Nga raukore are both blessed because of their special relationship to God, and are a blessing to those who receive them for whatever reason.

A term which is less common in Baxter's usage, but more frequent toward the end of his life, is the Hebrew word 'anawim'; translated by Godfrey Nicholson as 'those who are lost and dispossessed of their own; who are loved most by God'.²¹ It is employed often in the important late document entitled 'A Handbook for the Christian Militant', where Baxter speaks of 'the tribe of nga raukore, the anawim, the poor of God'.²² This manuscript is inspired by the Exodus motif of the enslaved nation being led out of Egypt by a liberating God, and as the title suggests, marks an attitude of increased militancy by Baxter in regard to the condition of poverty. His use of the term 'anawim' suggests not only associations with earlier biblical traditions, but encounter perhaps with some of the emergent Liberation themes coming from South America. Baxter's use of it hints at importing some of these political overtones into the cognate 'nga raukore'.

The important element in Baxter's understanding of the poor is not that they have less disposable income than their peers. Rather it is the fact that they have been driven to the edges of society because of their differences and their wounds. They suffer the dual pain of their own chaotic lives²³ and of exclusion by their more industrious compatriots. In Baxter's religious worldview, the crucifixion of Christ teaches that God himself has been driven to the margins,²⁴ and therefore the fringes of society and their inhabitants are places of blessing and revelation. There is deep spiritual significance in the embrace of poverty. The outcasts carry the presence of God in their being, and it is always with this in view that Baxter discusses nga pohara. His response is aimed not so much to ameliorate their condition through charity, as it is to offer inclusion through love.

²⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.55., where he adds, 'The alkies have joined me to myself again. Blessed be the wood of the cross from which our health comes!'

²¹ Quoted in Phillips, "Dialogue," p.280.

²² Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

²³ Baxter says '[T]hey bring me their grief and chaos to share'. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.55.

²⁴ 'Let us not forget that we who believe our God died destitute on a cross seem quite mad to a great nation whose God is money.' Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.5.

(b) The Poor as Blessed

In Baxter's view, those who experience poverty in the way in which he interprets it are already blessed because of their status as the poor. Stripped by necessity of the materialist frame of reference which deadens the rest of society, they are able to intuitively attain gospel practices such as sharing and honesty.

In the house of love the wallpaper may fall off the walls - and the boards are bare, and there is little food, and there are blankets, not sheets, on the beds. The point is, the people there are concerned with one another, not with their possessions. And if they are married... then they are happy in bed together, because their love for one another is unobstructed by the love for possessions.²⁵

There is a tendency toward romanticising poverty in such an attitude, and Baxter frequently gives the impression of an inverted class system in which the poor are qualitatively better than the rich.²⁶ It is perhaps the corollary of the poet's longing for the innocence of Eden, and being attracted to the simplicity of the poor as 'children'. But he at least has scriptural warrant for his views.²⁷

The theological roots of Baxter's view of poverty seem to lie in Christology. Christ himself is a poor man, and therefore regarded as the friend of the poor:

But the bums and the streetgirls and the winos and the unemployed who saw him go past carrying his cross were sorry for him... They took the view that he was one of them, one of the poor, because the rest of the world treated them like garbage and he treated them as his friends. So they were bitterly sorry when they saw him going up the hill to his death.²⁸

²⁵ James K. Baxter, "The House of Love and the House of Death," 133-135 in *The Essential Baxter*, ed. J. E. Weir (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1993) p.134.

²⁶ Elizabeth Isichei notes Baxter's 'polarised caricatures' which are 'not true to life', and which suggest 'that a bad Catholic is somehow closer to God than anyone else, however virtuous'. Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.241.

²⁷ See Gill, *Fringes of Freedom* pp.213-243.

In his incarnation, Baxter incorporates poverty into the being of God. Through his death on the cross, Christ accepts the fate of the poor and implicitly extends to them the grace and acceptance of God. It is a representative death, in which the poor man Jesus is pushed to the margins of life and condemned. Through his resurrection, we discover that not only this poor man, but the state of poverty and exclusion itself, has been transformed.²⁹ God has acted on behalf of the poor.

[T]he central icon of the Christian is always the crucifix. For there we see the representation of our own central condition, laid open, made plain, by the image of our God who joined Himself to the destitution of the poor, the sick, the old, and even of the dead.³⁰

The result is a mingling of divinity and poverty with profound consequences. The poor are henceforth drawn into the heart of God and remain as intimate companions of the divine. The anguish of Christ mingles with the misery of the poor, elevating their otherwise pointless pain to the status of redemptive suffering.

Here, it may be helpful to keep in mind that a man who is filthy in person, ill-clothed, and without full control of his bodily or mental functions, is in fact an afflicted man, and thus very likely to be much nearer to God than one is oneself.³¹

For Baxter, the marginalised have special status '[p]recisely because they exist and He loves them'.³² But the exchange works both ways. The experience of life and death as a poor man changes the nature of God. We now understand God as irreparably transformed through the crucifixion: 'God, the poor child who was born between two beasts; God, the man of thirty-three who died destitute between two criminals'.³³ In this mutual exchange, then, poverty is a point of intimate connection between Creator and estranged humanity: 'Poverty is the door

²⁸ Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.7.

²⁹ Cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9 - 'For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.'

³⁰ James K. Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," *NZ Tablet* 10 January 1968 p.9.

³¹ James K. Baxter, *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: New Zealand Tablet 1969) p.23.

³² Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

³³ Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.5.

broken in the wall between man and man and man and God.'³⁴

The poor are blessed in their very being through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. But in a very real sense, they are also a blessing to those who open their hearts to them.

Yet to enter a poor communal house and receive the love of the anawim, after pain and solitude and darkness, is like being given a cup of hot wine. Nothing in Egypt compares to it.³⁵

(c) The Poor as God's Protectorate

One of the features of the poor, as understood by Baxter, is their lack of social power. They are exposed and vulnerable; subject to whatever societal forces which might act upon them. But due to their special relationship with God, they have a hidden guardian to watch over their affairs: 'God protects them because they have no other protector'.³⁶ While they might find themselves afflicted, they are never abandoned. Baxter is convinced that it is the presence of nga raukore which sustains the Jerusalem community against the odds, because when they are present the entire tribe is under the care of God.

Te Atua protects us because we put persons before property, and He is a Person. He protects us for the same reasons He protects the birds of the air - because He loves us, and we have no other protection.³⁷

Living at Hiruharama, Baxter finds that the presence of nga pohara brings tangible blessing and refreshment.

And that is precisely why my heart feels clean
As a fish in running water - Poverty, man,

³⁴ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

³⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

³⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.21.

³⁷ Baxter, "Notes on Community Life".

Is a word that skins the lips, the Prior of Taize said,
But when the gut is empty and the house is crowded

With forty visitors, then Te Whaea throws her coat
Over the lot of us, and nobody goes hungry.

'Empty Bellies', CP 498f.

The presence of the poor functions as a preservative to society, and functions as a call toward the marginalised Christ who lurks in their midst. Through respect for the unmerited wounds of the poor, God offers mercy to the wider community.

And because of their afflictions they belong in a special way to the heart of the kingdom. These People conceal in their midst the tribe of nga raukore, the anawim, the poor of God, the trees who have had their leaves and branches stripped off. Precisely because they exist and because he loves them, God does not permit our culture to wholly atrophy.³⁸

The judgement of God against an indifferent society is deferred because of nga pohara. Through their experience of exclusion, they have learned the quality of acceptance. While they have little in the way of material possessions, what they have is shared and given in the service of others. Such generosity warms the heart of God, and acts as propitiation on behalf of their more hard-hearted compatriots. In typical fashion, Baxter conveys this through a contextual version of the Good Samaritan parable:

A drunk man is lying in a Wellington street, with blood and vomit coming from his mouth. The people step over him and round him. But before the police arrive, a young man of homosexual temperament has called a taxi and put the drunk man into it. He takes him home and washes him and gives him his own bed to sleep in. He feeds him and lodges him for a week.

The young homosexual is saving Wellington from becoming the city of Sodom. The

³⁸ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

fault of the original Sodomites, as the Rabbis have taught us plainly, was their lack of the virtue of manuhiritanga, that is, the practice of mercy and respect to the guest and the stranger.³⁹

The paradoxical inversion is characteristic of Baxter, with a certain delight that God should choose to save the wealthy and powerful through the humble actions of the poor.⁴⁰ His theology is firmly rooted in the conviction that the God he serves is on the side of the dispossessed and marginalised, and that divine protection accompanies them wherever they go.

Rouseabouts who lie down in the park not infrequently find that Christ is beside them, looking into their eyes, listening to their complaint, and saying: 'A little while. Just a little, and you and I will never be parted.'⁴¹

(d) The Poor as the Presence of Christ

The nature of God is to remain hidden in the world, thus demanding that humanity search for hints of divinity in an ambiguous world.⁴² For Baxter, however, the suffering Christ and his ragged band provide a significant clue in the search for transcendence.

If a man were to say to me, 'Where shall I find God?' I think I would be inclined to answer: 'In the gaols; in the hospitals; at deathbeds; wherever the soul of man is touched by destitution'.⁴³

The elusive God 'is present wherever mercy is present, wherever the poor continue to love one

³⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:28,29 - 'God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.'

⁴¹ James K. Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," *New Zealand Tablet* XCV, no. 33, 21 August (1968): p.10.

⁴² 'In a chosen overcoat of night / You hide from me. All men find it so.' James K. Baxter, 'Five Sestinas: 4. Song to the Father', CP 587f.

⁴³ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.24.

another'.⁴⁴ Following the implications of Matthew 25:31-46, Baxter finds in the needs of the destitute the presence of Christ.

The chorus of their chaos becomes a possible Christ
When the light behind the face begins to shine,

Who wear no shoes in the street because
Rain was invented to kiss the feet of the poor.

'Autumn Testament (47)', CP 564.

Through Jerusalem and the urban crash pads with which he was associated, he combines his search for God and his friendship with the disreputable in one seamless movement. Baxter's earlier experience as an alcoholic, and his longstanding involvement as a participant in Alcoholics Anonymous and as a prison visitor, provide a bedrock of empathy for not only the plight but the uncomplicated honesty of those who are afflicted.⁴⁵ Certainly his trip to India and encounter with the poor there had also served to shape his attitudes.⁴⁶ The doss-houses of Boyle Crescent in Auckland and MacDonald Crescent in Wellington together with the Jerusalem community were places where he sought to provide shelter for the underclass of New Zealand society. He interpreted this not so much as an act of charity, as a response to the incognito Christ who has been abandoned.

Truly you gave me
The poor to embrace.
In their faces I can see
The colour of your face...

⁴⁴ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁴⁵ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* pp.145-150. McKay notes that 'The hours he put in with fellow alcoholics developed his caring for those living on the margins of New Zealand society, the down-and-outs, prisoners, and the disenchanting young.', p.147.

⁴⁶ Jacquie Baxter emphasises the connection between her husband's experience in India and his later embracing of poverty through the Jerusalem period. Video interview, William Grieve et al., *The Road to Jerusalem Featuring the Words and Works of James K. Baxter* (Auckland, N.Z.: Television New Zealand Ltd. : Distributed by Roadshow Entertainment (NZ), 1998), 1 videocassette (60 min.). McKay comments that amidst 'some of the most disadvantaged people', Baxter observed that 'the street-sweepers of the untouchable class had an air of incredible joy about them'. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.170.

To the city I will go then
And take you by the hand
And share the sour bread with you
In a familiar land.

'2 Songs of Pharoah's Daughter - (ii) The Song of the Many', CP, p.523f.

It is important to note the synthesis of Christian mysticism with social activism which motivated Baxter in this period.⁴⁷ In an extension of the Catholic concept of 'real presence', he finds a sacramental encounter with Christ through his life among nga mokai. The alcoholics, the drug addicts, the mentally ill and the street people serve as a counterpoint to his own devotional meditation and receiving of eucharist.⁴⁸ They are 'the hidden faces of Christ'⁴⁹ which cry out for recognition. Compassion toward them is no more than the visible expression of love for a crucified Saviour who has been driven to the margins of life. Poverty is the chosen cloak by which Christ conceals his ongoing presence in the world, 'the image of the our God who joined Himself to the destitution of the poor'.⁵⁰

(e) The Poor and Freedom

While it might seem that poverty limits and constricts life, Baxter views it as conferring a liberty which is unavailable to those with greater resources. Citing his experience in India, he claims 'The poor are freer than the rich.'⁵¹ At one level, he bases this proposition on the relative freedom from interference which genuinely poor people experience.

In Delhi, while I was there, the poor lived in chambers of the Mogul tombs, raising

⁴⁷ O'Sullivan, "Prophet." See also McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.285.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mother Teresa: 'He says: "And you did this to me: I was hungry, naked, homeless .. and you did it to me." Jesus in the eucharist and Jesus in the poor, in the disguise of a poor, makes us contemplative in the heart of the world. We see Christ in the eucharist in the sign of bread and we see Him in the poor in the poverty and the misery.' Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa's Words to International Association of the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa* [Internet] ([cited March 2002]); available from <http://www.tisv.be/mt/cw.htm>.

⁴⁹ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

⁵⁰ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9.

⁵¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

families, cooking food behind curtains of sacking. The police did not interfere with them. There were too many.⁵²

But more importantly for the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Baxter maintains that poverty enables freedom from materialism. This is the real captivity; the reign of the dollar note which 'deadens whatever it touches'⁵³ and 'is a heavier drug than pot or alcohol'.⁵⁴ In 'a society as determinedly materialistic as our own',⁵⁵ the price of success is surrender to a form of social slavery.

You are bound to be affected by the pains of depersonalisation, desacralisation and centralisation, and the hideous dry rot of the slave-owning mentality - whether you yourselves become slaves or belong to the class of owners.⁵⁶

Freedom, for Baxter, is not simply the ability to 'do what one feels like'.⁵⁷ Rather it is the capacity to stand outside of 'a society that is smothering its offspring as a stupid sow smothers her litter'.⁵⁸ It is on this basis that Baxter asks the seemingly rhetorical question, 'Who is more free, the poor Indian or the potentially wealthy New Zealander?'⁵⁹ While the majority have 'decided that our security comes from material possessions',⁶⁰ the poor through their marginalised position are able to stand outside of enslavement to consumerism. They gain the freedom that comes from having no stake in the system which entraps others. While they might suffer privation, their reward is a clarity of perspective which results from 'the door broken in the wall'.⁶¹ In this sense Baxter is employing the Matthean qualification of 'poor in spirit' (Mt 5:3), supporting the notion that the poor are both blessed and closer to God because of their poverty.

⁵² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

⁵³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.44.

⁵⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.29.

⁵⁵ Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

⁵⁶ Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

⁵⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

⁵⁸ Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

⁶⁰ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

⁶¹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

(f) The Poor and Mercy

In Baxter's understanding, nga raukore are the special recipients of God's mercy, in which the 'unimaginable Father... takes the poor and hopeless in his arms'.⁶² They find comfort for their brokenness in the embrace of the crucified Christ. But in another sense, they are not only the recipients of mercy but the exponents of it. Their experience of marginalisation and degradation at the hands of a materialist society induces a tenderness toward others and the withholding of judgement. As one example of those excluded and disempowered, Maori express the compassion of the poor:

But the Maori people, having suffered poverty and humiliation themselves, are commonly merciful to the wounds of the poor, whether the poverty is material or psychological.⁶³

In this attitude, morality becomes insignificant because of the greater force of love and understanding. Those who have already been condemned are less likely to wish to condemn others.

Women who think they have ceased to be Christian shack up with dying alcoholics and wash their piles with warm water. Men who think the same extricate the head of their neighbour's wife from the gas oven and find they have a new woman to look after and another mark on their crime sheet.⁶⁴

In the community of nga mokai, Baxter finds clear expression of what he terms 'the sinners' Magna Carta' - 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy'.⁶⁵ He contends that 'the heaven of the poor is hidden in the hearts of the people. It is their love.'⁶⁶ Such love encompasses 'not just the mercy he [God] shows to you, but the mercy as well that you show to others'⁶⁷. It is this quality of forgiveness and moral oversight which grants the poor special

⁶² Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁶³ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.9f.

⁶⁵ Baxter, "Lion and Lamb". The scripture reference is to Matthew 5:7.

⁶⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.46.

status. They are not better than other people, but more conscious of their own need for grace and therefore more willing to extend it to others. In this quality they provide a gospel analogy and make present the limitless forgiveness of God. Through their human acceptance the divine love shines.

He is present wherever mercy is present; wherever the poor continue to love one another. Mercy is his manifestation.⁶⁸

In their mutuality of suffering, nga pohara find friendship and understanding with the God of mercy. Their presence provides a proximate hermeneutic for understanding Christian forgiveness.

3. A Christian Response to Poverty

Baxter, of course, was neither born poor nor suffered circumstances which would in and of themselves have made him poor. He belonged to the educated middle class, and arguably near the upper strata of it. And yet he became a self-proclaimed poor man. He did so in response to the demands of his faith and as a consciously prophetic reaction to the society in which he lived. In both his theological and devotional philosophy, the motif of poverty is central. Voluntary poverty, as distinct from that which is caused by external forces, is a theme which Baxter returns to constantly in the latter years of his life. He distinguishes what he terms 'Gospel poverty' from that which is 'thrust on men by the influence of others'.⁶⁹

(a) Poverty as Discipleship

A primary motivation for Baxter's embrace of voluntary poverty is that of discipleship, understood as the following of Jesus. In particular, the approach suggested by the spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis is one which Baxter appears

⁶⁸ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁶⁹ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

to take to heart.⁷⁰ His commitment to poverty is an attempt to shape his life according to the example of Christ: 'Let us be poor then: poor followers of a poor and crucified Master'.⁷¹ Discipleship, or orthopraxy,⁷² becomes the hermeneutical key for understanding the words of Christ.⁷³ So much so that he draws the radical conclusion that 'If we are not in some sense poor we are not Christians'.⁷⁴ He is impatient with those who take the name of Christ and yet fail to give expression to it in the way they live. For Baxter, it is only in conformity to the way of Christ that faith becomes more than an empty totem.⁷⁵

Let us forget even the finest lies and accept the Word who is Truth springing up endlessly from the centre of our souls. Then we can be ourselves and live at peace with all men. The road is poverty.⁷⁶

Baxter is quite explicit about the voluntary nature of his opting for poverty, even if there is a sense of compulsion which comes through his faith in Christ and compassion for those who he recognises as Christ's children.

But until then, although I hate war, I am like a soldier. I wear my uniform - the uniform of poverty, recognisable to those who are also poor. I did not come exactly as a volunteer. God conscripted me...⁷⁷

His 'uniform of poverty' consisted of old clothes, bare feet, and untrimmed hair and beard. He also made a commitment to the relinquishment of possessions, holding to it with a

⁷⁰ 'Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ must strive to conform his whole life to Him.' Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* trans. L. Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1952) p.27.

⁷¹ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

⁷² The term, given currency by South American Liberation theologians, was known and understood by Baxter: 'Karl Rahner said to us, 'You have orthodoxy. Where is your orthopraxy?' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁷³ 'Let us not imagine that the Father instructed the Son as the skipper of a coastal boat instructs the engineer. The will of God is rarely explicit. One learns the theology of kenosis not out of a book but by tramping forty miles with sore feet in the rain.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40.

⁷⁴ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9.

⁷⁵ 'It is one thing to have ideas. It is another to change one's style of life... The practice of visible poverty is the same kind of thing.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁷⁶ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.48.

⁷⁷ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

scrupulosity which seemed at times severe.⁷⁸ The sudden adoption of this new lifestyle surprised both friends and family.⁷⁹ But it served not only to mark him out as a disciple of Christ, but also as a sign to the nation. He compared himself to Nebuchadnezzar, whose humiliation was both 'an affliction and a portent'.⁸⁰ To make his own poverty highly visible and militant was a means of extracting himself from and challenging the materialistic status quo of his compatriots. He interpreted it as a sign of protest.

Yes, I will put on a collar and a tie. I'll do it when the Government departments put people before regulations - when the mental hospitals treat sick persons as persons, and not as disposable garbage - when the churches, including my own, cease to be an enclave and sanctuary of the middle class, and open their doors with full friendship to the methos and the hippies and the ones who might meditate sitting cross-legged on the floor. When these things happen I can put off this uniform, and go towards the graveyard with a quiet mind.⁸¹

The discipline of poverty is not merely an objective or instrumental practice, however. Through obedience to the call of Christ, those who follow discover an intimate friendship with the wounded saviour:

Let us try to be poor then: some of us living on nothing, some on as little as we can without damaging others. Then we will have another reason for joy, because Christ will see no obstacle in our souls, and come to live inside us.⁸²

Baxter seems to indicate that poverty, accepted voluntarily as part of active faith, has the power to qualitatively change the perception and experience of the believer. It brings a sharing in the freedom and blessing which is granted to those who are genuinely nga pohara. The path of poverty restores that essential Edenic simplicity of soul which Baxter diligently seeks. He is hoping for:

⁷⁸ 'It is absurd to say I am really a poor man while I keep on putting words together. Words set in order are mental possessions.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.17.

⁷⁹ Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.125.

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁸¹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁸² Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

[T]he spirit of revolutionary poverty which filled the hearts of the Apostles with joy. They were able to see the lilies of the field - that is, the natural creation - through the perfect glass of Christ's poverty. All things belonged to them because they laid claim to nothing.⁸³

In this sense, his approach is Franciscan. His chosen coat of poverty is not an end in itself, so much as a way of removing barriers between himself and Christ.⁸⁴ Baxter believes that:

...when a man is poor there is no hindrance between a his soul and Christ... What joy we will find - joy, in what others call suffering - a new heaven and earth! Who needs 'art' when the leaves of all the trees have become the book of Christ?⁸⁵

Consistent with his entire philosophy, the presence or absence of material goods is of interest primarily for the journey toward God.

(b) Poverty as Availability

A key element in Baxter's understanding of voluntary poverty is that of availability. It is a part of his wider discussion of kenosis; a theme which will be treated in a separate chapter of the thesis. As such, poverty is one part of stripping away whatever stands in the way of God, and therefore making oneself spiritually open to the divine will. Baxter is aware that a 'comfortable servant might begin to serve comfort instead of serving me',⁸⁶ and that poverty offers something of a bulwark against that possibility.

To be poor is not to become good. Poverty is availability. It is to be that void, that nothing, on which Te Wairua Tapu moved at the beginning of the world and still does

⁸³ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

⁸⁴ Baxter suggests that the choice of poverty could draw followers 'closer to Christ in His poverty'. Furthermore, 'their souls shining on the surface of their faces' might attract others and 'strike them with awe'. James K. Baxter, "Twelve Letters to a Priest (1st Series)". Auckland, 1969.

⁸⁵ Personal letter from James K. Baxter to Peter Olds, c.1969, Bill Pearson and Peter Olds, "Two Personal Memories of James K. Baxter," *Islands* II, no. 1, Autumn (1973): p.6.

⁸⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.16.

move. I am incapable of being good - my soul is a mass of faults and contradictions - but when I know I am nothing, then through the eye of that needle God can do what he wants to do.⁸⁷

Materialism insulates people from the presence of God, preventing them from engaging fully with either creation or their own humanity. The voice of God is muffled by a surplus of goods and the attitude of possessiveness which attaches to them. Only through the willing relinquishment of such encumbrances is union with God possible.

A kaumatua said to me, 'The sin is to say, it is mine'... Attachment to possessions - material, mental or spiritual - is the root of all sin. Why worry about the fruit? Why not dig out the root?⁸⁸

Communal love and the sharing of possessions acts as a purgative of the soul, refreshing the spirit and enabling reconciliation with God.⁸⁹ In this sense Baxter regards poverty as a spiritual discipline, setting him free to pursue his vocation. He quotes with approval the prayer of Charles de Foucauld,⁹⁰ which he regards as expressing his own journey:

'Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord...'⁹¹

Baxter describes it as 'the prayer of poverty, of a man who is becoming the void'.⁹² It reinforces his own view that the purpose of relinquishment is not that of self-improvement, but of increased availability to God. He asks that Charles might pray for him, imploring 'God

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.16.

⁸⁸ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁸⁹ 'When we share our kai, when we share our houses, when we work for love, not for money, then Te Atua blesses us with a blessing like a shower of rain, and our faces begin to shine and our souls become strong and joyful.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹⁰ A French nobleman who became a missionary priest in Algeria, living in Franciscan-style simplicity before his assassination in 1916.

⁹¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22f.

⁹² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

to give me the peace of poverty'.⁹³ There is the common ground between the two men of their certainty that their own lives are of little significance in comparison with the will of God.

You poor old bugger, let us embrace! We can do nothing. God can do everything. Ask God to give us the peace of God.⁹⁴

It is through weaning the soul from dependence on possessions of every kind - whether material, conceptual or emotional - that Baxter seeks to become a Christ-carrier, the donkey of Jerusalem.⁹⁵ Poverty is 'the quiet country'⁹⁶ where the poet encounters his Lord without resistance or barrier.

(c) Poverty as a Call to Responsibility

Given Baxter's understanding that nga raukore represent the tangible presence of Christ in the world, it is not surprising that he also sees them as a summons to responsibility on the part of the Christian community. The poor stand as a challenge to the church's commitment to love.

Alcoholism, mental illness, the difficulties of youth, the loneliness of age, war and the effects of war, disruptions of family life, poverty that is not the Gospel poverty but something thrust on men by the injustice of others - these are indeed our challenge and our opportunity.⁹⁷

The scandal of the church is that it prefers to go about its own business, leaving Christ in his incarnation of poverty stranded by the roadside. In so doing it neglects the fundamental teaching of Jesus.

⁹³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

⁹⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

⁹⁵ See James K. Baxter, 'Jerusalem Sonnets (36)' CP p.472: 'go on, little donkey / Saddled and bridled by the Master of the world'.

⁹⁶ James K. Baxter, 'Four God Songs: 1. Two Songs for Lazarus (ii)', CP 521.

⁹⁷ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

The church is standing in the shoes of the Pharisees, who had orthodoxy but lacked justice and mercy. Te Ariki told his people to be orthodox with the Pharisees but to be merciful with the Samaritans.⁹⁸

The church has inadvertently 'married herself to Dives', and needs to return 'to her actual husband, the poor man Christ, who is also Lazarus'.⁹⁹ The incarnation of Christ carries the healing example for believers to follow. He became poor in order to give love to the poor.¹⁰⁰ In order to be faithful, his disciples must do likewise.

I remember thinking as I saw the Host raised in the early morning in the Cistercian monastery chapel at Kopua - 'Yes, we have to become the Bread and the Wine. We have to let ourselves be eaten by our neighbours.'¹⁰¹

The true role of the church is that of 'the servant church'; furthermore, 'a servant's job is to clean out the lavatories, actual or metaphorical'.¹⁰² Christian people have an inherent vocation to escape their materialist vocation and instead to embrace and offer compassion to the poor. Baxter sees the mechanism for this being the traditional Catholic teaching on works of mercy. Within this category, the basic 'minimum requirement for salvation' is that of 'feeding the hungry, clothing the naked'.¹⁰³ However, he expands the list to make it a practical manifesto of Christian duty, under the heading of 'The works of mercy that are most pleasing to God'.

To feed the hungry;
To give drink to the thirsty;
To give clothes to those who lack them;
To give hospitality to guests and strangers;
To bail people out of jail, visit them in jail, and look after them when they get out of jail;

⁹⁸ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". The reference to Dives and Lazarus is from Luke 16:19-31.

¹⁰⁰ See Philippians 2:5-7.

¹⁰¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹⁰² James K. Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit : From a Reading of the Prison Letters of Paul* (Karori: Futuna Press 1973) p.8.

¹⁰³ Baxter, "Lion and Lamb".

To bury the dead and go to funerals;
To instruct the ignorant with humbleness;
To strengthen those who are doubtful, or weak in the faith, and help them clarify their minds and make their own decisions;
To rebuke those who are at fault with tender love and without humiliating them;
To forgive what seems to be harm done to yourself;
To put up with difficult people;
To pray continually for all creatures.¹⁰⁴

This was a practical expression of Christian faith, and one which Baxter tried to follow in his own life. He also sought to implement the code within the various communities he established, and in particular at Jerusalem. In those situations, he was in a clear minority as an explicit representative of the Christian message, and needed to establish social compassion on humanitarian grounds. His message to the visible church, however, was one of radical obedience to the call of Christ as represented through the presence of nga pohara:

Let the monks and the brothers and the nuns open the doors of their holy jails and put down mattresses in the corridors for the houseless poor. Their 'poverty and their 'chastity' were given them by God so that they could embrace all people as brothers and sisters, and love them and be loved by them.¹⁰⁵

Neglect of the poor was an indication of the moribund state of the institutional church, and a denial of her vocation to express the servant hood of Christ. In Baxter's mind, the responsibility of the church was clear enough, and inescapable:

The church exists to serve her members and to serve the kingdom of Te Atua. How can she be a servant unless she is poor? Be poor then, and be available to all men.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit*. p.29; see also Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.11f. for an alternative list.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

(d) Poverty and Injustice

Towards the end of his life, Baxter's experiences among the poor and outcast of New Zealand society begin to generate a response which goes beyond either identification or compassion. There are clear stirrings of anger at the injustices suffered by the poor. He finds rising within him:

[A] certain kind of anger (not anger-against, anger on-behalf-of) when I could no longer endure the sight of the unhealed, unregarded wounds of the people, and in particular the wounds of the young.¹⁰⁷

He interprets this growing rage as a form of prophetic protest; it is 'a form of love. It comes when we hate the pattern of evil with a precise hatred, because it harms both the evildoer and those to whom evil is done'.¹⁰⁸ Despite his 'high' view of poverty and its benefits, Baxter is not blind to the systemic injustice which serves to create and maintain a permanent underclass in New Zealand society. He borrows the imagery of the biblical prophets to describe a situation where privilege is used to oppress those without power.¹⁰⁹

How nice to be nice! But the poor have no money
By definition, and in this country
They flay us for our hides, and tell us to eat asphalt
Unless we can learn to lick the boss's arse.

'Ballad of Firetrap Castle, 7. Firetrap Castle Song', CP 530f.

He identifies numerous agencies of injustice. These include the police ('And the rich men pay the fuzz / And the fuzz arrest the poor')¹¹⁰, the media (who 'suck the bollocks of the rich / And trample on the poor')¹¹¹, the Labour Bureau ('Where the clerks are accustomed to bully the

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Micah 3:3, where the oppressive rulers 'flay their skin off' the poor'.

¹¹⁰ James K. Baxter, '[Oh early in the morning]', CP 526.

¹¹¹ James K. Baxter, 'Ballad of Firetrap Castle, 2. *Truth Song*', CP527f.

poor')¹¹², and the courts ('Where Skully sits like Rhadamanthus / Weighing the guts of the poor in his scales')¹¹³. Together they form an oppressive collective to further marginalise those who are already vulnerable. Observing this creates in Baxter a 'mood of rage and rock-bottom frustration'.¹¹⁴ Though moved by poverty in other lands, he grieves for 'the people of my own country' with 'smashed desecrated hearts'.¹¹⁵ He claims 'It drove me into action'.¹¹⁶ His sorrow begins to create a new militancy and commitment to issues of justice which goes beyond his long-existing compassion: 'It is not our business to be charitable. It is our business to be on fire with love and the desire for social justice.'¹¹⁷

From the late 1960s on, Baxter participated in a number of movements advocating social change. Closest to his heart was that of Nga Tama Toa, the radical Maori protest group. In 1971, he accompanied them on a protest at Waitangi, where an attempt was made to burn a naval ensign.¹¹⁸ He began to speak of a 'Maori revolution', commenting:

The members of Nga Tama Toa might be its head; the people of the poorest maraes, its heart; the ones who are being injured in the borstals and the jails, its balls and its guts.¹¹⁹

He also participated in a variety of protests against the Vietnam war.¹²⁰ His effort was based on a Gandhian embrace of pacifism. He reports that he does not 'march happily in the student demonstrations', concerned not so much for 'opposition to war' as with the establishment of peace.¹²¹ During his time in crash-pads in Wellington, Baxter sought to lobby the City Council to allow squatters to occupy empty houses in the central

¹¹² Baxter, 'Ballad of Firetrap Castle, 7. Firetrap Castle Song', CP530f.

¹¹³ Baxter, 'Ballad of Firetrap Castle, 7. Firetrap Castle Song', CP530f.

¹¹⁴ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁸ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.268. For Baxter's own account of this protest, see Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

¹¹⁹ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.10.

¹²⁰ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.211ff.

¹²¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40f.

area.¹²² Through these ventures there was a developing strain of activism in his approach.

Baxter's nascent liberation theology will be the topic of a separate chapter. However, it is worth mentioning at this stage his temptation toward Marxism. Part of his motivation toward that philosophy grows out of frustration with the church and its indifference toward poverty.¹²³ But mostly it springs from his sense of outrage at injustice.

How can I live in a country where the towns are made like coffins
And the rich are eating the flesh of the poor
Without even knowing it?

'Ode to Auckland' CP 597f.¹²⁴

It is urban life especially which causes Baxter to call on 'Father Lenin'.¹²⁵ Back in Jerusalem, his earlier temptation 'to think for several months that I was becoming a Marxist'¹²⁶ seems distant. Yet by the end of his life he is hoping for 'an intelligent boobhead' or 'not-so-intelligent Varsity radical' to bomb Auckland university, and asking 'Why not burn the Art School down?'¹²⁷ He claims that 'Christianity has weakened my brain cells', and implores:

O Father Lenin, help us in our great need!
The people seem to enjoy building the pyramids.
Moses would get a mighty cold reception.

'Ode to Auckland' CP 597f.

¹²² Oliver, *James K. Baxter* pp.142ff.

¹²³ 'The reason few missionaries have made converts in China, and the Communists have made millions, is - I think - because the missionaries were moderately affluent, but the Communists were poor and in love with poverty, which is one of the hidden faces of Christ. So the Communists follow Christ and we desert Him. I wish it to be otherwise.' Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

¹²⁴ Note parallel with Micah 3:3 - 'who eat the flesh of my people'.

¹²⁵ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.44. Baxter says of Lenin: 'Lenin loved the people. Yevtushenko described him as the man who found Mother Russia lying drunk in the mud of the marketplace, and wiped her clean and set her on new feet.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". See also Baxter's poem 'The Communist Speaks', CP 373f.

¹²⁶ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

¹²⁷ James K. Baxter, 'Ode to Auckland', CP 597f.

However, it seems that these sentiments are more an expression of his frustration at the quietism of Christianity than any serious leaning toward a Marxist analysis.¹²⁸ A more consistent attempt to render his anger at injustice is coined in the biblical narrative of Dives and Lazarus.¹²⁹ Lazarus is the 'type' of those who languish in poverty 'outside the gate', while Dives represents the uncaring wealth and satisfaction of a materialist society. Baxter condemns the church for having aligned itself with Dives instead of with her 'actual husband, the poor man Christ, who is also Lazarus'.¹³⁰ This is a great betrayal which robs the church of its grounds for militancy.

With great concern she cares for the children of Dives because Dives will pay for the schools and the stone buildings in which she teaches doctrine and celebrates the Ritual Meal. Let her go back to Lazarus and receive the warmth of his embrace.¹³¹

Baxter through his voluntary poverty ('I am King Dives until / I put on Lazarus' coat')¹³² discovers 'the pain and peace of Lazarus'.¹³³ But his prophetic analysis of Pakeha society is that it replicates both the indifference and the consequent judgement accorded to Dives. In a dream of Gehenna, Baxter identifies with the fate of the affluent:

But the agony of Dives is what I felt in my dream; the plague city he calls a civilisation, a culture that cannot understand itself because it dare not accept its own spiritual strangulation and need of mercy. Instead it chooses guns and money and the badges of education. The agony of Dives is shaking the world to pieces.¹³⁴

Despite moments when his anger prompts him toward thoughts of overthrowing the social order, however, in general Baxter's response to injustice is that of modelling a way of life in which love and sharing are the guiding principles.¹³⁵ His faith demands that this alternative

¹²⁸ Baxter expresses a preference for organic communities over the communes of Mao Tse Tung, which he categorises as 'works of Caesar'. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

¹²⁹ Luke 16:19-31.

¹³⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹³¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹³² James K. Baxter, 'Four God Songs, 1. Two Songs for Lazarus (i)', CP 520f.

¹³³ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.48.

¹³⁴ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.48.

¹³⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

living is militant ('It is as much militancy to fast as to plant a bomb in a courtroom'),¹³⁶ and does not succumb to the social complicity which makes religion the opiate of the people ('The name of God becomes an aspirin if religion is used to divert men from social militancy.').¹³⁷ The weapons which he chooses for his battle against a 'desacralised, depersonalised, centralised Goliath'¹³⁸ are 'militant in a low key'¹³⁹:

aroahanui: the Love of the Many;
manuhiritanga: hospitality to the guest and the stranger;
korero: speech that begets peace and understanding;
matewa: the night life of the soul;
mahi: work undertaken from communal love.

I do not know what the outcome of the battle will be. My aim may be poor. But I think my weapons are well chosen.¹⁴⁰

(e) Poverty and Community

The formation of community as an alternative to desacralised existence is so important as to warrant separate treatment, and will be examined in the next chapter. It is useful, however, to reflect briefly on the connections which Baxter draws between poverty and community. He regards community as an antidote to materialist society, and poverty as the vital ingredient of community. In the struggle to incarnate the kingdom amidst a people numbed by individualism and possessions, the sharing of life in tribal structures is a sign of hope.

Communities are seeds planted by Te Wairua Tapu. In a community, I becomes Us.

¹³⁶ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.4.

¹³⁷ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.15. See also Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". : 'Prayer is a drug unless it leads to works of justice and mercy'.

¹³⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

¹³⁹ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.4.

¹⁴⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.54.

God became Us to share our destitution.¹⁴¹

In order to achieve it, however, there is need of a certain amount of deprogramming. The habits of ownership are hard to break, and yet they form an effective barrier to changing categories from 'me' to 'us'.

I may like my coat with leather cuffs, or my boots, or my sleeping bag - but if somebody else uses them, I have to remember that they are actually *ours*, not *mine* - and therefore accept gracefully a transfer of communal property.¹⁴²

Symbolic of this struggle, and important to Baxter personally, is the matter of cigarettes. He reports a troubled conscience while in Jerusalem, 'because for a few minutes I had it in mind to keep for myself the last packet of family cigarettes... I repented, Colin, but it was a severe breach of the spirit of poverty'.¹⁴³ It is the discipline of voluntary poverty, of stripping away possessions, which alone can enable an attitude of sharing which is crucial to community.

The most important principle is the sharing of material goods - because when we say 'Ours' instead of 'Mine' we are beginning to love in a thoroughly practical way - and because poverty lays the soul open to God and gives great beauty to all one looks upon.¹⁴⁴

It is only this willingness to relinquish personal ownership which allows communities to overcome 'the rind of a lifelong egotism'.¹⁴⁵ Such a pathway is vital in Baxter's quest to recover the sacral innocence of creation and so reorder the world in such a way as to allow human dignity for all.

If we are to rebuild the sacramental universe our civilisation has shattered to pieces - I see no way of doing it except by sharing the things we possess. Then we are using

¹⁴¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7. Baxter also claims of Jerusalem: 'God builds the house. I do not build it. I am its unimportant caretaker. Only God can build with living timber.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

¹⁴² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹⁴³ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹⁴⁵ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

them as God wishes them to be used.¹⁴⁶

Poverty and community are brought together in Jerusalem, a tribe which not only consists of members drawn from nga pohara, but which celebrates poverty and communal ownership. It represents the tangible expression of Baxter's longing for an alternative and redemptive way of living. Through its poverty, the community carries the blessing of God.

I think Te Atua covers us with his wings because we share our goods, because we try to love one another, because we speak the truth, because we do not lick the boss's rectum, because we try to learn from the Maori side of the fence - but, above all, because we are poor. He said - 'Blessed are nga raukore, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.'¹⁴⁷

4. Conclusion

Baxter reports feeling something of an outsider in relation to New Zealand society from his very early years.¹⁴⁸ Later in life he became an alcoholic, accentuating his sense of distance from what he regarded as a conformist culture. Also, there is little doubt that his experience in India honed his sensitivity to those on the margins; whether in Calcutta 'or in Karori, the sickness is, not to be wanted'.¹⁴⁹ It is not surprising that he should develop an understanding of poverty which highlighted exclusion and isolation. When combined with his reading of the Bible and apprehension of the term 'anawim', this view develops into a sophisticated and typically mythologised interpretation of the condition of poverty. Baxter's notion of poverty is always more than that of economic status; it carries spiritual and theological freight.

The crystallisation of his thinking in the latter part of his life culminates in a startling and prophetic embrace of poverty for himself: a rigorous process of dispossession. This seems to fulfil several functions simultaneously for the poet. He is identifying with the poor; he is challenging the complacency of a hopelessly materialist culture; he is purifying himself in his

¹⁴⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹⁴⁷ Baxter, "Notes on Community Life".

¹⁴⁸ Baxter speaks of a childhood sense 'of difference... between myself and other people', comparing himself to 'a Jewish boy growing up in an anti-Semitic neighbourhood'. Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.123f.

¹⁴⁹ James K. Baxter, 'Autumn Testament (36)', CP 541f.

quest for God; and he is training himself for participation in communal life. His Christian faith demands of him both a personal simplicity, and a compassionate response to the impoverished Christ who incarnates himself in the dispossessed. In the company of the poor, he discovers the blessing, the protection and the presence of Christ. Importantly, he also finds a clearing of the muddy waters of materialism, helping him to gain a clearer perspective.

Towards the end of his life, a combination of frustration and impatience produce a growing sense of anger toward injustice. Baxter is deeply disappointed in the lethargy and complicity of the church. His experience in protest movements and the crash-pads of Auckland and Wellington lead him to adopt an increasingly strident and revolutionary tone in his criticism of the authorities. But always he is drawn back to the organic rather than the political solution; preferring to 'nail two boards together, with the help of a friend, and share kai with strangers'¹⁵⁰ than to work within the existing system for change. His chosen approach is that of Christian militancy, in which a radical approach to discipleship, which includes communal living and public works of mercy, is used to subvert the status quo. He commits himself 'to row my boat and pray to God to look after the drowning'.¹⁵¹ It is the strategy of a man whose primary commitment is to Christ, the poor man who is the hope of nga pohara.

¹⁵⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

¹⁵¹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

Chapter Five: Arohanui - The Love of the Many

1. *Introduction*

As indicated in Chapter Three, Baxter's journey to Jerusalem is in many ways the apex of his aspirations, as well as being a tangible expression of his response to the spiritual impoverishment of Pakeha society. The poet laments the rigid individualism which pervades much of New Zealand culture, cutting people off from each other and consigning them to 'lifelong separate pain'¹ The 'Jerusalem experiment'² is an attempt to form a redemptive community which might serve as both prophetic sign and instrument of healing. Like most of his life, the venture into tribal living which characterises the latter years of Baxter's life is heavily mythologised. It comes to represent for him the substance of Christian hope; a lived alternative which contains hints of the kingdom of which Christ spoke.

The motif under which Baxter develops both his theory and practice of community is that of 'The Love of the Many'.³ While this expression is given theological currency, much of the symbolic underpinning of it is provided by taha Maori, and in particular the concept of arohanui. In the glossaries which accompany much of Baxter's later work, a direct equation is made between arohanui and 'the love of the many'.⁴ In his understanding, the concept comes to represent a warm embrace of both friend and stranger which is born from a strong tribal identity. He regards it as something of a return to primal experience; a more robust and sustainable way of living which serves as an antidote to the impossible individualism of Pakeha existence. His various attempts to live communally are an outward expression of a moral and theological imperative.

¹ James K. Baxter, 'Travelling to Dunedin', CP 366.

² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

³ J.W. Geraets prefers 'A Theology of Communality' as the organising theme; see Geraets, "James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality". Both terms are used by Baxter, but 'the love of the many' seems more common and is more clearly an articulation of his theological perspective - 'theology of communality' is a term which Baxter repeats from its usage by Tim Shadbolt. See Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.58.

2. *The Lost Tribe*

A strong element of Baxter's generic sense of loss relates to the demise of tribal existence. Although he has no direct experience of community life in childhood, and his family were in fact somewhat isolated because of their beliefs⁵, he draws on the mythological and collective memory of Gaelic ancestry to bemoan the loss of the tribe - 'But what can a tribesman do when he has no tribe?'⁶ Baxter feels that the intimacy and identity of communal life has been irretrievably lost, leaving him to stumble awkwardly in the quest for harmony and meaning. The simple rhythms of tribal life - 'where the clan built their houses, washed their linen, made their music, harvested their crops, bore their children and watched over their dead'⁷ - are no longer to be found. This mythological clan, to which Baxter claims spiritual allegiance, represents for him another element of the primitive and therefore more authentic experience of 'natural man'.⁸ The process of destruction of the tribes, and the consequences for European civilisation, will be treated shortly. For the present it is sufficient to note that Baxter feels a sense of deprivation in his lack of communal experience.

It is not surprising, then, that his impetus toward primal innocence should motivate him toward the reconstruction of what he perceives as missing dimensions of social life. Doyle notes the consistency of this aspect of Baxter's redemptive aspiration with the underlying yearning for simplicity: '[c]arried forward into the era of social man, and into the conduct of his own life, this will to restore the tribe stems directly from the Edenic vision'.⁹ It is an integral part of the poet's desire to counteract the desacralising effects of materialism and education. Baxter describes Jerusalem as '[t]he trap I am setting to catch a tribe',¹⁰ and portrays the members of the community as 'a thousand and one, / the tribe of nga mokai'.¹¹ He seeks to recapture the lost element of tribal existence as part of the quest to press back toward

⁵ See McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.60f.

⁶ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

⁷ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

⁸ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

⁹ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.115.

¹⁰ James K. Baxter, 'Jerusalem Sonnets (35)', CP 472.

¹¹ James K. Baxter, 'He Waiata mo taku Tangi (for Eugene)', CP 510.

a purified existence where humanity structures itself in accord with the rhythms of the created order. It is important to consider his views on communal living against the horizon of these deeper longings.

The enemy of tribalism is that of an individualism accentuated by consumerism and accidie. While referring to the destruction of the clans of his Scottish ancestors, Baxter cites Culloden, mythologising the battle as one of Caesar suppressing the regional mind.

Wherever a tribe is left, he feels it itching like a flea, and will rub till he kills it. This is because the autonomous tribal authority has no need of his power to govern its own affairs and will not readily join itself to his plans for organisation, subjugation or conquest.¹²

He envisages a situation in which tribalism is set against contradictory and often superior forces, and so struggles for survival: '[t]he voice of the tribe is not explicit; it seems to speak from the earth itself, in a low voice; one has to listen carefully to hear it when the megaphones are shouting round about'.¹³ It is an easy transposition to see the contemporary death of the tribes as attributable to different 'megaphones'. As Vincent O'Sullivan characterises Baxter's view:

The final destruction of the tribal unit, a later and more decisive Culloden - an important symbolic event for Baxter - came when the Cumberland of materialism struck dumb what was numinous in the land, or spiritual in the people.¹⁴

Tribal identity and communal existence are thus victims of a fractured and depersonalised society, both symptom and cause of alienation from the natural order.

3. *The Effects of Individualism*

¹² Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.29.

¹³ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.29f.

¹⁴ Vincent O'Sullivan, "After Culloden: Remarks on the Early and Middle Poetry of James K. Baxter," *Islands* II, no. 1, Autumn (1973): p.27.

Baxter's view of Pakeha society is of an atomised and isolated existence; one which imprisons people in situations of quiet desperation. The lack of tribal structure creates suburban ghettos where the functions of community must be carried by the impossibly inadequate foundations of family life.

But the families can't fill the gap left by the broken communities. For years now, the headless growth of commerce and technology has been smashing down all the fences. The bill has to be paid, in death, crime, insanity, social dislocation.¹⁵

Baxter pictures the product of a spiritually empty home in the form of a girl sitting in a pub, searching for 'any man who will treat her as a human being and not as a garbage disposal unit'.¹⁶ The disappointment of another empty encounter leaves her bereft: 'her face just a little more like a skull, with eyes that show a curious deadness, yet with pain just under the surface, like the look we see in the eyes of the photographs taken of people in Belsen'.¹⁷ She comes from an apparently successful family.

Her Daddy has promised her a new car when she gets her degree. There is plenty of money and social prestige in her home. It is her job to add the kudos of education.¹⁸

While her parents might oppose her going to Jerusalem, in the presence of the community 'at the very least, she would be among people who would treat her as a human being'.¹⁹ The simple life there might provide the meaning and identity she is hungry for.

She might become celibate. Many do. She might give her fur coat away for another girl to wear, and spend her time cooking food for thirty people and standing on a muddy kitchen floor.²⁰

The loneliness and spiritual poverty endemic to society is a consequence of the individualism

¹⁵ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.6.

¹⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.35.

¹⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.35.

¹⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.35.

¹⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.36.

²⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.36.

which has rent the fabric of community. The problem is that 'home life is not communal - I mean, there are no guests sleeping on mattresses on the floors of the homes the children come from - and the aims of the society at large are narrowly acquisitive and individualistic'.²¹ Baxter is convinced that '[i]n a tribal situation it would be simpler'.²² He speaks of 'that more or less anti-communal secular abyss which constitutes the Pakeha towns and suburbs and to which we Pakehas are thoroughly used as we are used to many other evils'.²³ In such settings, the organic and human-scale ordering of the tribes is lost, requiring that formal and remote authority structures effect discipline within society. Personified by Baxter as Pharaoh or Goliath, this state behemoth uses the instruments of education and consumerism to maintain a state of passivity among citizens. The result of individualism is that of clearing a social space in which bureaucracy and civil authorities exercise formal power.

But the terrible aspect of our lack of freedom is the fact that we are not free to act communally, when communities are everywhere ceasing to exist, and only a desacralised, depersonalised, centralised Goliath remains to demand our collective obedience.²⁴

Education is viewed by Baxter as performing an oppressive role by forming people to behave as passive individuals. He has some sympathy with teachers, who have 'continually to make bricks without straw', and are themselves 'crushed by the authoritarian atmosphere and the endless roadblocks they encounter in our schools'.²⁵ It is a difficult task, made more difficult by the fact that 'schools, or classes in schools, have insurmountable difficulty in generating a true community spirit'.²⁶ Nevertheless, teachers become the unwitting allies of the centralised and depersonalised state by their obedience to the educational authorities.

Teachers do this because they are slaves of a highly dishonest society. They are employed, directly or indirectly, by the hard middle class core of that society to ensure

²¹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

²² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.27.

²³ James K. Baxter, "The Maori in the Towns," *New Zealand Tablet* XCIV, no. 30, 2 August (1967): p.27.

²⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

²⁵ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

²⁶ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

that the children grow up with the same fantasies and prejudices as the parents.²⁷

They both symbolise and promote the individualism and materialism which is so destructive of communal life. The educational values are those of Pharaoh, and serve to undermine human and tribal dignity.

When I speak of depersonalisation, you may consider the effect of mass media - the fictitious worlds of advertisements for soap powder and frigid cop-and-robber fantasies, which parents, children and teachers, enter when they sit down in front of a TV screen.²⁸

These distractions maintain people in their isolated and unnatural state, and serve as a substitute for genuine community. The focus on self is a means of hiding from responsibility and belonging to others and to God. Baxter begins *Jerusalem Daybook*, which is concerned primarily with community, with a parabolic story about a man attempting to shut himself away from accountability and connection. The man, finding that 'life was too hard for him to bear', took up residence in a large corrugated iron tank, where 'he lived a blameless life without interruption from the world'.²⁹ However, he was plagued by volleys of bullets piercing the wall of his tank. Over time the man began to look out through the bullet holes, and observe the people passing by and the beauty of the world. Eventually 'the tank rusted and finally fell to pieces', and the hermit 'walked out of it with little regret'.³⁰ To his surprise he discovered that the person firing the bullets was not his enemy, but Christ himself: 'And the man who had come out of the tank saw that there were scars on the other man's hands and feet, and these scars were shining like the sun'.³¹

It is both an autobiographical and moral parable. It speaks of the temptation to withdrawal into the realm of the self, in denial of community. Christ, the seeming terrorist, shoots holes in this protective solitude, allowing reunification with tribe and nature. Solipsism is portrayed as

²⁷ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

²⁸ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

²⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

³⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2f.

³¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.3.

a sin, part of 'the rind of a lifelong egotism'³² which inhibits community. The focus on the individual, which is inculcated in Pakeha society, needs to be corrected with exposure to tribal life. This, in Baxter's view, is not only beneficial but redemptive:

In a community, I becomes Us. God became Us to share our destitution. When I becomes Us, we are joined to God in a hidden fashion, and persons are more themselves, not less themselves.³³

Only the experience of sharing life with others over a sustained period has the power to counteract the deep conditioning of individualism.

4. *Maori Aspects of Communal Life*

In forming a coherent theology of community, Baxter was forced to look outside his own heritage and culture. He found within Maoridom a deep tradition and practical understanding of tribal life. For Pakeha attempting to embark on a voyage of communal living, it is necessary 'to bow the head and learn from our elder brother',³⁴ Maori. In effect, Baxter's underpinning philosophy for Jerusalem, the most sophisticated of his communal ventures, is almost entirely informed by his enthusiastic reception of taha Maori. While W.S. Broughton notes that 'Maori society, with all its emphasis upon community rather than individualism and its ethic of arohanui... was one of the sources of Baxter's inspiration',³⁵ when it comes to his philosophy on community the influence is deep and almost unalloyed. The poet is quite clear that 'the [Jerusalem] community rests in the lap of the pa'.³⁶ In effect Baxter's theology of community is a Christianising of the Maori concept of arohanui.

This synthesis is not difficult for him, because as Geraets suggests, '[f]or Baxter Maoritanga

³² Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

³³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

³⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

³⁵ W.S. Broughton, "A Discursive Essay About Jerusalem," *World Literature Written in English* 14, no. 1, April (1975): p.72.

³⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

and Christianity are totally compatible'.³⁷

In tackling his approach to communal life, therefore, it is necessary to make a basic survey of the Maori concepts which Baxter adopts, before going on to examine the way in which he supplements them theologically. The essential elements to be examined are neatly provided in *Jerusalem Daybook*. Baxter pictures himself as a reluctant David, confronting the 'desacralised, depersonalised, centralised Goliath'.³⁸ In doing so, he selects the weapons previously cited:

[T]he five water-worn stones I choose from the river, to put in my sling, are five spiritual aspects of Maori communal life -

arohanui: the Love of the Many;
manuhiritanga: hospitality to the guest and the stranger;
korero: speech that begets peace and understanding;
matewa: the night life of the soul;
mahi: work undertaken from communal love.³⁹

Each of these categories will be briefly examined in light of its meaning within Maori culture, and the way in which it is adapted within the life of the Jerusalem community.

(a) Arohanui

As suggested by the title of this chapter, the integrating factor in Baxter's venture into community is that of arohanui. The term aroha may be translated simply as love, albeit with overtones of the communal love which lies at the heart of the tribe and binds individuals into a social unit; 'the powerful bond of love that springs from a tribal matrix'.⁴⁰

The essential elements of interpersonal relationships involving aroha are respect, friendship and care. The aroha of a person makes no demands on another. There are


³⁷ Geraets, "James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality" p.58.

³⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

³⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.54.

⁴⁰ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

no conditions laid down before the giving of self.⁴¹

Arohanui is the strong and applied version of such love, rendered into English by Baxter as the Love of the Many. That word has, in Baxter's thinking, a rough equivalence with the Greek term .⁴² He distinguishes it from the Love of the One for the One, which, while valuable, is 'fragile' and inadequate 'for any person to hang his or her life on'.⁴³ In his use of the term arohanui, he is generally referring to the corporate expression of love: 'love of the many, to show affection to one another, to be tolerant, to help people out of their hang-ups and so on'.⁴⁴ Baxter explains that 'the tribe, or the local semi-tribal community, has commonly among Maori people a most powerful symbolic and spiritual force, of a kind that Pakehas may find it hard to understand'.⁴⁵ It is this spiritual and sustaining force which he seeks to transplant from Maoridom into the Jerusalem community.⁴⁶

Theologically, Baxter is convinced that "Ko te aroha i Te Ariki" - 'Where love is, there the Lord is'.⁴⁷ And it is especially in the expression of communal love that the presence of God is to be found.

If we are looking for God on the human level, it is in the Love of the Many that He hides and reveals Himself. The Love of the Many is like air or sunlight. It is understanding, peaceful, unpossessive, tolerant, prepared to suffer for and suffer with.⁴⁸

It is with this conviction that Baxter at Jerusalem is sure that 'God lives among us'.⁴⁹ It is in

⁴¹ Hiwi & Pat Tauroa, *Te Marae: A Guide to Customs and Protocol* (Auckland: Reed Books 1986) p.144f.

⁴² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40., where he defined *charitas* as 'the love of community, the Love of the Many'.

⁴³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

⁴⁴ James K. Baxter quoted in Ian Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," *N.Z. Listener* 18 October 1971 p.19.

⁴⁵ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

⁴⁶ Baxter believes that 'the Maori spirit, *tuwairua* (*sic*) *Maori*, can belong to a Maori and to a Pakeha'. James K. Baxter in Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," p.19.

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.14.

⁴⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28.

arohanui, the Love of the Many, that companionship with the divine is experienced. In such communal love, identity is discovered not in self-love or the mutual love of couples, but in the tribal love which gives respect and dignity to every member of the group without qualification. Baxter finds himself entwined and held in such love at Jerusalem:

yes, they are the vines
that grow at Hiruharama
and wrap around my bones, -

a thousand and one,
the tribe of nga mokai
who put their fingers
inside my rib-cage
like the flame-red flower
of the nasturtium
on the rubbish heap
below the pa, -

'He Waiata mo taku Tangi (for Eugene)' 2, CP 510

Those who come to the community are often defeated and disillusioned by their experience in a world which lacks the intimacy of social fabric. But among the ragged tribe of Jerusalem they find arohanui which is capable of refreshing and restoring their souls.

- when Mumma came from the bin
With scars from the wrist to the shoulder,

They combed her hair and put their arms around her
Till she began to blossom. The bread she baked for us

Was better kai than you'd get in a restaurant
Because her soul was in it.

(b) Manuhiritanga

Within Maoridom, strangers are regarded as potentially threatening. Not only is there the risk of warlike aggression, but more subtle spiritual issues may be at stake.

When visitors who are strangers to a marae arrive, they are deemed to be waewae tapu (sacred feet), people who bring with them their own sanctity and ancestral spirits that might be inimical to the spirits and mauri (life force) of the tangata whenua. For this reason, visitors have to go through a highly formalised ritual welcome designed to decontaminate them of their alien tapu and negate any evil spiritual influences that might accompany them.⁵⁰

Through such a process, the stranger is transformed into a guest (manuhiri), under the protection of and welcomed into the heart of the tribe as if tangata whenua. Warm hospitality, epitomised by abundance of food, is offered to guests. This generous and loving hospitality, with its ability to welcome and ennoble strangers, is extended into a way of life and known as the quality of manuhiritanga. Baxter adopts the quality of manuhiritanga as being an essential component of the Love of the Many. His understanding of it seems to be taken directly from Maoridom and given theological overlay:

The guest is a sacred person sent by God. It is my opinion that if we turned away any guest from the door - mad or sane, drunk or sober, male or female, young or old - then we would be excluding God from the house. The guest should be welcomed with signs of love, and given food and drink - even if there is very little to eat in the house - and given a place to lie down. If a guest chooses to stay for any length of time, he should not be asked to contribute money or perform tasks - though his help should be welcomed if he offers it.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ranganui J. Walker, "A Place to Stand," 15-27 in *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Maoritanga*, ed. M. King (Auckland: Reed, 1992) p.17.

⁵¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.44.

He demonstrates a thorough understanding of the foundations of manuhiritanga among Maori, and its implications for those who might follow it as a way of life. Baxter defines manuhiritanga as:

[T]he relation of the host tribe to the stranger or guest, regarding the [Jerusalem] community, say, as a host tribe in this sense. That they should open the door to anybody who came, give them a warm welcome, something to eat and drink, a warm place to lie down.⁵²

The sacrality of the guest is a common and heartfelt theme in Baxter, and finds expression in the Jerusalem community. His initial communal experiment there operated under a universally 'open-door' policy.

Old, young, mad, sand, drunk, sober, male, female, Maori, pakeha - whoever comes here must be welcomed warmly, and given kai to eat and coffee to drink, and a place to lie down, if they need it. Otherwise we exclude God from the house. The stranger is his representative.⁵³

Geraets notes the extent of the welcome: '[m]anuhiritanga is shown to spiders, lice, crabs, plants, and to all who come to Jerusalem'.⁵⁴ While the policy brings undoubted pressure on the meagre resources of the fledgling community, Baxter defends it against those who complain: '[h]ow can we exercise the virtue of manuhiritanga, unlimited hospitality to the guest and stranger, and not be crowded quite often?'⁵⁵ Eventually, however, it brought the demise of the original Jerusalem and Baxter is forced to admit that 'when the open-door community was here, the house was often overcrowded, the sense of Maoritanga was frequently cloudy, and it was hard to get work done'.⁵⁶ When local Maori impose a limitation of ten people on the Jerusalem community, he finds '[i]t does hurt me to send visitors on the

⁵² James K. Baxter in Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," p.19.

⁵³ James K. Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/83, Dunedin, 1971.

⁵⁴ Geraets, "James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality" p.64.

⁵⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

⁵⁶ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42.

way', but comes to 'accept the present arrangement as the will of God'.⁵⁷ Despite the truncation of hospitality through the accommodation quota, Baxter remains committed to the expression of manuhiritanga as a means of acknowledging the God concealed within every stranger - 'our sacred guests, jewels hidden in a ball of mud'.⁵⁸

(c) Korero

The Maori term korero literally means speaking or speech. When Baxter employs it as a communal virtue, he is referring to the specialised usage of it as 'speech that begets peace and understanding'.⁵⁹ This in turn stems from the way in which problems are solved within Maori culture. The somewhat inaccurate description of decision-making by consensus indicates at least the participatory nature of discussions which eventuate in a communal decision. Giving everyone the right to speak ensures that no one is excluded even if their point of view is not reflected in the final decision.

Perhaps the most important aspect of a marae hui is that people have the right to be heard and others have an obligation to allow them to speak without interjections or interruptions. A speaker should be allowed to say his or her piece without opposition and without heckling.⁶⁰

In this sense korero is an expression of the Love of the Many, offering respect and dignity to the other. Baxter regards the freedom and opportunity to speak plainly as an essential element of building community.

[F]riends should speak the truth to one another. Words are made to convey truth. To hide one's heart from one's friend indicates some measure of fear or distrust. One has to take the risk of being misunderstood. But understanding grows if communication is truthful and also frequent.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42.

⁵⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.43.

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.54.

⁶⁰ Tauroa, *Te Marae* p.118.

⁶¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.43.

He is clear that he is engaging in cultural borrowing in the development of this philosophy. He defines korero as:

[T]hat mind-clearing and problem-solving mode of discussion which is traditional among Maori people. It needs a group to make it work. I think it can solve many problems otherwise insoluble.⁶²

Applying the principle to the Jerusalem community, Baxter cites a conflict over nude swimming in Whanganui river. Some members of the community, including Baxter himself, have enjoyed swimming with no clothes on. But when it is done in the sight of local Maori and draws complaints, Baxter intervenes: 'I called a meeting of the community in the middle room of the wharepuni'.⁶³ There he promotes korero on the subject, which produces a decision acceptable to all parties.

There was an intelligent perceptive discussion about the problem of nude swimming and various other facets of our relationship to the local people. We decided to adopt a compromise decision, already suggested to us by the pa people, of swimming with togs or jeans on at the water hole, and - if we so wished - swimming naked only at the rapids, where our bodies would be too far distant to be clearly visible to a bystander.⁶⁴

The important element is not so much the outcome of the discussion, as it is the resolution of a potentially damaging conflict in such a way as to preserve the sense of communal belonging. In this sense korero is a valuable mechanism for the expression of arohanui:

But the process of korero, the group discussion, is open for any of us to initiate. It relaxes tensions. It stops the formation of factions. And quite often real practical wisdom can emerge from it.⁶⁵

⁶² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.51.

⁶³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.50.

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.50f.

⁶⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.51.

(d) **Matewa**

This is a rather obscure term, used in its communal context by Baxter to mean 'the night life of the soul',⁶⁶ and translated in his glossary as 'what comes toward us'.⁶⁷ In another place, he suggests matewa is 'the area of Maori thought and feeling that lies at the edge of reason'.⁶⁸ The root of the word is 'mate', which has a range of meanings with the most common being those of death and sickness. It would seem then that Baxter is adopting local usage of a term to refer to the preternatural forces associated with death and the spirit world. It appears to be associated in his thought with the realm of the anima; a region which lies beyond the reach of direct observation. It involves:

[T]he experience of the preternatural - not experience of God, who alone is supernatural, but experience of elements in nature and elements in one's own soul - perhaps even an obscure experience of angels, demons, and the spirits of the living and the dead.⁶⁹

Baxter further explicates what he means by the concept of matewa in a passage from *Autumn Testament*, albeit using the category of anima: '[t]he anima is the area familiar to Maori thought, the place of fear, the passive night from which dreams come, where one encounters the spirits of nature and the spirits of the dead'.⁷⁰ He portrays it as the territory which is covered in a fog of fear, and yet which must be entered and endured in preparation for death.

The relevance of this quality for the building of community is not at first obvious. Baxter seems to advance two arguments for its importance. The first is that of his own preparation for the founding of a community in a Maori setting. He recalls his early experience at Jerusalem, before the first community assembled there.

I remember how, in my first six months at Jerusalem, when I lived there as a hermit, I

⁶⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.54.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.58.

⁶⁸ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

⁶⁹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁷⁰ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

used to go step by step up a certain dark road - moving my feet very slowly as if they were in deep sand - towards an old broken house smothered in bramble which my anima told me was haunted - possibly by the anima itself, since that part of one's soul is often experienced as a destructive power. I would force myself to go in through the bramble, alone, at midnight, right into the dark door of the house - my heart pounding, sweat running off my body.⁷¹

The reason for undertaking this ordeal was 'to make a journey on the Maori side of the fence' and 'to diminish my fears'.⁷² Without it, Baxter considered he would not be ready for the task which lay ahead of him.

What good would I be as a father to a fearful tribe - most of them aged seventeen to twenty-five - if I could not myself go against the fears that tended to swallow them up... I have had to get to know the preternatural area of my own soul - to be, if you like, more familiar with the dead than the living - in Jerusalem which is a village of graveyards. Perhaps this is to be a good *tohunga*. One has to cease - at least, in measure - to fear death or the dead or the dark abyss of one's own soul.⁷³

This encounter with the spirit realm as a form of preparation is somewhat reminiscent of the tradition of shamanism.

The second rationale for linking *matewa* with the Love of the Many is given by Baxter as that of breaking down the dominance of the animus, which he regards as the sphere of egotism and possessiveness. In order to form community, this distorting principle needs to be dethroned.

At Hiruharama, we go beyond the conscious shell of knowledge, that part of the soul which says - 'I want; I have; I am' - into the darkness of the anima, the yin principle in the mind which may be compared to the night itself. It is necessary to make this

⁷¹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁷² Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁷³ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

journey.⁷⁴

Through travelling into 'the place of fear, the passive night from which dreams come, where one encounters the spirits of nature and the spirits of the dead',⁷⁵ the pilgrim is emptied of all barriers to tribal life, and learns not to cling to that which cannot be held. The encounter may be terrifying, but is also liberating.

At times the journey may be agonising. It may demand the last ounce of oneself, to go beyond oneself, to walk the water of availability to all things and all persons. But there is always peace beyond the agony. We wait to be turned into entire creatures. At the centre of the darkness we wait for the light of the spiritus to shine, the light that the disciples saw on the Mountain of Transfiguration.⁷⁶

Once again we see Baxter giving a theological gloss to a Maori concept, and employing it in the service of communal living.

(e) Mahi

Mahi is literally work, though Baxter interprets it as indivisibly linked to the life of the tribe, so that it becomes for him 'work undertaken by members of a community on behalf of that community'.⁷⁷ Within Maoridom, such work is regarded as an honour in that it is performed voluntarily out of love for others, rather than resented because it is imposed. Baxter notes that mahi thus has a 'sacred connotation', in distinction from the Pakeha understanding which is 'severely desacralised'.⁷⁸ It is necessary therefore for Pakeha 'to learn from the remnants of the Maori tribal structure that still survive among us'.⁷⁹ In the original Jerusalem community, '[m]ahi was the little finger on our hand'.⁸⁰ The policy,

⁷⁴ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

⁷⁵ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

⁷⁶ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

⁷⁷ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁷⁸ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁷⁹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

⁸⁰ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42.

promoted by Baxter, was that no guest should be asked to undertake any work.

There was no expectation in the sense you have to do such and such. My view was that work would have to be voluntary.⁸¹

This is in keeping with the Maori view that manuhiri should not be obliged to work, even though their contribution is gladly accepted when freely offered.⁸² Unfortunately, in Jerusalem, this meant that many basic tasks were often unattended. While Baxter notes that sometimes after a few months residence, community members 'may be working on behalf of the community in one way or another',⁸³ the reality was that many did nothing. When Tim Shadbolt and his friends arrived to visit Jerusalem, they were dismayed that no one was working, and in short time cleaned up the main house and dug a garden.⁸⁴ At the time, Baxter was defensive about the accusation of 'bludgers and parasites' in the community,⁸⁵ but later admitted that 'it would put a certain strain on the community' and that 'it couldn't continue indefinitely in that form'.⁸⁶ With the advent of the second community (with its limit of ten members), referred to by Baxter as 'family',⁸⁷ the concept of mahi was more firmly established: '[t]wo of my family are carpenters, and the girls keep the house clean, mopping it out with water and disinfectant daily'.⁸⁸

Baxter does not count work in and of itself to be of great value, especially in a depersonalised society where it has become 'the weekly chore one undertakes to do, often in servile conditions, for the sake of a pay packet at the end of the week'.⁸⁹ But performing even mundane tasks for the sake of communal betterment has the power to restore the dignity to manual labour, and indeed to heal the troubled soul. Mahi is an important element in the building of communal love and respect. Baxter describes a former community member, Abe,

⁸¹ James K. Baxter in Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," p.19.

⁸² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.44.

⁸³ James K. Baxter in Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," p.19.

⁸⁴ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.266.

⁸⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.43.

⁸⁶ James K. Baxter in Hay-Campbell, "The Jerusalem Experience," p.19.

⁸⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.41.

⁸⁸ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42.

⁸⁹ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

who had the use of only one lung and wheeze through the night in his bunk.

But I saw him with a shovel in the bottom of the pit

They dug for the shithouse, tossing earth to the sky,
His dark face wrinkled with the tribal smile.

'Autumn Testament' (37) CP 559

For Baxter such glimpses of transformation are hints of the redemptive power of living in a community based on aroha.

5. Theological Aspects of Community

The most formative values which Baxter introduces to Jerusalem are those he has gleaned and described from the realm of tikanga Maori. He hopes that when the community is fully constructed, 'the walls and the windows and the rafters' might be finished 'mainly in the Maori style'.⁹⁰ But the other strong influence on Jerusalem is that of Christian theology; Baxter notes that the foundations 'were contributed by the church and the pa'.⁹¹ His dalliance with Christian perspectives on community is perhaps less overt than his reliance on Maori wisdom, but is none the less significant for that. The overarching vision of Baxter in the final years of his life is Christian; his use of Maori concepts is made possible because he sees them as being compatible with his faith. The equivalence of arohanui with *charitas* has already been noted. Both concepts influence Baxter's mature category of the Love of the Many, which is a richly theological symbol.

(a) Community as Analogy of Trinitarian Life

Community is valued not only as an experience which is pragmatically

⁹⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

⁹¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

transformative in a depersonalised world, but also because it expresses something of God's own life and love in human form. For Baxter, the journey into communal living is both an obligation of Christian discipleship, and a revelatory sign to the world. Jerusalem is therefore a prophetic symbol in the context of New Zealand society:

And your sign is in our heart, - the shape of our lives together is
your own shape -

'In Praise of the Taniwha' CP 513f.⁹²

The trinitarian life of God is a communal existence, and therefore the Christian view of love has an inherently communal bias.

[The Holy Spirit] prefers to act in a communal context. This should not seem strange to us, since the Christian message regarding the Trinity has revealed to us that God himself is communal in his own being. And since we are made in his image, man is most truly man in communal situations.⁹³

Baxter contrasts this with non-Christian perspectives in order to explain his understanding of community.

A deist may see God as a Power behind the universe, unconnected with man. but a Christian believes that God is also our Brother - that He became us, by becoming a member of the human race - and this profoundly alters our view of human love.⁹⁴

It is clear from this statement that a strong view of the incarnation influences Baxter's view of human interaction: '[w]hen we love our neighbour, we are also loving Christ present in our neighbour'.⁹⁵ Christian love cannot be reduced either to a relationship between God and the

⁹² In this poem 'your sign' is a reference to the taniwha rather than God, but as Geraets notes, the taniwha symbol is itself an analogy of the Christian deity. J.W. Geraets prefers 'A Theology of Communality' as the organising theme; see Geraets, "James K. Baxter: A Theology of Communality" p.59.

⁹³ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.33.

⁹⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

⁹⁵ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

believer, or to what Baxter terms the 'Love of the One for the One'.⁹⁶ A thoroughly Christian view of love must be a trinitarian love, which by definition cannot exclude others.

This love is not self-love. A man absolutely on his own - supposing it were possible - might turn his thoughts to God or to the visible non-human creation. But to be a practising Christian, he would require the company of other men to love - since *charitas* is the love of community, the Love of the Many.⁹⁷

It is the privilege of humanity to be able to participate in such divine love, and hence to experience something of the communal bonds which suffuse the Godhead: '[i]n a very faint and limited way, I believe He allows us to think his thoughts after Him - to share in that relationship of love which is the foundation and meaning of the whole universe'.⁹⁸ Baxter seems to suggest that without participating in the expanded love of the Trinity, which has been broken open to include humanity through the incarnation, it is not possible to have direct knowledge of God. Communal love, the Love of the Many or *charitas*, is the means of receiving God.

A man knows God by *charitas* - that is, by brotherly and sisterly love. When *charitas* is present in the soul, God is present there - because God is *charitas*.⁹⁹

None of this represents for Baxter 'a formal statement of Christian doctrine'.¹⁰⁰ He is more interested in the practical expression of his theological convictions, as represented by Jerusalem, the 'experiment which involves the Love of the Many'.¹⁰¹ The art of communal love does not require to be undergirded with faith for it still to have profound significance:

Yet I think that when people love one another, and speak the truth, and share their goods - Christ comes to live in their hearts, whether they believe in him or not - because Christ is the Love of the Many incarnate among men. These things are

⁹⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

⁹⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.2.

⁹⁹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.3.

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹⁰¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

possible to sinners. The bread of friendship can be eaten even if it is spotted with fly dirt.¹⁰²

(b) Anticipatory Existence

The general orientation of Baxter's thought is toward the past. For the most part his longing is for a return to innocence; the retracing of human destiny to the primal peace enjoyed by Adam in Eden. But there are also signs of an eschatological perspective, typical of Christian theology, emerging in Baxter's interpretation of communal living. There is of course a certain resonance in the choosing of Jerusalem as the locus for his symbolic community, with its connotations of the 'New Jerusalem' which comes at the end of time.¹⁰³ Baxter plays on this in his suggestion that Hiruharama is the locus where 'what is not can marry what is'.¹⁰⁴ There seems to be the suggestion that he considers certain elements of the community to be anticipatory signs of the coming order, or, in traditional Christian terms, the kingdom of God. His tribe is thus given prophetic significance. He 'sees' in communal existence a representation of that which is to come.¹⁰⁵

I have seen the boulder lifted
From the back of the tribe. I have heard their singing voices.
I have felt their hands like the wind on the grass
Stroking my cheek, when it seemed all hope had gone...

The light of a new morning is bright on the grass
And the voices of the poor are welcoming the day
When the cloud of night will be lifted and Pharaoh's kingdom gone.

'Song to the Lord God on a Spring Morning' CP 591f.

¹⁰² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹⁰³ 'And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...' Revelation 21:2.

¹⁰⁴ James K. Baxter, 'Morning in Jerusalem', CP 519.

¹⁰⁵ Note the suggestion of Luke 7:18-23, where Jesus responds to John the Baptist's question as to whether he is the Messiah by pointing out the works that have been done.

The glimmerings of hope for a new way of living are regarded as being a portent and precursor of the heavenly existence which is to come at the end of the age. Simpson regards this strain of Baxter's thought as classic Christian utopianism:

...Baxter is expressing many of the outward and visible signs of the apocalyptic view of the world - the need for new relationships both physically (the sharing of goods, the embrace, the welcome to the guest) and spiritually (the need for honesty, truth and love), new ways of relating human being to human being.¹⁰⁶

Certainly the poet does seem to see mystical significance in many of the events of community life, especially 'when the sick get well, when the dead soul comes to life and appears on the surface of a friend's face'.¹⁰⁷ At times this strays into an interpretation which accords cosmic implications to the gathering of his tribe:

It is my opinion, Eugene, that the Spirit in these days is shifting mountains of despair from many souls and making crooked roads straight for the feet of those who will run to do the works of mercy.¹⁰⁸

But the description of Baxter as a 'millenarian prophet'¹⁰⁹ may be too strong. It is more accurate to recognise within his Jerusalem reflections a conviction that at times there are to be found glimpses of the redeemed life, which in Christian thought always has an eschatological dimension.

Heaven will be the fully human society. But that is "kept safe" for us on the other side of the grave... What is done here will be perfectly fulfilled in heaven... As the Spirit made the world out of nothing, so now from the chaos and nothing of our hearts he makes the new creation. We are the living stones of the new Jerusalem.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Tony Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," *Cave 2*, August (1972): p.33.

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.22.

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.45. Note the reference to Luke 3:5 and its antecedent Isaiah 40:4.

¹⁰⁹ Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," p.35.

¹¹⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.9.

Baxter is not prophesying the end of the world, nor suggesting that his prophetic role will induce it. But he does see redemptive signs of hope in the community, which presage an existence beyond time. Community life is thus an anticipatory form of existence, at least partially.

Our fault has always been to look to a future event to bring the sovereignty of Christ to us, whereas that sovereignty had already begun, in the communities of the early church, and is equally available to us today.¹¹¹

When he speaks with a troubled member of the tribe, Baxter cites the gift from God of 'a white stone at the end of the world' on which 'the secret name of each of us will be written'.¹¹² When a form of healing results, he sees it as a further affirmation of a realised future blessing.

Her face shines with love. I suppose these are the times of transfiguration that should not be mentioned outside the family. There are many of them.¹¹³

It is in such incidents that Baxter finds divine approval for his community, and renews his conviction that 'God lives among us'.¹¹⁴

(c) The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Baxter's manifesto on community, *Jerusalem Daybook*, is inspired by a challenge from the social activist, Tim Shadbolt: '[y]ou said we needed a theology of communality'.¹¹⁵ On reflection, however, he believes that the answer lies in a slightly different direction: '[a] theology of the Holy Spirit is what we need'.¹¹⁶ This comes from his growing conviction that efforts toward achieving Christian existence are misguided unless initiated and empowered through the Holy Spirit. To attempt community, especially of the Christian kind,

¹¹¹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.33.

¹¹² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

¹¹³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.46.

¹¹⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

is impossible without such divine assistance; after all, '[c]ommunities are seeds planted by Te Wairua Tapu'.¹¹⁷ The demands of communal life, which involve abnegation of self and love of the other, are only fully possible through the inspiration of the Spirit.

The first Christians did not start to share their goods in a free and full manner till after the bomb of the Spirit exploded in their souls at Pentecost. Before then, they would be morally incapable of this free and joyful sharing.¹¹⁸

Baxter believes that the potential for the Love of the Many is universally present in humanity. But it lies there dormant until the Holy Spirit shines upon it 'as the sun reaches into the dark earth and warms the seed'.¹¹⁹ The Jerusalem experience helps to persuade Baxter that 'without the power of the Holy Spirit we cannot do the works of mercy that God requires, and that he, the Spirit, must be waited for and supplicated and welcomed when he comes'.¹²⁰ It is the Spirit alone who:

'...lifts the poor boats of our souls above the rocks, as the tide does when it rises.

Without him we may have good desires but we have no power to perform them.'¹²¹

Late in his life, Baxter had an encounter with an independent Pentecostal group in Masterton, which had a profound influence on him.¹²² Coming on the heels of the collapse of the Jerusalem community, it reinforced for him the role of the Holy Spirit in achieving the Christian dream. Feeling keenly his own failure, Baxter saw evidence of that which he had been striving for among the young Pentecostals.

I have seen those who are buried in the love of Christ kneel and pray together. I have seen them go out in the streets, like brothers, to bring the young people from the billiard saloons and street corners, into a hall where they could eat together, slowly

¹¹⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7. Baxter distinguishes communities of this sort from 'communes' which are 'sub-personal' - presumably a response to Shadbolt.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.11.

¹¹⁹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.17.

¹²⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5..

¹²¹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5.

¹²² 'Recently in Masterton the Holy Spirit gave me peace and the healing of old wounds through the hands of an undenominational pastor.' Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5.

and gently bringing them to belief in Christ... I have seen them share their goods and welcome the street gangs into their houses.¹²³

The experience served to convince him that '[o]nly the Spirit can melt that frost'.¹²⁴ The presence of the Spirit and the creation of open and caring communities belong together for Baxter, because the divine presence is inevitably communal. Both through Jerusalem and other ventures, the Spirit creates communities and is found in their midst. In the presence of otherwise marginalised people, true redemption is made available.

Lord, Holy Spirit,
In the love of friends you are building a new house.
Heaven is with us when you are with us.
You are singing your song in the hearts of the poor.
Guide us, wound us, heal us. Bring us to the Father.

'Song to the Holy Spirit' CP 572.

6. Community and Sharing

Baxter's experiments in community are not constituted simply by people living in close proximity to each other. The essential element in the formation of community is identified as that of mutual sharing: '[c]ommunities cannot be founded without a spirit of poverty, that is, a spirit of detachment that expresses itself in the sharing of material and mental possessions'.¹²⁵ When Baxter lists a series of principles which underlie the Jerusalem community, he identifies sharing as the chief of them, and gives a rationale for that view:

The most important principle is the sharing of material goods - because when we say 'Ours' instead of 'Mine' we are beginning to love in a thoroughly practical way - and because poverty lays the soul open to God and gives great beauty to all that one looks

¹²³ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.36.

¹²⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.36.

¹²⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

upon.¹²⁶

It is important to distinguish Baxter's thoughts from the communistic impulse to rationalise wealth and ownership equitably. In his understanding, the motivation to share is consistently spiritual, intended to break down an 'unconscious egotism which only God can cure'.¹²⁷ The practical pathway of community is thus a means to cleansing the materialistic soul.

It is necessary for us to share our material possessions. Without sharing, it is extremely easy for people to quarrel with one another about items of property. I may like my coat with leather cuffs, or my boots, or my sleeping bag - but if somebody else uses them, I have to remember that they are actually *ours*, not *mine* - and therefore accept gracefully a transfer of communal property.¹²⁸

Sharing of goods (and Baxter includes intangibles such as values which people might have a sense of ownership for) is a spiritual discipline, closely aligned to poverty in its cleansing and restoring power for people whose hearts have become cluttered and disordered through accumulative lifestyles. The relinquishment of a possessive approach to existence is a way of rediscovering the world as essentially contingent.

If we are to rebuild the sacramental universe our civilisation has shattered to pieces - I see no way of doing it except by sharing the things we possess. Then we are using them as God wishes them to be used.¹²⁹

It is this intersection between the inner path to redemption and the doggedly specific demands of communal life which makes the Jerusalem experience sacramental for Baxter, exposing the clutches of the 'measuring, grabbing mind' and giving God 'the opportunity to cure it'.¹³⁰ Cigarettes become a significant symbol in the struggle for communal existence, at times

¹²⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹²⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

¹²⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹²⁹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹³⁰ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

gaining almost eucharistic portent.¹³¹ Baxter himself struggles to achieve *charitas* in his attitude toward them.

My conscience accused me this morning, after breakfast, because for a few minutes I had it in mind to keep for myself the last packet of family cigarettes, which Steve had brought out from the cupboard in the pataka. I repented, Colin, but it was a severe breach of the spirit of poverty. I gave the packet to another member of the family, the least certain of himself, and told him to take one and put the packet on the table where everybody would be able to help themselves.¹³²

The model and Christian inspiration for sharing of goods is for Baxter contained in the central sacrament of his faith - '[t]he core of it lies somewhere in the Eucharist'.¹³³ The Love of the Many involves giving not only goods but one's interior life to be shared with others.

Love one another and share your goods. This means also to share the pain and hope of one another's inner being. To give oneself to Te Morehu is to become a loaf of bread that is eaten.¹³⁴

There are some limits placed on what may be shared. 'Of course,' notes Baxter, 'we cannot share our wives or husbands or sweethearts, because they are persons, not things'.¹³⁵ But beyond these boundaries, the path of sharing leads to redemption and hope.

7. Community and Sexual Love

Throughout his life Baxter struggled with sexual fidelity, though his reputation for indiscretion may have been somewhat self-inflated.¹³⁶ Perhaps fuelled by this suspicion of

¹³¹ See Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42., where the assertion is made that after sharing smokes, the 'empty cigarette packet is a sacred object, a kind of sacramental, containing the life of God'.

¹³² Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.43.

¹³³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹³⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹³⁵ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.43. A similar sentiment is expressed in Baxter, "Notes on Community Life". : 'We do not share one another as we share kai and clothes and shelter. Persons are not property.'

¹³⁶ Frank McKay notes that 'Baxter's aspirations outran the performance'. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.144.

promiscuity, public opinion tended to suspect that Jerusalem promoted casual sexual encounters. Baxter scoffed at 'the imaginary vision of a free love orgy [which] haunts the minds of the members of the majority culture'.¹³⁷ However, Mike (Michelle) Minnehan, a community member who bore Baxter a son, considered that he adopted a *droit de seigneur* attitude to young women at Jerusalem. She was aware of his personal charisma, and described him as troubled.

He fought a furious battle against his sexual irresponsibility. He always had.¹³⁸

It seems that Baxter struggled to contain his expressions of intimacy with community members, leading to cycles of transgression and remorse. In *Jerusalem Daybook*, he cites 'certain difficulties with women' in the context of 'formative or destructive areas of sexual love'.¹³⁹

Baxter is aware of the temptations which arise from community living, especially in a situation like Jerusalem where physical embrace is encouraged. His own evaluation is that 'the physical expression of love within a group, by touching, by embracing, by sharing of kai or drink or cigarettes, promotes peace and trust' and 'diminishes the sexual tensions that arise from loneliness'.¹⁴⁰ But he is aware that this 'is a delicate area to walk in', and that 'there is a constant danger that Eros the horse will buck off the rider Agape'.¹⁴¹

Some may fear that the physical embrace, between members of the opposite sex, may lead to unchastity. I grant that the danger exists - but I think unchastity is much more prevalent in social areas where people show no sign of physical affection to one another. Then the genital relation may be the only channel by which love is being expressed physically. There is, as it were, a pile-up of water behind the dam - and when it is released it may overflow the banks.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.24.

¹³⁸ Mike Minnehan, quoted in Lynn Loates, "The Man Who Shot Angels," *More* May 1990 p.44.

¹³⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.9.

¹⁴⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹⁴¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹⁴² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.43.

Perhaps because of his personal experience, Baxter realises the ambiguity between communal love and sexual love. Both are intense, intimate and vigorous. The risk of confusion is not enough to lead him to discourage the enthusiastic expression of the Love of the Many however.

There are delicate problems in the relationship between men and women. Anybody who doesn't know that is naive. Nevertheless, the desire to love and the desire to be loved are closely intertwined. Until we are loved, we are unable to love.¹⁴³

He admits that '[c]ouples do from time to time pair off at Jerusalem'.¹⁴⁴ But even so, a 'surprising number of nga mokai do, for one reason or another, adopt a life of celibacy'.¹⁴⁵ Baxter refuses to impose moral regulation on community members; nor does he find much morally questionable about the sexual relationships at Jerusalem. His perspective is that human love which implies the Love of the Many is at root analogous to divine love. Communal love is dangerous, but with a little care can be separated from sexual expression.

It may contain erotic areas. but in the ordinary way of things it does not express itself genitally. The genital expression of love is reserved for the relationship of the One to the One.¹⁴⁶

The venture into community, which is in his view a journey toward the love of God, is fraught with difficulty. He is only too aware of his own failings to consistently make the separation between communal and genital love which he speaks of, but remains adamant that the greatest sin is that of failing to love well or completely.

8. Community and Suffering

Baxter's parable which stands as an introduction to *Jerusalem Daybook*, and an indirect answer to Tim Shadbolt's plea for a theology of communality, implies that seeming

¹⁴³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.6.

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.24.

¹⁴⁵ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.10.

assault, wounds, and scars are part of the process of becoming available to and engaged with others.¹⁴⁷ His preliminary comments make explicit what is proposed by the narrative:

In this daybook, I offer only a bundle of anecdotes, intuitions and conjectures - points where the shell of my own egocentricity has been broken through by the occasions of communal life. These points may be felt as wounds. But wounds are necessary.¹⁴⁸

This is consistent with the poet's understanding that suffering is not only inevitable, but can be illuminating; and that the journey into community will inevitably invoke personal pain for the participants. While the Love of the Many is redemptive and comes to humanity as a blessing, the preparation for its advent involves the stripping away of false securities, which may be experienced as radical loss and feel threatening to individuals.

Community life turns some people into misanthropes. They come to Jerusalem with the hopeful expectation that here at least they will find a garden of harmony and love. They find themselves confronted, without insulation, by themselves and their fellows, no doubt prepared to love, but radically clumsy, weak, discordant. If one can bear the pain of that truth, it is possible, I think, for the first time to begin to love.¹⁴⁹

To resist this process is to be consigned to individualism and egocentricity. Baxter encourages community members to accept what feels like a painful and destructive deconstruction, because '[w]ounds are like fountains in the soul'.¹⁵⁰ He himself bears 'wounds in my soul which God probably means to leave open'.¹⁵¹ But suffering is not the denial of community; rather, it is the genesis of it.

But those who come here always comment on the peace of the place, and indeed we are at peace. Peace and pain are often intimately connected.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

¹⁴⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹⁴⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹⁴⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

¹⁵⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40.

¹⁵¹ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42.

¹⁵² Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.42f.

Baxter holds to an orthodox Catholic view of the redemptive value of suffering, interpreting it as a form of participation in the sufferings of Christ. He rails against the 'God of sugar' proposed in the churches, preferring 'the terrible One who grips our living entrails, who drives both good and evil from our souls, as if both were his enemies, and fills us with darkness and anguish'.¹⁵³ His [Baxter's] own suffering is caused partly by his own journey and troubled conscience, but is also contributed to by his role within the Jerusalem community: '[t]he griefs of the tribe have communicated themselves to me... their tensions flowed into me as electricity flows into the wire that conducts it to the ground'.¹⁵⁴ But he accepts it as part of the price of community, and as a privileged sharing in the redemptive agony of Christ.

His sorrow is both ours and not ours. It is beyond us, yet spears slide out of it to pierce our little hearts... I love him, yet his sorrow terrifies me. To go into it, out of the warmth of the tribe, is too like dying before death.¹⁵⁵

All of this reinforces the conclusion that for Baxter, community is not so much a political or sociological experiment as it is an integral part of the life-long spiritual quest for God. The sufferings which might be borne as a result of this quest are regarded by him as both necessary and creative.

9. Community as Sacrament

In Catholic understanding, a sacrament is 'a visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation'.¹⁵⁶ The seven sacraments of the Church are regarded as making the mystery of Christ tangible and available to those who participate in them. Baxter was formed by this sacramental view - '[t]he house where I was born had seven windows'¹⁵⁷ - which fitted well with his mythical and analogical perspective on life. He was particularly taken by the element of mystery and encounter offered in the sacraments. The following describes his experience

¹⁵³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.14.

¹⁵⁴ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.46.

¹⁵⁵ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.46.

¹⁵⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Pocket Edition* (Dublin: Veritas 1994) p.179.

¹⁵⁷ James K. Baxter, 'Jerusalem Sonnets (38)', CP 473.

while venerating the Consecrated Host in a church:

...the change was as if I had crossed a boundary from one country to another. Behind me was narrowness, in front of me Infinity itself; behind me a light that resembled darkness, in front of me a darkness that was the Light of the World; behind me measured sacrifices and doubtful allegiances, in front of me that Man who is also God and who demands the last atom of our love.¹⁵⁸

It is perhaps natural that his high view of community should spill over into being regarded as sacramental, in that it represented 'a visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation'. Baxter's theological perspective is that on the basis of a Trinitarian perspective, the reality of God is in itself communal, and governed by the Love of the Many.¹⁵⁹ Therefore when human communities practice arohanui, they are both participating in and demonstrating the life of God to the world. In so doing they carry redemptive significance in similarity with more orthodox sacraments.

The community at Jerusalem thus carries deep religious significance for Baxter. He describes the simple practice of sharing goods as a means 'to rebuild the sacramental universe'.¹⁶⁰ The extent of his transposition of sacraments to incorporate the mundane is demonstrated by a rather striking proposition advanced in *Six Faces of Love*.

If a boy comes into a room, with a packet of twenty cigarettes - and if there are nineteen other people in the room - and if he gives each one a cigarette, and takes the last cigarette for himself - then, I believe, the empty cigarette packet is a sacred object, a kind of sacramental, containing the life of God, as a water-pipe contains water. I would not be surprised if it became radioactive, and shone in the dark, on account of its connection with the Love of the Many.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ James K. Baxter, "The Body and Blood of Christ," *New Zealand Tablet* XCIV, no. 49, 13 December (1967): p.20.

¹⁵⁹ See section 5(a) above.

¹⁶⁰ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹⁶¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42. This is an idea that he has rehearsed prior to Jerusalem - see Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.24. In that article, however, he is a little more cautious, qualifying his claim by suggesting 'If I am not crucified, the gift of the sacramental will probably not be helpful; if I am myself crucified, the cigarette will become an effective though unorthodox sacramental.'

This is an important clue into the reason why Baxter prefers to offer reflections on life in community rather than to write formal and analytical theology. His understanding is that the whole of life is potentially sacramental, and that to uncover the depth of ordinary experience is in fact to touch the divine reality which underlies it.

When we discover the communal Christ, he does become our teacher. But since he teaches us by love far more than by explicit knowledge, I doubt if we can usurp his function, and instruct others in the science of loving, except indeed by loving them as he has loved us.¹⁶²

He prefers to offer 'a bundle of anecdotes, intuitions and conjectures',¹⁶³ explaining:

None of these principles involve a formal statement of Christian doctrine. Yet I think that when people love one another, and speak the truth, and share their goods - Christ comes to live in their hearts - whether they believe in Him or not - because Christ is the Love of the Many incarnate among men.¹⁶⁴

The life of God and the love of Christ are inseparably bound to the communal life experienced in Jerusalem, which is offered by Baxter as a freely accessible sacrament to any who wish to receive it.

10. Conclusion

Baxter's lamentation and angst concerning life in Aotearoa/New Zealand finds its hopeful and redemptive response in the formation of the Jerusalem community. It is not the only communal venture he is associated with, but it is certainly the flagship of his aspirations. Jerusalem draws on the twin springs of Maori tribal wisdom and Christian understandings of corporate love. There is a complex interplay between two Jerusalems: the real community

¹⁶² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹⁶³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹⁶⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

which is chaotic, transitory, fragile and often overcrowded, and the mythological Jerusalem which carries Baxter's hopes of a new and more human way of living. The latter is utopian and anticipatory - a kingdom expressing the Love of the Many through selfless acts of sharing, welcome and embrace. Whether it ever existed outside of the imagination of the poet is open to debate, but it clearly represented for him the most profound work of his life; what Chris Parr describes as 'a much larger poem called Jerusalem'.¹⁶⁵

The experimentation which Baxter initiated into communal living was not primarily driven by a desire for social reform so much as a dream of Christian restoration. The tribal impulse, bathed in arohanui, was part of the larger quest for recovering the primal status of Eden, related intimately to Creator, creation and humanity. Although drawing heavily on Maori philosophy to inform his pilgrimage, Baxter assembles the various traditions around the organising centre of his own faith. The Love of the Many may be analogous to and deeply informed by arohanui, but what makes it unique and transformative is that it is a participation of the trinitarian love originating in the Christian godhead. Community is not so much an end in itself, as it is a means of removing barriers to encounter with this God. For Baxter it represents a tangible theological statement; a sacramental vessel which contains the very life and love of God.

¹⁶⁵ Parr, *Introducing James K. Baxter* p.42.

Chapter Six: Te Ariki - The Maori Face of Christ

1. *Introduction*

Baxter made a specific contribution to the development of contextual theology within Aotearoa with his recognition of and call for attention to 'the Maori face of Christ'. This emphasis in his thinking moves beyond the broad sympathy for Maori perspectives, already noted in the previous chapter. He is arguing not just for the possibility of importing taha Maori into a presumed universal Christian worldview, but making the case for a distinct Maori Christian theology, complete with its own Christology. By doing so, he implicitly (and explicitly) recognises the cultural specificity which undergirds the later development of contextual theology, and provides the foundation for Pakeha theology. Baxter is critically aware of the cultural captivity of Western theology, and its totalising impetus. He suggests that Pakeha might benefit not only from repentance, but from a new humility which allows them to learn from the Maori 'elder brother'.¹

The role of Maori prophets in the development of a unique stream of Christian thought and practice is noted. Baxter interprets this phenomenon not as heretical syncretism, but rather as the melding of prior cultural apprehensions of divinity with the new insights of Christianity. He recognises some key insights in Maori celebration of the faith which can enlighten the understanding of other branches of the church. As such, he functions as a 'reporter' of such theological constructions. Given that the term 'contextual theology' was first promoted in 1972, the year of Baxter's death, his intuitions are proved to be remarkably prescient. In this chapter, both the argument for and some of the revelatory aspects of the 'Maori Christ' will be examined. While it might appear confusing to find a Pakeha championing Maori theology, Baxter's understanding of the need for reconciliation of Pakeha to tangata whenua provides justification for viewing this step as an essential ingredient of developing a contextual faith.

¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

2. ***Maori and Christianity***

The reason that Baxter considers that 'Bernard and Francis can live at peace with Te Kouti (*sic*) and Te Whiti and Ratana'² is that he considers Maori culture to already contain significant elements of gospel insight. Particularly in its communal aspect, Maori tribal life exhibits traits which bear witness to the primal existence granted by God to humanity, and which has been lost and desecrated in contemporary experience. Baxter's firm belief is that 'the rainbow of tribal love' can be joined to 'the rainbow of charitas, the sign of the New Covenant'.³ This statement encapsulates his view that Christianity need not destroy Maori religion, but rather come as a fulfilment of it. Such a view is in keeping with Catholic orthodoxy that grace completes nature, rather than destroying it. In Baxter's view, the encounter between Maori and Christianity should not be confrontative but complementary, drawing out those threads of the culture which already bear witness to God's love.

The history of Pakeha settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand tells a different story however. Colonialism and Christian mission combined to effect a cultural assault on Maori, a campaign which continues into the present.

The settlers in the last century took from them the land they held sacred and killed them directly with muskets, indirectly by despair and disease. Today the Government laws regarding Maori lands are a wringer through which the Maoris are passed again and again like cloth, squeezing from them the last drop of tribal blood, the last graveyards and meeting grounds, the last scrap of tribal land.⁴

Within this, the church's attitude to Maori has been 'paternalistic and basically condescending, though not without sympathy and glimmers of understanding'.⁵ Baxter considers that as well as military and judicial aggression, Pakeha have exercised cultural aggression toward Maori, albeit often unknowingly. Mission to Maori has been premised on the assumption that they must relinquish their own pagan culture in order to adopt that of European Christianity. Maori

² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

³ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁴ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁵ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

believers are thus pushed toward choosing between their cultural heritage and their faith.

In Baxter's view, this pressure is illegitimate. The church, after all, 'can ideally add the salt of doctrine and the Sacraments to any type of community'.⁶ His suggestion is that faith can be built on the existing religious foundations within a culture, rather than laying waste the ground in order to erect an alien edifice. In the absence of such understanding from the ecclesiastical authorities, Maori have been forced into constructing their own versions of the faith, which have frequently been adjudged to be heterodox by a Eurocentric church.

The Maori church in this country is like a river that flows underground. Te Kouti, Te Whiti, Rua, Ratana and certain others are her prophets and fathers.⁷

While this historical development is understandable, it grieves Baxter that such polarisation between faith and culture has been provoked through the heavy-handedness of the European church.

Maori culture, in his view, is already remarkably receptive to Christianity. A creative synthesis is possible in which certain themes within Maoridom come to fruition when placed in the Christian environment. Baxter sees in the Maori view of death 'a natural intuition which rises towards the Catholic awareness of the unity of the dead and living in the Mystical Body'; describing it as 'a secret' which '[e]ven before Christianity the tribes had grasped'.⁸ He identifies 'a sacrificial element' in the meals surrounding a tangi, and wonders whether the wearing of green branches might not represent 'a faint foreshadowing of the Resurrection'.⁹ This approach would be regarded today as contextual in its methodology. Baxter is positing the presence within Maori culture of certain indicators which both predate and resonate with Christianity. The suppression of the culture by the church not only makes faith more difficult for Maori Christians, but denies the contribution which that culture has to make to the theological task.

⁶ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁸ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.63f.

⁹ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.64.

3. *The Maori Face of Christ*

The covert racism of the European settler church¹⁰ has forced Maori expressions of Christian faith underground. But while the religious authorities might have abandoned them, Baxter is certain that Christ has not. His theology of the incarnation suggests that the risen Christ is present and active within Maoridom. In unpublished material from the Jerusalem period, Baxter reports that alongside the vision which led him to make the pilgrimage to establish the community, certain other things were revealed to him by God.

I saw the image of the Lord on his cross. He had two faces. The pakeha face looked like that of a dead man, the eyes closed, the face covered with a kind of rigid glaze engendered by complacency and the desire for money and prestige. The face was not dead, but its coma resembled death. The Maori face was hideously smashed and bleeding.¹¹

This concept of 'the Maori face of Christ' becomes for him a central metaphor, representing the divine image located within Maori culture. Christ waits hidden and unrecognised among the people.

Meanwhile Our Blessed Lord sits in the pas, with a Maori face, with a Maori mother, with no sacraments, and secretly spreads his radiance in the hearts of His people. We certainly do not deserve His company; but this does not mean he will reject us if we seek it out.¹²

This feature of the poet's thinking is perhaps best known through his poem 'The Maori Jesus':

I saw the Maori Jesus
Walking on Wellington Harbour.
He wore blue dungarees,

¹⁰ See Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)"., where he discusses the attitude of the church to Maori, adjudging that '[t]he racist issue is with us here too'.

¹¹ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

¹² Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

His beard and hair were long.
His breath smelled of mussels and paraoa.
When he smiled it looked like the dawn.
When he broke wind the little fishes trembled.
When he frowned the ground shook.
When he laughed everybody got drunk.

CP 347.

Baxter seems to indicate a specific vocation in relation to making known Christ in his Maori aspect: 'I understood that it was not my personal business to try to waken the pakeha face, but to wash the Maori face, if not with water, then with tears of reparation.'¹³ In another place, however, he sheets home this responsibility to the entire Christian community.

The face of Te Ariki, the Maori Christ, has a special sweetness and a special strength. It is for us to wash that face in the places where it is being smashed by the blows of the hostile and the ignorant.¹⁴

Baxter feels the anguish of this suppressed and assaulted Christ keenly, and uses vivid language to describe it. He interprets his 'Jerusalem experiment' as one aspect of a theological and devotional response.

The grief that begins to split my soul in half is connected with the continuing suffering of Te Ariki, the Maori Christ - his agony in the mental hospitals, his scourging in our jails, his daily humiliation in our schools and factories, his carrying of the cross of an unwished-for materialism, his crucifixion as the pas die one by one like stars going out in the sky. It is a good thing that this grief is able to burn my soul like molten lead. I rediscover my reasons for being at Hiruharama, to put down a mat for his bloody feet to rest on.¹⁵

¹³ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

¹⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁵ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

It seems that he understands this 'mat' as a space in which the Christ-like elements of Maori culture might be allowed to flourish, rather than being crushed by the materialism of Pakeha society. Baxter's own part in this is complicated, in that he remains a Pakeha 'outsider' to the culture.

I understood that Te Ariki did not desire Te Morehu [the people = Maori] to be led like bullocks into the slaughterhouse of souls, our contemporary possession-centred culture. I had to make an alternative, a mat for them to stand on, if they so wished. But my role in this matter would be passive, not active. A pot does not create the water it carries. Yet even a rusty leaking pot can be used to carry water.¹⁶

The profound theological significance of this line of argument lies in its anticipatory embrace of contextual methodology. The poet has a deep appreciation of the ability of cultures to carry revelation, and of the corresponding necessity for theology to both respect and critically engender hints of Christ which are embedded within cultural worldviews, symbols and practices. For someone whose principal biographer rejects him as a theologian,¹⁷ Baxter shows an astonishing awareness and insight into the central issues of a contextual approach to the relationship between faith and culture.

The chief theological point is perhaps that Te Morehu have a right to an image, in liturgy, in art, in language, of that Maori Christ whom they are, just as we have a right to our pakeha image of Him. Christ is multi-cultural in his mystical body. They have never been given such an image, and so te hahi Maori has been torn apart in the womb, as if by forceps.¹⁸

His understanding of Christian revelation is one which legitimates and even necessitates uncovering the presence and image of Christ within specific cultural contexts. Baxter's statement might be compared with that of a contemporary advocate of contextual theology, Steven Bevans:

¹⁶ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

¹⁷ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.218.

¹⁸ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

Through us, God must become Asian or African, black or brown, poor or sophisticated, a member of twentieth-century secular suburban Lima, Peru, or of the Tondo slum dweller in Manila, or able to speak to the ill-gotten affluence of a Brazilian rancher. Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and most basic insight, must continue God's incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual.¹⁹

Baxter is advocating the development and recognition of both Maori and Pakeha theologies. But he is concerned that the authority and power of the settler church has crippled the Christ-child in the respective cultural wombs. In particular, he is angry at the way in which Catholicism has suppressed Maori culture, and thereby hampered the synthesis of culture and faith so necessary to authentic religion.

Our Catholic teachers, though reasonably friendly, are still paternalistic towards the Maoris. We will rid them of their 'dirt' (voluntary poverty), their 'laziness' (communal habits of work), and their 'immorality' (identification of sexuality with tribal love), while paying lip-service to the virtues of Maori art and the combativeness which has made them good footballers and soldiers.²⁰

He is adamant that the church would need significant reform in order for the Maori face of Christ to be seen: 'To accommodate the Maori Christ, our theology would have to change its emphasis, in matters of property morality, in matters involving the relation between the sexes, and in matters of work morality and physical style.'²¹ He doubts whether such a transition is possible, given that it involves putting 'a bomb under our endemic hidden racism by smashing through the structure of the pakeha church to the Maori church that groans just under it'.²² In the Maori settlement of Hiruharama, Baxter grieves that the mission church remains doggedly Eurocentric.

No rafter paintings,
No grass-stalk panels,

¹⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.8.

²⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

²¹ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

²² Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

No Maori mass.

Christ and his mother
Are lively Italians
Leaning forward to bless,

No taniko band on her head,
No feather cloak on his shoulder,

No stairway to heaven,
No tears of the albatross.

'He Waiata mo Te Kare', CP, p.537f.

He is dismissive of the 'cloudgazing pakeha Christ', asking 'when will your Maori church be built?'²³ His secret hope is that the community he is establishing at Jerusalem may be a significant starting point.

I will be interested to see what the walls and the windows and the rafters are like. I hope they are mainly in the Maori style. I hope that tukutuku panes and painted rafters are part of Te Atua's plan for us. I hope that Te Ariki and Te Whaea will stand in the middle of the house, and look at us with Maori faces.²⁴

The Maori face of Christ is present, albeit concealed and disfigured. Pakeha, who have contributed to this situation, may find that in their repentant service of bathing the wounded face of Christ, their own faith may be regenerated and that 'the water may begin to flow in our dry watercourses'.²⁵

²³ James K. Baxter, 'Jerusalem Sonnets (17)', CP, p.463.

²⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

²⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

4. Maori as the Elder Brother

Baxter makes a frequently reiterated claim that 'Maori is the elder brother; the pakeha is the younger one'.²⁶ The basis of this assertion relates to the complex historical relationship between Maori and Pakeha. Baxter expands his maxim by explaining that 'the Maori is the elder spiritual brother, by virtue of his sufferings and his insight'.²⁷ It would seem that there are a number of elements to his thinking. Under the category of 'sufferings', there is the clear systemic and judicial racism enacted within the colonial regime, which has resulted in the loss of land for Maori - 'A hidden racism is part of the pattern of the majority culture'.²⁸ There is also the loss of tribal identity and infrastructure, brought about by the aggressive dominance of European culture, which means that 'every Maori person in this country is already conditioned by Pakeha modes of thought'.²⁹ The racism is not only historical, however.

Maoris find it hard to get lodging. Maoris find it hard to get jobs. Maoris get convicted more often than pakehas if the arrest rate is the same on similar charges.³⁰

Such unmerited suffering aligns Maori with the wounded and rejected Christ, and brings them within his protectorate. This in itself confers special status in the view of Baxter.

However, more weight is given to the privileged position warranted through what he describes as Maori 'insight'. We have already seen in the previous chapter how Baxter draws heavily on Maori values in his promotion of a Christian view of community. It is the wisdom gleaned from centuries of tribal existence which bestows a seniority of understanding.

The Maori is the elder brother; the Pakeha the younger one - at least in the matter of a grasp of communal values. Let us not try ignorantly to reverse that role.³¹

While the ranking of cultural practices is fraught with difficulty, Baxter feels little

²⁶ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

²⁷ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

²⁸ See Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

²⁹ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

³⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

apprehension in doing so. The Maori view of death, for example, is in his view 'incomparably more mature and positive and adult than the view most current in European society'.³²

The task of Pakeha toward Maori is not simply that of reparation after many years of racism and injustice. To limit response to this would be to retain a position of power and superiority, rather than to accept with humility Baxter's suggested role of the younger sibling. A change in attitude is called for, in which Pakeha offer respect to Maori, and recognise that there is much to learn from a culture which has more fully adapted itself to life in these lands.³³ The road to peace for Pakeha must pass through a place of reconciliation with Maori, and given Baxter's theology of the Maori face of Christ, there is the hint that salvation lies in this direction. He advocates 'a proper humility - especially to see ourselves as learners rather than as teachers'.³⁴ The hidden Christ waits deep in the heart of Maoridom for the repentant return of Pakeha to receive his blessing. Historical injustice and Christian revelation form a seamless robe for Baxter.

Te Whiti, not Te Kouti, is the one whose example offers some hope. His blessing rested even on his enemies. He is the image of the toa Christ.³⁵

The role of the elder brother is to provide guidance, protection and identity. The suggestion here is that Pakeha identity is inevitably linked to Maori identity, given the common attachment to the land. Baxter considers that 'the pakeha's belly had grown big with swallowing the land' and that consequently an act of 'spiritual reparation' is necessary.³⁶ Far from this, however, Pakeha have sought to colonise Maori culture on the assumption that European ways are self-evidently superior.

The Pakeha who has approached the Maori and offered him in ignorance and arrogance the benefits of Pakeha life, may have resembled the fox in the fable who had lost his tail and tried to persuade the other foxes to have their tails chopped off,

³¹ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

³² Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.64.

³³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

³⁴ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.64.

³⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

³⁶ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

too.³⁷

The struggle of young Maori for land is perceived by Baxter as a kind of call to repentance on the part of Pakeha, initiated by the Maori Christ who is their victim.

Te Atua sends his angels to my side,
Sid and Hana, my friends of Nga Tama Toa,

Whose faces are his hidden Maori face
Scarred with blows, grieving for the loss

Of the land that belongs to Him and not to us,
The land whom the Maoris love as a mother

Whom we have turned into an old hacked whore
For the sake of profit³⁸

He is particularly impressed in his association with Nga Tama Toa,³⁹ from whom Baxter claims to have 'learnt the meaning of Christian militancy'.⁴⁰ He praises 'their courage, their informed political lucidity' and 'their hunger for the perpetuation of Maori culture'.⁴¹ In 1971 Baxter accompanied Nga Tama Toa to Waitangi, and participated in their demonstration there.⁴² In doing so, he was careful to show deference to Maori leadership,⁴³ not wanting to revert to the old Pakeha 'habit of sitting at the top of the table'.⁴⁴ In the company of the young militants, he discovers 'an experience I will not forget till the hour I die',⁴⁵ and discerns in

³⁷ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.64.

³⁸ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

³⁹ Nga Tama Toa were a Maori radical group formed in the 1960s which aimed to pursue land reparation and made a feature of protesting at annual Waitangi celebrations. See Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.8f.

⁴⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁴¹ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

⁴² McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.268f.

⁴³ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

⁴⁴ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.15.

⁴⁵ Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

their courage an expression of '[t]he toa Christ'.⁴⁶

It is the confrontation between Maori and Pakeha over land issues which, though painful, holds the hope of addressing historical injustices and therefore of proximate redemption. The conflict offers Pakeha the opportunity for healing through recognition of Maori seniority and communal wisdom.

In his heart of hearts the average pakeha knows that he is weak, lonely and stupid. Without money and machines the pakeha is a crab without its shell. The vigorous communal life of a marae brings his weakness home to him. He is a ghost in the pa. This position is very hard for him to bear. Yet, if he acknowledged his weakness, instead of disguising it with aggressive racism, he might find his true role, in the loving relationship of a younger brother to an elder brother who has a vastly wider range of social intelligence.⁴⁷

In Baxter's view, Pakeha should not be seeking to convert Maori into European churchgoers who 'imitate their pakeha neighbours by practising birth control, having no neighbours' and 'making money hand over fist',⁴⁸ but rather turn in humility to learn something of the Maori Christ who is incarnate on the marae.

5. *Maori Contributions to the Theological Task*

Baxter's own theology in the later period is enriched at almost every point by Maori insight. Considerable attention has been given to this influence in the previous chapter. However, there are certain points at which Baxter is keen to supplement traditional Christian theology with discrete concepts from Maoridom which he feels are vital additions. His attitude in this regard is that revelation is not a closed book, but rather an ongoing process in which God communicates new truth from the margins of society. If Christ is present within Maori culture, and the Pakeha status is that of the younger sibling, then it is reasonable to

⁴⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁴⁷ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

⁴⁸ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

expect that Pakeha may have to bend their minds in order to receive fresh truth in strange clothing. Consideration of two central concepts advanced by Baxter will serve as examples of this.

(a) Te Whaea

The term 'Te Whaea' literally means 'The Source', with maternal overtones. Baxter is astonished when a Maori prophet adds it to the traditional Christian trinitarian blessing - 'Ki te ingoa o Te Matua, o Te Whaea, o Te Tama, o Te Wairua Tapu'.⁴⁹ While this may seem heretical, and Baxter describes it as 'a bold step, both socially and theologically', the tohunga explains that the addition is part of a revelation to him: 'I do only what I am told to do. If a man changed the blessing, against God's will, how could he live for another ten minutes?' Baxter's method of reconciling this departure from convention is to assume that Te Whaea is a representation of Mother Mary.⁵⁰ In this way, he finds a place within his own faith for what is certainly a novel expansion of the Christian Trinity. This is in accord with Baxter's overt devotion to Mary which is longstanding.⁵¹ However, what is intended by the Maori prophet, and what Baxter seems to understand in his explanation, is a concept which cannot be wholly personified by Mary and may best be rendered into English as The Source. It seems to indicate a creative force of becoming, linked to the generative power of the earth.

Without the earth, nothing can grow. Without Te Whaea, our knowledge of Te Ariki remains abstract.

Through this symbolic device, Baxter is able to import a feminine and darkly mystical aspect

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.19. Unless otherwise indicated, the following quotations will be from the same passage, pp.19-20, which is the most explicit discussion of the concept in Baxter's writings.

⁵⁰ The direct equivalence of Te Whaea with Mary is demonstrated in the poem 'Te Whiori O Te Kuri', where Baxter recalls 'Kneeling instead in front of the stone statue / Of Te Whaea...'. CP, p.565.

⁵¹ Baxter declares: 'I am myself one of those people who came to the Church led by the Blessed Virgin; and I sincerely hope that when my mouth is firmly shut by death, the last word my heart will utter will be the name of Mary, with a total trust in her maternal care, to which I have long since abandoned myself.' He protests however, at an earlier stage, against 'putting Mary above or alongside Christ, as a Fourth Member of the Trinity'. James K. Baxter, "The Spirit of Mary," 12-16 in *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: N.Z. Tablet, 1969) p.14f.

into the godhead. He speaks of 'the darkness I call God, / The darkness I call Te Whaea'.⁵²
This encompasses his own experience and helps to integrate matewa into more orthodox Christianity.

Night, cold and memory
Are his instructors, teaching him how to let go of life,

Accepting the dark unknowable breast
Of Te Whaea, the One who bears us and bears with us.

'Night Clouds', CP p.505.

But an important function of Te Whaea seems to be a revelatory role in making plain the Christ who has been hidden within Maoridom.

She actualises Christ for us, not in the past only, at Bethlehem, but here and now, since God lives solely in the present, a present that includes both past and future. Maori theology is not linear; it deals with the everlasting present.

This is consistent with Baxter's Catholic understanding of the function of Mary, without whom 'our knowledge of Christ remains essentially an abstraction'.⁵³ But Te Whaea is much more than a Maori term for rendering the Blessed Virgin into that language. He explains that Te Whaea is 'not the blue and white / Lady of our adoration' but 'a woman built like a tank (both senses of the word)'.⁵⁴ Elsewhere he brings the Catholic and Maori conceptions together: 'bring us to Te Whaea, to the Mother of all men, to the Void and the Beginning'.⁵⁵ For Baxter, there are overtones of the concept of earth mother - hints of Papatuanuku⁵⁶ - which allow a creative contribution to Christian theology.

⁵² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.24.

⁵³ Baxter, "The Spirit of Mary," p.15. Here he is repeating with approval the words of Thomas Merton.

⁵⁴ James K. Baxter, 'The Moon and the Chestnut Tree (2)', CP p.497.

⁵⁵ James K. Baxter, 'In Praise of the Taniwha', CP p.513f.

⁵⁶ The earth mother in the Maori creation myth, who brings the world into being through union with Ranginui, the sky father.

Te Whaea is the sign of the perfected creation, of the pa in its spiritual aspect of group love, and of te hahi Maori, the unborn Maori Church that has to struggle against the weight of our worship of commerce and technology.

Pakeha theology needs augmentation to correct its rational and masculine bias, and Baxter finds in the incorporation of Te Whaea into the godhead a way of introducing Maori affective religious intuition, which previously he has personally included through the figure of Mary.

(b) Wahi Ngaro

A somewhat similar motif is to be found frequently in the later writing of Baxter. He defines Wahi Ngaro as 'the void out of which all things come'.⁵⁷ It builds upon a longstanding mythological symbol in Baxter's writing which is variously named as the gap, the abyss, nada, the void or the cave. In the renaming of this inner generative darkness as Wahi Ngaro, the poet finds a more satisfying and integrated means of addressing it. His usage of the term is broad, and James suggests that it incorporates: 'unfathomable mystery; the underworld domain of Gaea; and the waters of generation or chaos of the Creation myths'.⁵⁸ Baxter has long been aware of 'the foul cave / which is the void'⁵⁹, but there is a mystical flowering which comes in his recognition of the Maori concept - most beautifully expressed in *Autumn Testament*.

Wahi Ngaro, the gap from which our prayers
Fall back like the toetoe arrows

Children shoot upward - Wahi Ngaro,
The limitless, the silent, the black night sky

From which the church huddles like a woman
On her hillock of ground

⁵⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

⁵⁸ James, "Primal Vision" p.168.

⁵⁹ James K. Baxter, 'House Painting', CP, p.313f.

'Autumn Testament (4)', CP p.542.

Baxter finds in Maori thought a more positive appreciation of the previously threatening nothingness. He now describes Wahi Ngaro as 'my point of beginning'; the place 'where I find my peace'.⁶⁰ Eugene O'Sullivan interprets Baxter's concept as 'an image for the original chaos, the void, and yet of something that God fits - that you have to enter to find him'.⁶¹ He compares it to the Eastern spiritual tradition, where God is known in the darkness. But while there are parallels with other streams of mystical thought, and Baxter was aware of them, the concept which he wishes to advance is a distinctively Maori one. It is the primeval darkness which precedes the creation myth, a potent and embracing womb-like night.

In Wahi Ngaro Baxter finds a place where 'prayers, thoughts, desires, are bundled away in their necessary grave', and where 'it might seem that one has become an atheist'.⁶² It is a space where 'the ego like a sentry / At the gate of the soul closes its eyelids'.⁶³ Caught between the 'abyss of God above' and the 'abyss of darkness underneath one's life',⁶⁴ Baxter learns to accept what James calls a 'divine genitive transcendence'.⁶⁵ The Maori concept of Wahi Ngaro contains nuances of a rich emptiness, a creative darkness, which Baxter feels is a useful addition to Christian theology. It displaces fear of dissolution and allows exploration of theological territory which might have been regarded as off limits within Christian orthodoxy. The tributary of Maori culture provides wisdom, refreshment and insight to Pakeha faith, a gift from Te Ariki, the Maori expression of Christ.

6. *Distinctives of the Maori Christ*

Baxter advances the argument that the Maori face of Christ is hidden because of

⁶⁰ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

⁶¹ Eugene O'Sullivan, Unpublished Address to students of NZ Baptist Theological College, Auckland, 1986 (transcript in author's possession).

⁶² Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

⁶³ James K. Baxter, 'Autumn Testament (5)', CP, p.543.

⁶⁴ James K. Baxter, 'How to Fly by Standing Still (4)', CP p.576.

⁶⁵ James, "Primal Vision" p.170.

Pakeha assumptions of moral and social superiority, and that his own role is to cleanse that face so that it might be more clearly seen.⁶⁶ The implication is that the visage which is to be revealed is distinct from the received image current in the Pakeha church. The question is raised as to what the distinctive features of the Maori Jesus might be. While the matter is not addressed systematically by Baxter, there is sufficient evidence in his later writing to assemble a picture of 'Te Ariki himself, the Lord in his Maori aspect'.⁶⁷

(a) Communal

The Maori Christ is first and foremost communal. He makes himself present in the midst of te morehu, the people. He 'sits in the pas', and 'spreads his radiance in the hearts of His people'.⁶⁸ In a discussion of communal life, Baxter suggests that:

The example of Te Ariki is cheering. He did not despair of his friends, faulty as they were. He thought them worth dying for. And since Te Ariki is God Himself, none of us need ever feel that God despairs of man.⁶⁹

This communal emphasis of the Maori Christ is further explained in one of Baxter's sermons, where it is contrasted with the Pakeha tendency to accumulate and strive selfishly for success.

To make money. To climb up the ladder. There's nothing wrong in any of that. But it is wrong if a man does it just for himself. Christ fed the people with bread and fish. He did a miracle to feed them. But He would not do a miracle just for himself. Te Ariki is like the wharepuni. His ribs are over our heads. His arms are on each side of the door. He came into the world for us. He fasted for us. He died for us. We have to try to be like him. We have to try to live and die, not just for ourselves, but for other people.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ There may be some echo of the Catholic practice of the Stations of the Cross, one of which celebrates Veronica wiping the face of Jesus.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.20.

⁶⁸ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁶⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

⁷⁰ James K. Baxter, "Sermon". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/167, Dunedin,

The Maori Jesus personifies a commitment to the tribal group above that of the individual, a commitment which has 'commonly among Maori people a most powerful symbolic and spiritual force, of a kind that Pakehas may find it hard to understand'.⁷¹ When Pakeha come with humility, they can receive instruction from Te Ariki, learning that 'He became all of us, not just one of us'.⁷²

(b) Vulgar

In comparison with the Christ of the European settler church, the Maori Christ demonstrates a certain degree of vulgarity. He breaks wind, plays guitar, wears dungarees and has long hair, and associates with call-girls and alcoholics.⁷³ Baxter, himself 'a coarse man by intention',⁷⁴ finds the Maori Christ to be more accommodating than his Pakeha double. While the more orthodox Jesus is an icon of respectability, Te Ariki 'didn't work and he didn't have a change of clothes'; in short, 'he was not respectable'.⁷⁵ Baxter regards vulgarity is a normal part of communal life. He considers that it is only Victorian culture which has made it seem unacceptable. Citing the example of a Maori woman who composes crude songs for shearers to sing, he argues that this is a valuable contribution to the community.

Well, talking of vulgarity, a woman makes songs for the shearers to sing. They're extremely vulgar - from our point of view perhaps obscene. This is an upright woman. She's making songs for the shearers to sing in Maori. There's nothing peculiar about this in the Maori culture. They'd say 'That's fine!', you see. Does this mean a failure in morality? Not at all! No!⁷⁶

Christ, who is made incarnate in the midst of Maori people, is similarly at ease with the basic functions of human life and as little scandalised.⁷⁷ The 'magnificent tradition of tolerance and

⁷¹ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

⁷² Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

⁷³ James K. Baxter, 'The Maori Jesus', CP p.347 f.

⁷⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26.

⁷⁵ Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.6.

⁷⁶ James K. Baxter in J.E. Weir, "An Interview with James K. Baxter," *Landfall*, no. 28, (1974): p.247.

⁷⁷ Baxter notes: 'And a father who cannot plunge into lavatory humour - or, on occasion, sexual humour - will never quite have the unclouded affection of his children.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26.

understanding'⁷⁸ demonstrated by Maori is a defining characteristic of the indigenous Messiah.

(c) Militant

Baxter finds that '[t]he God they imagine, and pray to very often in the churches, is a God of sugar'.⁷⁹ This distorted picture needs the corrective of the toa [warrior] Christ. Baxter mourns the 'lost militancy' of Christianity, stemming from a 'false Christ', 'fashioned in the image of a middle class liberal who wants people to improve their personal morals but who does not challenge Pharoah'.⁸⁰ What is needed, he suggests, is 'calculated militancy in the style of Te Whiti'.⁸¹ In this Maori prophet we see intimations of Te Ariki, the Maori Christ.

Te Whiti, not Te Kouti, is the one whose example offers some hope. His blessing rested even on his enemies. He is the image of the toa Christ.⁸²

In the face of racism and dispossession of Maori, Baxter is convinced that:

The Maori revolution is not something that might one day happen. It has been burning like a slow fuse ever since the Land Wars.⁸³

He advocates non-violent direct action as a Christian response, after the fashion of Te Whiti. But it is important to avoid the passivity which is 'used to divert men from social militancy' and makes the name of God into 'an aspirin'.⁸⁴ What is required is action.

However clumsy the action may be, to move against the fear of Pharoah, to act in

⁷⁸ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.60.

⁷⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.15.

⁸⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁸¹ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.11.

⁸² Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁸³ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.10.

⁸⁴ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.15.

concord, is invaluable. The toa Christ is born in the soul at that moment.⁸⁵

The warrior Christ is living and active in the midst of Maori culture, and seeks to awaken both Maori and Pakeha to a more socially responsible mode of existence within Aotearoa / New Zealand.⁸⁶

(d) Hospitable

In Maori eyes, the Pakeha Christ seems rather grudging and stingy. Baxter considers that the Pakeha face of Christ reveals a deathly 'complacency and the desire for money and prestige'.⁸⁷ Pakeha are attempting 'to live by bread alone', and their churches demonstrate 'comparatively thin and slight communal bonds'.⁸⁸ The Maori Jesus, in contrast, is a lively and welcoming figure.

His breath smelt of mussels and paraoa.
When he smiled it looked like the dawn...
When he frowned the ground shook.
When he laughed everyone got drunk.

'The Maori Jesus', CP p.347f.

He welcomes strangers and outcasts to his canoe, bringing 'the drowning' on board.⁸⁹ Te Ariki teaches that 'God does not turf us out of the house He made for us', and Baxter believes 'that human beings should try a little to imitate the hospitality of God'.⁹⁰ In one of his final poems, Baxter is distressed when he asks a group of Pakeha Catholic acquaintances at the university to provide lodging for a Maori friend. All of them make excuses; 'The bourgeois Christ began

⁸⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁸⁶ Baxter notes the impotence of Pakeha to recognise their own captivity, but hopes that 'Maori militancy may open a door for him'. Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

⁸⁷ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

⁸⁸ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.27.

⁸⁹ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹⁰ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

to blush on the Cross'.⁹¹ The Maori Christ exemplifies the hospitality of the marae, on the other hand, and Baxter sees in this a foreshadowing of the kingdom of heaven: 'I think that the Maori souls will find in heaven a continuation of the life of the pa'.⁹²

(e) Merciful

Baxter accuses the European church of a tendency toward Pharasaism. He caricatures the faith of the typical Catholic man:

[H]is heaven is a whitewashed gaol where the prisoners have all been converted by the wardens to believe their sentences are just. His God is the Super-Cop.⁹³

This is in contrast to the loving and merciful God of the gospels, whom Baxter is more inclined to respond to.

He is present wherever mercy is present, wherever the poor continue to love one another. Mercy is his manifestation.⁹⁴

The difference between Baxter's view of God and that of the respectable Catholic is essentially one of Christology. The poet's understanding of the nature of God has been reworked in the image of Christ.

My God, as you know, is the Super-Convict, the sinless sinner, His long hair matted with blood and dirt and other people's saliva, perhaps unable to control His bowels, who has not held a job for three years but wandered round telling fables and talking theology, Himself certainly immune from sexual faults, but not bitterly conscious of them in others and accustomed Himself to express love by an embrace.⁹⁵

⁹¹ James K. Baxter, 'Ode to Auckland', CP p.597f.

⁹² Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

⁹³ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁹⁴ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹⁵ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

This reticence to judge and willingness to extend mercy to a flawed humanity is also an expression of the Maori Christ, who reflects the generosity of the culture.

Te Ariki told his people to be orthodox with the Pharisees but to be merciful with the Samaritans. He carried out that teaching in his own life.⁹⁶

Baxter suggests that a combination of the experience of oppression and 'a thousand years of communal living' enables Maori to 'know the human limits' and consequently to refrain from meddling with the morality of others.⁹⁷ It gives them a compassionate orientation to life: 'But the Maori people, having suffered poverty and humiliation themselves, are commonly merciful to the wounds of the poor, whether the poverty is material or psychological'.⁹⁸ This practice of mercy makes Maori culture congruent with the Christian God.

'Ka iti te whare, ka nui te waka' - the house is small, the canoe is big. The people of God who gather in the church building, te whare tapu, are small in number compared to the kingdom of God, all those who exhibit mercy in their lives.⁹⁹

Through Christ, God 'will not let a million sins stand between Him and us'.¹⁰⁰ Self-understanding of this, learned in a culture of mutual acceptance, allows the teaching of Christ to prevail.

I am a sinner and I hate my sins. But I do not hate myself. When I hate my sins the hatred comes from a true love of myself. I have mercy on myself, the creature God made, and though I may hate his sins and joke at his stupidity, the grief that goes with this does not injure my soul. So I must have mercy on others, and love them tenderly, while I hate their sins and mine. This is the meaning of the saying that we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.47.

⁹⁸ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁹⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹⁰¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

The Maori Christ is the one who makes this generous mercy available.

(f) Marginalised

The picture portrayed by Baxter of the Maori Christ is that of a figure pushed to the margins of society and left to languish outside the mainstream of cultural attention. He speaks of Christ's 'hidden Maori face',¹⁰² and pictures the Messiah languishing in obscurity and poverty amidst the Maori people.¹⁰³ Baxter laments 'the Maori Christ we are so painfully putting to death',¹⁰⁴ and sees the signs of that crucifixion in the suppression of Maori culture. He is executed by the Pakeha middle class.

The hard core of the middle class, most of them, though not all, wanted him to be nailed up. He was menacing their security. The god of the hard middle class core is money. He had overturned the tables of the money changers in the Temple. He didn't work and he didn't have a change of clothes... he was not respectable.¹⁰⁵

It is because of this that the poor and marginalised, among who must be counted the majority of Maori, find refuge and compassion in Christ. Baxter is convinced that they will 'get to Heaven without going to Mass' and 'are in Christ's arms' already.¹⁰⁶ Far from the halls of religion, the Maori Christ is a quiet participant in the arohanui of the marae.

7. The Maori Church

Efforts to include Maori in the Pakeha church, while motivated by good intentions, are regarded by Baxter as doomed to failure. They are misguided, based as they are on the preconception that Maori must adapt themselves to Pakeha culture in order to fit in. Baxter complains that '[f]or a hundred years the churches have been teaching Maori people to be

¹⁰² Baxter, "The Young Warriors".

¹⁰³ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.19.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.7.

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

ashamed of being Maori, and members of the pakeha culture have been telling them that they are dirty, lazy and immoral'.¹⁰⁷ The Pakeha church 'is hamstrung by muddled thinking, unconscious prejudice, and sheer ignorance of Maori thoughts and custom'.¹⁰⁸ The Catholic church in particular has been 'paternalistic and basically condescending' in its approach to Maori:

As far as I know, in the course of a century the Church has ordained 5 Maori priests, 4 of them pretty recently. Three of the Maori Mission pakeha priests can speak Maori, and one or two of the Mill Hill fathers... Maori priests have in a large degree to be de-Maorified to become priests.¹⁰⁹

In many subtle ways the church has restricted rather than supported Maori culture, and Baxter is aware that:

If that great boulder on the back of the pa
They call the church is ever to be shifted

It will take a delicate crowbar.

'The Moon and the Chestnut Tree', CP p.496f.

While Baxter is concerned to some extent to reform the Pakeha church in order to cleanse its racial prejudice, he is much more interested in seeing the recognition and encouragement of the Maori church. Like Te Arika, this church is already present but largely unnoticed by the Pakeha majority; it is a 'river that flows underground'.¹¹⁰ Baxter calls for the validating and servicing of this indigenous church *in situ*.

I want to see fifty or a hundred Catholic priests in the pas, speaking Maori fluently, helping the Maoris to keep alive their disintegrating tribal culture - not smoothing the

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, "Maori in the Towns," p.26.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹¹⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

'transition' by which they become brown pakehas. I want the Mass to be said in Maori throughout the pas.¹¹¹

His dream is for the Maori church to become strong and articulate in representing the unique faith of the Maori people with their own cultural symbols.¹¹² This would produce a distinctively Maori expression of the faith, readily identifiable.

Let Churches in Maori areas be built with statues of Our Lord and Our Lady as Maori people, carved by Maori sculptors. Let the walls have tukutuku weaving and the roof show the rafter carving. And this can be done.¹¹³

Baxter is aware that the Maori church must go beyond cultural form to articulate its own theology,¹¹⁴ but regards an inculturated church as a good starting point.

If the Maori Christ is to be 'born again in a broken whare',¹¹⁵ the resultant movement within Maoridom will encompass much more than a renewed worship service, however. Baxter envisages a broad movement among Maori which might resurrect the strategies of Te Whiti in calling for justice over land issues. He is convinced that with the help of the media, '[t]oday such a movement would meet with greater success'.¹¹⁶ He envisages a mass movement born out of the grass roots oppression of Maori people, where the Maori Christ summons them to liberation.

E taku Ariki, how long, how long
Till Your moon lights the heart of a Maori Zion

And a thousand men move out of the bin and the clink,
Working and eating together, offering whatever they have?

¹¹¹ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹¹² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

¹¹³ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹¹⁴ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

¹¹⁵ James K. Baxter, 'Zion', CP, p.448f.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

Following the campaign of Te Whiti, a contemporary equivalent of his movement might echo the non-violent civil disobedience which marked the struggle for Taranaki. Baxter suggests the way forward would be '[t]o squat on Crown lands and build huts and till the ground'.¹¹⁷ Using New Testament imagery, he declares a 'small seed can grow into a large tree', and that reoccupation of land would be an apt Maori response: 'If non-communal use of land is the cause of social evils, communal inhabiting of the land can bring back health'.¹¹⁸ Such social activism is not seen as separate from a Maori church, but as a legitimate militancy inspired by the warrior Christ in the heart of the culture. A Maori church would be as much a political development as a theological one.

8. Conclusion

Robert Schreiter, advocate of contextual theology, claims that '[t]he gospel is always incarnate' and that it must come to voice among specific groups of people:

Culture is the concrete context in which this happens. It represents a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world. Without a sensitivity to the cultural context, a church and its theology either become a vehicle for outside domination or lapse into docetism, as though it Lord never became flesh.¹¹⁹

In his reflections on the Maori Christ, Baxter is recognising the incarnation of Jesus among Maori people, and arguing for the validity of a form of Christianity which has legitimate cultural expression in that context. He is aware that the dominant form of faith has been Eurocentric, and therefore impoverished and oppressive. This has been debilitating for both Maori and Pakeha; the Maori face of Christ has suffered abuse and disfiguration, while the Pakeha face of Christ reveals an anaesthetised quality redolent of death. Therefore Baxter's

¹¹⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁸ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.15.

¹¹⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.21.

vocation, to 'wash the Maori face'¹²⁰ is of benefit to both Maori and Pakeha.

The histories of the two people are so entwined that the salvific destiny of Pakeha people cannot be separated from the move toward justice for Maori. The picture painted by Baxter is that of Christ waiting in neglect on the marae, with the implication that it is there that Pakeha must go if they are to find reconciliation with him and with their Maori sisters and brothers. As junior sibling, albeit the one holding the power, the Pakeha must adopt an attitude of humility in approach to Te Ariki. This Maori Christ has many gifts of learning to distribute to those who are willing to grant him recognition and acceptance. In the absence of the requisite humility, Jesus will remain the Toa Christ, a warrior who will lead his people in a new level of militancy which might involve the occupation of Crown lands in the quest for justice. Confession or confrontation seem to be the options which face Pakeha.

Baxter dreams of and calls for the full birth of the Maori church. This is to be a community based on the marae, and resplendent in the symbols and artefacts of Maori culture. It will recognise and celebrate those deep communal insights which are points of commonality at which Christianity and Maori culture inter-penetrate and reinforce each other. Furthermore, the theological wisdom of Maori will provide a contribution to the ongoing reflection of the universal church, by offering categories which are consistent with and supplementary to the orthodox tradition. Baxter himself functions as a reporter of the first fruits of Maori theologising. The role of a Pakeha as an advocate of Maori theology may seem strange. It is an oddity which Baxter is aware of, but he feels helpless in the face of a perceived call to fulfil that function. By doing so, he is not neglecting the task of calling into being an authentically Pakeha church. He understands that the first step on that journey is a return to the marae to pay homage to the Maori Christ and seek his forgiveness.

¹²⁰ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

Chapter Seven: Te Morehu - Humanisation as the Goal of Faith

1. *Introduction*

In the latter years of his life, Baxter's vision of the role of the church becomes subtly refined. Increasingly impatient with the lumbering institution and its inaccessibility to ordinary people, he looks more hopefully to the presence of Christ in the human community. The term 'Te Morehu' (the people) becomes something of a refrain in his later writing.¹ Building on a long-standing rejection of the influence of dualistic theologies including Manicheism, Calvinism, Puritanism and Jansenism, Baxter seeks a redemption which involves the flowering of humanity rather than the rejection of it. He is dismayed by the discomfort and suspicion with which many theologies regard the natural world and humanity's place in it.

The vision which Baxter promotes is that of a Christian humanism; a philosophy which is both deeply human and deeply Christian. This is a form of faith which is not in tension with the broad range of human experience, but rather a fulfilment of it. Baxter's theology is rooted in the concrete experience of ordinary men and women, and universal in scope. It leads him to propose a servant role for the church, in which the Christian community may assist people into attaining all that their humanity portends. Rather than standing over against and in judgement of the community, Baxter dreams of and attempts to model a church which is located among the people and acts for them. This ecclesiology, reminiscent of aspects of Bonhoeffer's², is kenotic and revolutionary. It provides a dynamic and dispersed paradigm of Christian faith, which is well suited to a contextual approach to theology.

¹ Russell Phillips suggests the existence of a seventy page manuscript entitled 'Te Morehu' held at the Hocken Archives (Phillips, "Dialogue," p.279.). However, this document is not extant, and it would seem to be a confusion over one of the copies of 'Handbook for a Militant Christian' held in the archives.

² See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM 1954).

2. ***Unearthly Existence: The Persistent Reluctance to be Human***

In order to understand Baxter's advocacy of Christian humanism, it is necessary to investigate the difficulties which he seeks to overcome through it. He perceives an undercurrent of suspicion and antipathy towards human existence which runs through Western society, and is fuelled by various theological perspectives. This chapter begins with a brief survey of the evidence garnered by Baxter to support his claim of a persistent reluctance to be human.

(a) **Abstraction**

Human life is embodied, physical, concrete, temporal, finite and contingent. It is the question of whether this condition is to be celebrated or bemoaned which Baxter sees as the determining one. For his part, he devotes himself to the full acceptance and exploration of mortality. His own poetry, at its best, is firmly grounded in the details of physical existence. In an early lecture on the creative process, he approves a poem by St John of the Cross in the following terms:

We touch, as it were, the poet's work, and say: *This is substantial man*; not a mere ghost blown upon by *Agape*, but the hide, hair, and inward quality of the human creature.³

It is this 'hide, hair, and inward quality of the human creature' which is the subject of both Baxter's poetry and religious thinking. He finds the essence of art and devotion in the primal experience of *l'homme donn*☺ or 'natural man'⁴, as noted in chapter two of this thesis.

Anything which abstracts from such immediate encounter with the physical world is by definition a step removed from it. Baxter criticises '[t]hose tall asthenic bird-like men / With spectacles and lecture notes'.⁵ Direct experience of the natural world has, in his view, precedence over any reflection upon it. The tendency of humanity to retreat into the realm of

³ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.45.

⁴ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

⁵ James K. Baxter, 'A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting', CP 396f.

the mind is a form of withdrawal not only from the natural world as given, but from the very condition of being human. Baxter describes it as 'living in a universe comprised of a series of objects grasped and possessed by a process of conceptualisation'.⁶ The role of the poet is to inhabit flesh and embodied life in such a way as to be able to pierce the apathy of those who have succumbed to the temptation to abandon their humanity.

We can live for years without knowing we are alive. We can imagine we are secure on a ledge 3 inches wide on the face of a 1,000 ft. precipice. I think a poet is concerned to record, for himself mainly, but also for others, those rare moments when he is alive and awake.⁷

It is not, of course, that Baxter is calling for a materialist frame of reference with no transcendence. On the contrary, he finds the divine and eternal deeply embedded in proximate experience: '[t]he natural vision may reflect God, as a pool may reflect the rays of the sun - and best of all when it is brown, muddy, and full of its own life'.⁸ It is simply a question of what human qualities are brought to what he terms 'experiential knowledge'.⁹ Rational analysis creates distancing from the world and humanity, while contemplation embraces it. Baxter speaks of 'the habit of natural contemplation, of letting the mind rest upon, draw nourishment from, the images of nature perceived as an organic whole'.¹⁰ He finds his responsibility to be that of radical attention: 'poetry is often experience revealed... the poet is a man who holds up a mirror to what is happening'.¹¹ Through a strong theology of incarnation, Baxter believes that God 'is present in a hidden way in the hearts of all men and in the natural creation'.¹² Because of that, it is the journey *towards* rather than the journey *away from* the ordinary world which uncovers transcendence. Human beings must embrace their finite condition in order to encounter God.

⁶ Baxter, "Things and Idols".

⁷ James K. Baxter, as quoted in Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.72..

⁸ James K. Baxter, "Literature and Belief," 37-67 in *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) p.64.

⁹ Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.44.

¹⁰ James K. Baxter, speaking in Auckland in 1963, as quoted by Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.76.

¹¹ James K. Baxter in Weir, "Interview," p.242.

¹² Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.64.

(b) Urbanisation

The term 'urbanisation' is used here as an integrating symbol of Baxter's jaundiced view of the process of 'depersonalisation, desacralisation and centralisation'¹³ which afflicts civilisation. He regards this as an historical accommodation to the terrors and inconsistencies of human life; an attempt to set boundaries and exert control over the potential for chaos. There is a 'fundamental anarchy... at the heart of every man's life'; 'Chaos is inside the human heart... [a]nd this anarchy is very painful to us, perhaps the most painful thing in the world'.¹⁴ A desire for self-protection generates the entire project of civilisation. Societies seek a form of order through regulation. In attempting this with limited success, humanity has paid a large price, and sacrificed something of the essence of human existence.

Modern Western man resembles the Norse god Odin, who went to the secret well which lay in the roots of Ygdrasil, the tree of life, and demanded some of the water to drink, so that he would have the power of wisdom and foreknowledge. The guardian of the well demanded that he should tear out his right eye and give it to him before he could drink the water. Odin did so, and achieved foreknowledge at the cost of partial blindness - an image, I think, of the loss of the religious and aesthetic vision.¹⁵

The compromise which accompanies contemporary urban existence - 'the commercial and technological and military obsessions of modern society'¹⁶ - separates people from basic aspects of natural experience. It leaves them isolated and amnesiac in a condition of neurosis: 'the edge of falseness, the thin fog of complacency, the intellectual blindness of a person who has forgotten who he is'.¹⁷ Baxter regards contemporary civilisation as:

[A] culture that cannot understand itself because it dare not accept its own spiritual strangulation and need of mercy. Instead it chooses guns and money and the badges of education.¹⁸

¹³ Baxter, "Varsity Talk".

¹⁴ Weir, "Interview," p.249.

¹⁵ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

¹⁶ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.53.

¹⁷ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20.

¹⁸ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.48.

The palliatives brought to bear on the fear of unfettered existence - education, respectability, wealth, morality - divorce us from our primal experience of being human, and thus make us less humane. It is only by a conscious act of the will and constant struggle that the numbing effect of such forces can be overcome.

I see it as my own chief function, as a man and a writer, to struggle - by whatever means I find available, including gross satire - against the devil of acedia who rises from that swamp and inhabits, like an honoured guest, our Government Departments, our business offices, our churches, our schools, our places of entertainment, our art galleries and our homes.¹⁹

Once again, the role of the poet is to be a combatant on behalf of humanity, fighting to recover the stolen treasures of primal experience. In order to do so, Baxter feels it necessary that he, or indeed any artist or prophet, encounters the anarchy and dissolution which dwells both in inner and outer experience.

One has to be pretty close to the fire, I think, pretty close to this position of Chaos. The nearer you are to it and can survive the better.²⁰

He does not seek anarchy for its own sake, but rather as a tool to unravel the death shroud which he feels has bound humanity in anaesthetic conformity. The goal is not chaos itself, but rather the ability to feel and perceive which carries with it an inherent sense of danger and dissolution. The apparent rejection of civilised values may seem a form of barbarism, but 'a free man gets back the use of his tongue and his eyes and his hands'.²¹

(c) Puritanism

The chief barrier to attaining the full expression of humanity, however, is a

¹⁹ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.14.

²⁰ James K. Baxter in Weir, "Interview," p.243.

²¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.46.

theological one. The dualism which Baxter regards as a persistent corruption in Western society springs from Christian tributaries. Baxter concludes: 'After twenty years of doubt and fumbling, I have come to the conclusion that the problem is an intellectual one involving the historical development of Christianity.'²² The essence of the theological misconception is the separation of flesh and spirit.

There is always an element in Christian thought which is, in fact, Manichean - the old dream that man's freedom is to be found by release from his body, rather than by acts of prayer and labour in a material world. It sets its face against the unity of flesh and spirit...²³

The motif under which Baxter most commonly discusses the problem is that of Puritanism, though he almost as commonly uses terms such as Calvinism, Manicheism, Jansenism and Angelism. None of the terms is a precise theological usage, though he is aware of the historical contexts which have generated them.²⁴ In Baxter's handling of the term 'Puritanism', as Parr notes, he encompasses all that is in theological opposition to his proposal of a humanist Christianity.

The Puritan vision of a demanding and judgemental God, of human culpability for suffering and death, of human depravity and incapability of doing good, and of the bodily functions - especially sexuality - as the evidence of depravity, is effectively the religious antithesis of the 'humanist Christianity' Baxter sought.²⁵

Baxter always understands Puritanism within New Zealand society against its Calvinist origins. After all, 'The society into which I had been born (and, indeed, modern Western society in general) carries like strychnine in its bones a strong unconscious residue of the doctrines and ethics of Calvinism'.²⁶ But both labels are more likely to occur as shorthand

²² Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.20f.

²³ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.46.

²⁴ In his 1966 lecture 'The Man on the Horse', Baxter confesses to possessing Calvin's *Institutes* which he uses 'as paperweights, and also to give the impression I am a learned man', and proceeds to quote from the work. James K. Baxter, "The Man on the Horse," 91-120 in *The Man on the Horse* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) p.92.

²⁵ Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.149.

²⁶ Baxter, "Man on the Horse," p.91.

pejorative terms of disdain for 'the spiritualizing tendency of modern semi-Christian society'.²⁷ The legacy of Puritanism is a negativity toward physical existence in the natural world, and a pervading suspicion of anything which brings pleasure. In Baxter's view, it reeks of dualism: 'whatever does not belong to God is seen as the work of the devil... [t]he devil is tacitly credited with sovereignty over the flesh and intellect of man'.²⁸ The poet regards this attitude both as theologically flawed and disastrous for humane existence. His critique of Puritanism deserves some analysis, in order to understand the counter-proposal of a Christian humanism.

(i) Sin and the Fall

Baxter interprets Puritanism's fundamental flaw to be that of its attitude toward the Fall, and the consequent power of sin to corrupt human life. He finds in Calvinism a wholly pessimistic anthropology. The passage which he quotes from Calvin's *Institutes* he regards as being representative:

Hence, those who have defined original sin as the want of the original righteousness which we ought to have had, though they substantially comprehend the whole case, do not significantly enough express its power and energy. For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle.²⁹

This doctrine of 'total depravity' is anathema to Baxter. Its negativity toward the human condition impoverishes our experience and demeans God's creation. Baxter has no illusions about sin, and regards it as the constant companion of humanity. But he cannot accept it as the sole truth or defining quality of mortal existence. While Calvin views the Fall as absolute, Baxter regards it as something of a lovers' quarrel; a painful separation accompanied by longing on both sides. It has not obliterated humanity's capacity either to do good or to receive God.

²⁷ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.46.

²⁸ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.48f.

²⁹ Baxter, "Man on the Horse," p.92.

In a definitive theological statement, Baxter establishes the foundation of his own understanding in opposition to the strictures of Puritanism.

If, as the Catholic thinkers have always taught, the Fall was not complete, and the natural man, though wounded, is still the earth lamp who holds the oil of grace - then the only viable solution is a difficult humanism which works towards an understanding of the passions without being overthrown by them.³⁰

The Puritan reduces human will to an empty cipher on the basis of the Fall, thus relegating moral value to either the good of God or the evil of the devil. In Baxter's view, '[t]he Devil was credited with more than his due'³¹, and so, by implication, was God. It is a classic dualism, in which the human person is acted upon, and ceases to be a moral and creative agent. To hold such a radical view of the Fall makes of ordinary men and women spectators in the drama of redemption, and reduces all human endeavour to that of footnotes in the progress of theology. He speaks of 'that inhuman crystalline vision of the depravity of the flesh'.³² Baxter's own position is that the 'wounded... earth lamp' of humanity is still responsible and capable, and that no simplistic escape mechanisms from a 'difficult humanism' are viable.

Ascribing too great a role to the devil diminishes the realm of freedom in which humans move, and makes the world a treacherous place.

If every boy who is attracted by a girl in a bikini bathing suit, or who drifts into some sexual fantasy, stands in immediate danger of the loss of his soul, then the world is a rat-trap where the devil sets the baits.³³

Baxter regards such events not as threats to eternal salvation, but rather as 'natural occasions' which are best regarded with 'a humorous and cautiously positive view'.³⁴ That which is

³⁰ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

³¹ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.47.

³² Baxter, "Man on the Horse," p.92.

³³ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.49.

³⁴ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.49.

characterised as demonic³⁵ is more often than not simply the functioning of the natural part of human existence, and better welcomed rather than excluded. Dualism such as that contained within Puritanism demonises much of the organic and physical dimension of life, and particularly the sexual. It thus teaches people to fear the very realm in which the incarnate God is to be discovered. Doyle notes that: '[f]ear of the natural self has, all along, been root cause of the puritanism Baxter fought'.³⁶ Baxter decries the Christian 'neglect of, and even contempt for created things, and a fear of natural animism'.³⁷ He is concerned at the damage it does to the animal dimension of our existence. Dismissing the 'simplicist view of human nature', he warns '[i]f pagan beauty and the qualities of intellectual courage and romantic love are to remain in Hell, then Heaven will be painfully depleted'.³⁸

Baxter's hope is to recover a view of sin and the Fall which is true to theological verities, and yet more descriptive of and accommodating to the human condition. He regards the Fall as significant: 'I have often thought that the greatest single limitation which has come to the human race as a result of the Fall of Man is that none of us truly understand the meaning of our own lives'.³⁹ However, our intuition that the Fall has affected us is a sign to Baxter that it is not complete, and the longing for innocence and fulfilment remains. To dismiss the capacity of men and women for wisdom and goodness in their created state is 'almost to deny their humanity'.⁴⁰ Puritanism destroys human hope and creativity by severing the ethical taproot, and creates fear of and retreat from the very world in which it is possible to be fully human.

(ii) Revelation

A further consequence of the Puritan position is that divine revelation cannot be located within the reach of a depraved and lost humanity. The seeker after truth

³⁵ Baxter still holds a working category of 'diabolic inspiration'; see Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.50f.

³⁶ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.167.

³⁷ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.47.

³⁸ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.53.

³⁹ James K. Baxter, "Heaven," 153-160 in *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: New Zealand Tablet, 1969) p.159.

⁴⁰ James K. Baxter, "Symbolism in New Zealand Poetry," 56-78 in *The Fire and the Anvil: Notes on Modern Poetry* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1955) p.71.

should not look for it in human art or wisdom, or indeed in the natural world which is equally corrupted by the Fall. Instead, revelation comes through scripture alone (the self-communication of God), and primarily through Jesus Christ. While not denying the force of the affirmative view of biblical revelation, Baxter finds it absurdly limiting to exclude the natural world from making a theological contribution. Such an impoverished attitude creates a kind of religious captivity: 'Since Puritanism is essentially an aggressively negative view of the natural forces latent in society and in the individual, the Puritan, as such, is helpless to deliver himself from a cage of his own making'.⁴¹ The force of the Manichean perspective is to render knowledge of salvation as the only wisdom necessary to the job of being human, and to counsel people not to be distracted from it.

Baxter finds the sphere of revelation to be somewhat wider than this. While nodding in the direction of 'special' revelation, he posits a middle ground of human experience and understanding, where knowledge about God and humanity may yet be discovered.

I think our Lord left art to us as our playground, a specifically human area in which we could try to achieve self-knowledge, however painful, knowledge of the creation, however fragmentary, and even knowledge of Him, however incomplete, without the devastating weight of the moral imperative...⁴²

While acknowledging the difference between human and divine wisdom, he cannot bring himself to take the Puritan sword to the former.

There is wisdom in dreams; a human wisdom, to be taken or left, not the Divine Wisdom. Can the Church not tolerate and absorb the wisdom of the natural man?⁴³

Baxter's particular interest, of course, is in the arena of art. As an artist himself, he is conscious of the tensions between faith and human experience in the creative process. While appreciative of the role of the church in fostering art, he finds that the desire for certain

⁴¹ Baxter, *Recent Trends* p.10.

⁴² Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.42f.

⁴³ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.53.

outcomes and 'the tension of Christian Catholic morality'⁴⁴ has often muddled the relationship between art and the *magisterium*. His own conviction is that art must remain agnostic in its reliance on common human perception of life which is universally accessible. In a definitive statement, Baxter argues for the necessary freedom of the artist:

An artist who is a Catholic has to set Revealed Truth on one side, not rejecting it, but for the moment doing without it. He has the advantage of intellectual fellowship with those who are not yet able to believe. And he obscurely serves God by an implicit act of trust that He is present in a hidden way in the hearts of all men and in the natural creation. Theology interprets what is given; art discovers in each unique event, however imperfectly, the pattern of the hidden One; but it cannot presuppose the nature of the pattern; each work is a new discovery.⁴⁵

Two comments can be made on the basis of this explanation. The first is the point already made, that Baxter finds genuine revelation within the natural order: God is 'present in a hidden way in the hearts of all men and in the natural creation'. Such revelation is not the sole preserve of the church, and the 'Christian apologist has to recognize that Karl Barth, or the Council of Trent, have not said the last word about human nature, and that Dostoevski (*sic*) or even Sartre may shed light on our problems'.⁴⁶ Secondly, Baxter's distinction between the respective roles of theology and art seems to suggest the differing models of 'from above' and 'from below' in theological method. His description of the artist's quest is in accord with a shift in understanding as to what constitutes revelation and theological reflection. The recognition of the natural order and human culture as potentially revelatory are essential elements of contextual theology.⁴⁷ Baxter's preconception of theology is that of church-centred and regulated, and consequently he distinguishes it from the field of art where '[a] Catholic artist, like a Catholic scientist, must not go beyond the natural evidence that his life and the world proposes'.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.47.

⁴⁵ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.64.

⁴⁶ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.48.

⁴⁷ See Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* pp.7-10. 'If the ordinary things of life are so transparent of God's presence, one can speak of culture and events in history - of contexts - as truly sacramental, and so revelatory.' p.9.

The problem which the inherent Puritanism contained within Christianity has caused is a split between faith and humanity. The suspicion of pagan animism and fear of sensuality has caused the church to act in a censorious manner toward art, thus creating a crisis and sense of exclusion on the part of the artist. Many creative prophets have been forced into adoption of a secular humanism, simply because the Christian community has removed the option of a genuinely Christian humanism. This has occasioned a tragic chasm:

No dichotomy of form and flux, of Apollonian and Dionysiac principles within modern humanism is so great as the gulf between the battlements of the Church Militant and the stony ground below where men struggle often with the same basic problems under different names, yet fear to accept orthodoxy lest their present armour should be called intellectual arrogance and stripped from them. Lacking a Christian humanism, men have turned to agnostic or atheistic humanism for an understanding of their problems.⁴⁹

Baxter seeks to reconcile humanity and faith both within his own creative corpus, and within the Christian community. Christian revelation must be recognised and celebrated in the midst of the human community in order for this to be possible.

(iii) Moralism

A further insidious by-product of Puritanism is a moralising attitude associated with Christianity. Baxter is intolerant of the Church's focus on what he terms 'the unexamined ethics of nursery morality - wash yourself, dress well, work hard, keep the Sixth Commandment, don't use dirty words'.⁵⁰ This 'desert of moralism'⁵¹ with its simplistic approach to human ambiguities, betrays an abiding dualism which sets 'flesh' against 'spirit'.⁵² Too much of Christian ethics is effectively a fear of sexuality and a child-like sense of

⁴⁸ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.63.

⁴⁹ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.48.

⁵⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁵¹ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.43.

⁵² 'The devil of dualism loves that word, "flesh" - by using it to refer to our physical nature, he shatters half the wisdom of St Paul and creates a huge tribe of half-men and half-women.' Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

parental disapproval. Baxter suggests a more complex response is called for.

But to be adult means to be emancipated from the fears of an infant. An adult may justly fear lapses into cruelty or dishonesty or cowardice - or a mishandling of the relation between men and women. But our priorities should be New Testament priorities - not the priorities of the nursery.⁵³

Too often the message of the church is 'a set of mediocre social rules'⁵⁴ which confuses natural urges with moral transgression, and denigrates the physical aspects of human existence.

No human impulse, however strong or trouble-making or painful it may be, can be described as animal. It is simply bad theology. Impulses that occur in human beings are human impulses.⁵⁵

The objectification of moral codes, in Baxter's view a Calvinist approach, is seldom appropriate to the human situation. 'It is doubtful whether the moral law can suitably be regarded as an objective legal pattern - a science of moral traffic rules, as it were, given us by the Divine Head of the Universal Traffic Department.'⁵⁶ The solution, however, is not entirely to be found in situational ethics.⁵⁷ Baxter distances himself from a relativist position, claiming 'I have no wish to overthrow the moral theology of the church'.⁵⁸ His halfway position is the advocacy of Christian love as the basis of all ethical endeavour:

To love is to be a human being. An old Church Father said once - "Virtue is the ordering of love." I would prefer to say - "the harmonising" - because love is not a

⁵³ Baxter, "Lion and Lamb".

⁵⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.19.

⁵⁵ Baxter, "Lion and Lamb".

⁵⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.10. Similarly, in Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.25., Baxter claims that Paul 'did not intend to present the Colossians with a spiritual traffic manual. Too many of our people have been hypnotised by the particulars of moral instruction, to the neglect of the guidance of the Spirit who alone can bring such particulars to life.'

⁵⁷ Baxter argues: 'Once you start taking the road of situational ethics, you have to go on to a point where you say that what Hitler did was right because, as he saw it, his own situation and that of the German people demanded he should massacre the Jews.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.11.

logical, mechanical order, but a relationship like that of notes in a tune.⁵⁹

Because love is demanding and unpredictable, societies often prefer the safer option of social codes of virtue. Puritanism erects a moral fence to keep the dilemmas of conscience cordoned off. Baxter characterises 'the litany of the middle class' thus:

They mean they will not cease chasing money and take time off to love one another.
They mean they will limit the size of their families in an absurd degree so that the children they have can all go to University and be bureaucrats or marry bureaucrats.
They mean that even the beginning of honesty would shatter their lives. They mean, God help them, that their fears are great. Well, St Paul, St John and W.H. Auden [*sic* - should be Auden] have all said we must love one another or die.⁶⁰

Fear is the motivating factor in much Christian ethical motivation, but this is a sentiment unworthy of the human freedom we have been entrusted with. It is a twofold fear: fear of human fallibility, and fear of the demands made by a holy God. Baxter portrays the dilemma of the nervous believer thus:

'I believe in God; I believe God is good. But God is also holy. He demands perfection from us. Every day I tremble at the thought of meeting this holy, perfect, invisible God of ours. I try to avoid any kind of evil. But I am just a man. Religion is a burden I carry, because of the holiness of God.'⁶¹

Theologically, the anxiety is based upon the Puritan doctrine of the Fall, which has excised any natural capacity to do good from humanity. Because the internal motivation for virtue is missing, it must therefore be replaced by an external framework which might serve to restrain moral chaos.

The Calvinist thesis that the Fall is absolute and the natural man totally depraved has

⁵⁸ James K. Baxter, "Aspects of Christian Action". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/121, Dunedin,

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.3.

⁶⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁶¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.7.

led, by devious byways, to a kind of idolatry - a deep reliance, torn still by an anguish of uncertainty, on the civilising influence of education, culture, and the power of the State - as if these could eradicate the turbulence of the passions and put in their place an abstract social benevolence.⁶²

Baxter's cynicism regarding such mechanisms has already been made apparent.⁶³ He sees dependence on such 'civilising' forces as a retreat from the existential difficulties of being human. The chaos which is so feared is something to be encountered rather than excluded; a consequence of human life. In order to overcome the false security of the 'social nursery', it is necessary to gain 'direct knowledge of those aspects of human nature which a neo-Calvinist would ignore or repudiate', and to hold together radical tensions - 'the instinctive and the social, the wild and the domestic, the passionate and the rational'.⁶⁴ It is the naming of the instinctive, the wild and the passionate as evil which betrays the essential dualism of Puritanism.

But the dualist fears too much the undeveloped half of himself. He does not see it as a potential element in mature love, but simply as an enemy.⁶⁵

By locating passions outside the natural realm and ascribing them to the devil, the proponents of this flawed theology deprive their audience of a vital element of human experience, and achieve order only at the price of a truncated journey through life. Baxter prefers the alternative of 'a difficult humanism'.⁶⁶

3. *Christian Humanism*

The vision which Baxter has is one of a humanism springing from Christian foundations, and also a Christianity which is human. The former will be treated in this section, and the latter in

⁶² Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

⁶³ See Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.73.

⁶⁴ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.22.

⁶⁵ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁶⁶ As quoted previously; Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21. Such humanism 'works towards an understanding of the passions without being overthrown by them'.

the following section. Although the two are not always clearly separated in Baxter's thinking or writing, it is helpful for the purposes of analysis to distinguish them. In his understanding, of course, it is Christianity which has created much of the problem in appropriating our humanity. But despite the theological roots, this malaise has entered into Western culture and influenced those who have no overt links to faith.

Baxter does more than criticise the Puritan dualism, however; he advocates the return to an integrated humanism. This, he argues, need not abandon Christian roots. Indeed, he regards a theological foundation as essential to a comprehensive humanism. Anything less results in a humanism with inadequate depth to meet the demands placed upon it. Baxter considers the essential component of Christian humanism to be that of its internal motivation.

The difference between Christian humanism and secular humanism does not come from a difference in objectives. Both the Christian and the secular man love their neighbour, and desire to show him mercy, and labour to help him. The difference is in the recognition of the source of love. The Christian recognises that the love in his heart flows from God, through the Lord Jesus by the power of the Spirit. The secular man believes that it comes from himself.⁶⁷

It is important to note that the love expressed by Christian and secularist has, in Baxter's view, the same origin. The distinction is merely one of *recognition* of the source. Christian humanism, on this understanding, is not a narrow parallel stream to secular humanism, but a broad and embracing tradition sufficient to encompass all. Some of the components of that humanism will now be examined.

(a) Earthly Existence

The alternative to dualism is that of integration. Baxter argues for acceptance of and ease with the physical reality of human life. He resists the interpretation of 'flesh' as something to be despised and overcome, and the derogatory way in which certain desires are

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.8.

labelled 'animal' impulses.⁶⁸ A frequent strategy of Baxter is to use scatological or sexual references as reminders of the embodied condition of humanity, and to make the heavenly-minded 'a little less angelic'.⁶⁹ The basic elements of life, which Puritans might find embarrassing, are in fact a reminder of the essentially physical nature of human existence.

But of course our Creator did not despise the animals, as so many of us do. he had made them, and He knew that His work was good; and He chose to let our way of begetting and conceiving children and expressing marital love be also a link with the mysterious animal kingdom, so that in love the highest and most humble things would be united.⁷⁰

It is union of the diverse elements of humanity which Baxter is interested in, and which he considers vital to a robust humanism. He finds the temptation to set the 'spiritual' against the 'animal' to be wholly misguided⁷¹, and prescribes toilet humour as an antidote to it.⁷² Crude humour has theological value in calling us back to the integration of diverse elements of our experience.

Yet I believe that the Creator knew well that there would be a tension in us between high and humble, between conscious and subconscious, between spiritual and animal elements; and that we would express this tension in humour... the father who breaks wind in front of his eight-year-old son, and then laughs, may not only be a pleasant man for his son to be with; he may also be sharing implicitly a joke of the Creator.⁷³

The dichotomising of life creates 'half-men' who are equally diminished in their humanity because 'each turns away from some essential aspect of life'.⁷⁴ The deeply embedded tendency

⁶⁸ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁶⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.28.

⁷⁰ James K. Baxter, "Christian Humour," *New Zealand Tablet* XCV, no. 10, 13 March (1968): p.13.

⁷¹ Baxter laments priests who regard themselves as 'being split into two halves, spiritual and animal', and who are preoccupied with the 'suppression of the "animal" half' through 'prayer and devotion'. James K. Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (2nd Series)". Unpublished Manuscript, Hocken Archives, MS 975/122, Dunedin, 1970.

⁷² See Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.26.

⁷³ Baxter, "Christian Humour," p.13.

⁷⁴ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21. See also Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)". where Baxter suggests that dualism 'creates a huge tribe of half-men and half-women'.

toward angelism, which regards humans as 'pure spirits rather than as men and women', and is suspicious of 'the biological and psychological functions which are an integral part of human nature',⁷⁵ must be resisted.

Natural existence is embodied existence, and something to be celebrated rather than regretted. Baxter revels in the simple joys of life while resident in Jerusalem: 'Now I am happy again, a newborn child resting freely at its point of origin, wrapped in His overcoat, as Francis knew - wind, sun, stars, fire, earth, water, and the love for which even love is too weak a name.'⁷⁶ The spiritual within humanity is not to be set over against natural life, and it is only when the rhythms of the world themselves become a prayer that true humanity is discovered in its interdependence with all that is.

When prayers, thoughts, desires, are bundled away in their necessary grave, it might seem that one has become an atheist. Trees are trees, hills are hills, men are men.⁷⁷

And yet paradoxically that is the moment of true insight and faith. Baxter believes 'that natural contemplation is by its very function agnostic, depending on images provided by the senses... very obscure communications from nature, who stand symbolically in the same relation to man as a bride does to her husband.'⁷⁸ The full development of humanity arises not out of abandonment of the physical and created world, but by immersion in it. So much so that Baxter envisages heaven as a realm which includes eating, animals, and sexuality; he imagines 'Heaven to be the fully human state'.⁷⁹ His hopes and his humanism are intimately connected to organic life.

(b) Communal

Baxter's high view of community has already been canvassed.⁸⁰ For him,

⁷⁵ Baxter, "The Spirit of Mary," p.14.

⁷⁶ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

⁷⁷ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.5.

⁷⁸ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.26.

⁷⁹ Baxter, "Heaven," p.158.

⁸⁰ See Chapter Three, Section 5 (b), pp.68ff.

human life is communal life, and humanism demands the recapturing of this necessary dimension. The tragedy for 'modern man' is that '[h]e has no ancestor, no tribal matrix' and that consequently '[t]hrough his lifelong intellectual solitude' he remains in 'terrifying poverty'.⁸¹ The type of 'false humanism' which brings about such solitude is the 'contentious self-defeating kind' which attributes 'a magical or semi-divine power to human faculties'.⁸² To base human life on the resources of the self-contained individual is to court disaster; the foundation is insufficient to carry the weight of the superstructure. It is starved of 'the powerful bond of love that springs from a tribal matrix'.⁸³ While Baxter has every sympathy with those who have been forced to pursue humanism outside of the context of the church, but cannot condone a 'belligerent secular humanism that sweeps aside reliance on the power of God'.⁸⁴

It is the theological underpinnings of humanism that the poet wishes to once again emphasise. His emphasis on community, 'the tribal or village matrix of thought and feeling'⁸⁵, is not community for its own sake. It is that 'man is most truly man in communal situations', and this in turn is because 'God himself is communal in his own being'.⁸⁶ Certainly 'secular atheistic humanism'⁸⁷ may achieve an ordering of society, and even a form of community, but it will be deficient in recognising the source of communal love.

God will deify man through Christ. Man cannot deify himself... the seed below the ground is in a different position from that of the shoot that has emerged above the ground. The Christian has to acknowledge unequivocally that with God alone is power.⁸⁸

That is why Baxter responds to Tim Shadbolt's proposal of 'a theology of communality' with

⁸¹ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.27.

⁸² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19f.

⁸³ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

⁸⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.18f.

⁸⁵ Baxter, "Man on the Horse," p.97.

⁸⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.34.

⁸⁷ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.47.

⁸⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19.

the comment that '[a] theology of the Holy Spirit is what we need'.⁸⁹ It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit, whether acknowledged or not, that true communal existence can be achieved:

A humanism that lacks the power of the Spirit falls continually into anger and bitterness and false accusation. The accusations are invariably unjust because those who have not encountered and received the Spirit are truly unable to do and continue to do what is good.⁹⁰

Baxter attempts to harmonise two differing streams of thought here, and at times verges on contradiction. On the one hand, he attributes the communal impulse to 'natural man' and the primitive tribal structure which preceded a more sophisticated social order that has destroyed 'the communal vision of those who love the sacred earth'.⁹¹ On the other hand, he sheets home the ability to live communally at all to the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁹² He holds the two together by imagining the tribal impulse to be a faint echo of the primal Edenic condition of humanity. Damaged by the Fall but not destroyed, this impulse is rekindled through the power of the Spirit, to achieve something approaching genuine human harmony. It is the end to which humanity is called, and so bookends history: 'Heaven is Divine and human community'.⁹³ To return to Baxter's definitive statement on humanism, 'natural man, though wounded, is still the earth lamp who holds the oil of grace'.⁹⁴

(c) Redeemed Humanity

Although Baxter proffers a Christian humanism, he never envisages this as some sort of in-house activity for Christians. Rather his humanism is universal. What distinguishes it from secular parallels is the deep theological foundations of it. However, Baxter neither imagines nor advocates that all people must convert to Christianity in order to

⁸⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

⁹⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.12.

⁹¹ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

⁹² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.11.

⁹³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹⁴ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

participate in Christian humanism. The seeds of such a humanism are buried in society as a work of God, independent of appreciation or belief.

Jesus is God. The world was made in Christ. And the new creation, the wholly human society and the perfecting of non-human creatures, grows like a tree from the root of his incarnation.⁹⁵

Building on the Catholic notion of faith as a gift, Baxter wants to break out of the exclusive and insular notions of Christianity, which would make belief dependent on either the will of the believer or some form of predestination.

Nobody is excluded from the Christian secret. It is for all peoples: Christ is in you (not "can be in you") because by his life and death and resurrection he united himself to all men. The assent of the believer is the positive recognition of an already existing relationship. The assent does not create Christ in his soul. That would be beyond human power; and at any rate, Christ is already there.⁹⁶

This is an important passage in the interpretation of Baxter's Christian humanism, because it echoes Karl Rahner's category of 'anonymous Christians'⁹⁷ in its commitment to both Christian tradition and universalism. The corollary of this is that the whole of humanity is potentially redeemed already through Christ. Christian humanism is an acting out of that which is an eschatological reality. For Baxter, it is impossible to be fully human without an active category of the divine. That would be to deny our creaturely and related nature, and so negate elements of humanity. While this view might be interpreted as a subtle arrogance, it is more a confessional approach that the poet is adopting; '[s]ince I am a Christian, I offer Christian explanations'.⁹⁸ While it is his conviction that 'God indeed nourishes the souls of all men',⁹⁹ it is the application of his own faith perspective to a humanism which is independent of belief systems.

⁹⁵ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.12.

⁹⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.16.

⁹⁷ See Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 390-398 in *Theological Investigations 6* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1969).

⁹⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.8.

⁹⁹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.17.

Yet I think that when people love one another, and speak the truth, and share their goods - Christ comes to live in their hearts, whether they believe in Him or not - because Christ is the Love of the Many incarnate among men.¹⁰⁰

Baxter's humanist vision seems to be that we should live as we already are; redeemed, forgiven and intimately related to the creation. He intends that we should live God's life in our own beings, 'since we are made in his image'.¹⁰¹

He did not command us to love our neighbours in order to lay a burden on our backs... we should forget the tension of solemnity and embrace our fellow beings and laugh with them... How can man learn the extraordinary secret that He loves them? Only by daring first to love one another.¹⁰²

Baxter's dream is that of the 'fully human society'.¹⁰³ By this he does not mean the Christianisation of society, but the humanisation of it; with the proviso that his understanding of humanisation is deeply conditioned by the Christian tradition. In that view, humanity is already redeemed and only needs to begin living that way in order to become fully human.

4. Toward a Human Church

The second aspect of Baxter's Christian humanism relates to the humanisation of the church. Although closely linked to his philosophy of the transformation of society, this element of it refers more specifically to the role of the church both internally and in relation to the wider community. In a lengthy and programmatic statement, Baxter provides an allegory which links his thinking about church and humanism.

On one side of the mountain the pines grow. They rise up high and stately, like the pillars of a cathedral. We are aware of a religious solemnity in their shadow. Their

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹⁰¹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.34.

¹⁰² Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

branches say, moved by the wind, 'Endure, endure, one day we will come to God.' But below the pines nothing can grow. One finds only pine needles and dog manure.

On the other side of the mountain grow the broad-leaves. They do not rise so high. Their branches spread out horizontally and much dead material falls to the forest floor. The scene is not a tidy one. But saplings grow up among the rotted wood and fallen leaves, and the broad-leaves shelter them with their branches.

The pines are an image of deism. The broad-leaves are an image of humanism. Was the Lord Jesus a pine or a broad-leaf? That is the question we have to ask ourselves. The evidence of the Gospels leads me to the conclusion that he was a broad-leaf and the pines felt obliged to kill him.

The crisis of the church, in her deep return to the Gospel realities, asks of us something resembling a personality change, from deist to humanist, from pine into broad-leaf.¹⁰⁴

It is the transformation of the church from deist to humanist which captures Baxter's imagination. The task has two elements: an internal movement in which the church itself becomes more human and welcoming of people, and an external movement in which the church becomes instrumental in constructing the fully human society.¹⁰⁵ A simple reformation of the church is not sufficient.

To love the people of God means to serve them. We are called the servant church. And a servant's job is to clean out lavatories, actual or metaphorical. We are servants not only the people of God, those who already recognise the cross as the mercy sign, but servants also of the kingdom of God, all those who have the seed of mercy in their hearts.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.7f.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.7.

The fundamental shift in Baxter's ecclesiology in relation to humanisation should not be underestimated. It is a radical relocation of the church from the ecclesiastical ghettos to the midst of human community. He feels keenly 'the gulf between the battlements of the Church Militant and the stony ground below where men struggle',¹⁰⁷ and dreams of a church which might be alongside humanity in the thick of existence. Too much of Christian practice serves to separate rather than reconcile believers with their own humanity.

Belief in itself does not always humanise us. It may even do the opposite. It may make us think that we are secure, safe from human evil, a tribe miraculously set apart, a people whose treasure is already laid up in heaven - "The people of God, His people." Let us examine our fallacy.¹⁰⁸

Baxter's manifesto on the way in which the church must reassess its role in the world, 'Handbook for a Militant Christian', will be examined in detail in the next chapter. It is sufficient here to note that he calls for the church to be where Christ is - incarnate in the tensions of ordinary human life. The following aspects illustrate some of the ways in which the church must change to achieve humanisation.

(a) Acceptance

The corruption of the gospel through the husbandry of the church dismays Baxter. He regards the Catholic Church in particular as 'our paralysed paranoid mother' who reluctantly 'carries a beautiful child in her womb'.¹⁰⁹ The 'longstanding rigidities of churchianity'¹¹⁰ serve to exclude rather than include people. The blunting of love through moralism has created a church where 'religion becomes a useless parody of itself'.¹¹¹ Baxter dreams of Christian community which touches and includes humanity:

I look forward to the time when Mass will be celebrated freely and frequently in

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.48.

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, "Aspects of Christian Action".

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19.

¹¹¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.4.

Christian homes. Then the chalice may be a kitchen cup, the paten a saucer, the bread may be cut from a family loaf, and the wine bought at a bottle store... As things stand, a child who comes into one of our churches is likely to find himself under the shade of the pines, not in the fruitful shelter of the broad-leaves.¹¹²

It is necessary to move beyond 'a set of mediocre social rules as a substitute for Christianity'.¹¹³ Once again the dualism of the Puritan detracts from the gospel by positing certain standards of behaviour as being necessary to faith.

How good does one have to be to become acceptable to God? That is the web the Jansenist or Calvinist spins for himself... God loves us, not because we are good, but because he is good.¹¹⁴

The key to humanisation is acceptance, both of oneself and of others. This is an attitude which is not oblivious to human frailty, but which recognising it, moves beyond it in love. Asking the question 'How does a man in his ordinary life experience God?', Baxter describes the simple camaraderie of two friends.

Then he tells his friend some secret matter - some burden - a sin perhaps, some terrible or humiliating act of weakness that he thought he would carry to the grave inside his breast. And a door opens - because of love, because of honesty - and the two friends put their arms round one another, and the heart of each man is lightened... God has given his own life to the soul of each man because they had mercy on one another.¹¹⁵

The love of Christ and the activity of God are here removed from the realm of church and doctrine, and located by Baxter firmly in the midst of ordinary human affairs. The practice of mercy, he suggests, is suffused with the love of God whether or not it springs from an attitude of faith. Human acceptance serves to overcome the trap of moralism.

¹¹² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.21.

¹¹³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.19.

¹¹⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.17.

¹¹⁵ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.5f.

To make oneself spruce for God is an infantile delusion. He accepts us in our true spiritual dishevelment. It is his power that makes us able to grow spiritually, as the sun reaches into the dark earth and warms the seed. But the seed itself is the life of God in our souls. His love creates in us the capacity to love, by giving shape to Christ in us.¹¹⁶

Christ is not to be found in distinction from our human condition, but rather in the core of it. Whereas Puritanism separates, acceptance has the opposite effect of including all people in the struggle towards love, which Baxter regards as the theological arena *par excellence*.

(b) Sexuality

A significant aspect of self-acceptance of humanity, and one in which the church frequently struggles, is that of sexuality. Baxter dares 'to hope sometimes for a theology of sexuality that does justice to the human situation'.¹¹⁷ He finds the Manichean tendency of dividing flesh and spirit to be at its worst in Christian views of sexuality. Baxter laments 'the obsessive purity of dualism' with its 'refusal to recognise that love plays some part in all sexual impulse and activity'.¹¹⁸ An acceptance of embodiment will allow that sexuality is part of the fabric of human existence, and lies close at hand whenever the spiritual qualities of tenderness and compassion are invoked. In illustration of this, Baxter tells the parable of a fictitious Father Damien, who works in a leper colony. Overcome by a woman's suffering, he embraces her and finds himself consummating his love sexually. Baxter comments:

If you do not understand my parable, there is little point in my explaining it. I suggest, though, that it points towards the mystery of *charitas*... My point is perhaps that it would be unwise of us to suppose that we had to achieve the sinlessness of Christ before we could begin loving our fellow man.¹¹⁹

He struggles against the concept that the expression of sexual love outside of marriage is

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.17.

¹¹⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.10.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹¹⁹ Baxter, "Aspects of Christian Action".

always wrong, seeming to posit that the spark of divine love within physical life may often overflow whatever channels are created to contain it.

I cannot accept a theology that equates the situation of some visiting motorbike boy who follows a girl round, saying - 'I want a fuck' - with the situation of a couple who pair off with any degree of mutual tenderness and responsibility... I am gambling on the assumption that no human love, if it implies, however dimly, the Love of the Many, is separated at its root from the love which is Christ given to us to love one another with.¹²⁰

The problem, as discussed earlier, is a discomfort with the natural or animal aspects of human existence; a tendency to 'enthroned the virtue of purity above that of charity'.¹²¹ Many people educated in the church have 'never heard that love transforms all things... that God made us, body and soul, and saw that both were good'.¹²² Baxter hopes for a Christian view of sexuality which might both express some of the complexities of it, and which might admit that such a volatile force cannot be easily regulated. Sexual love is 'fragile and subject to jealousies and misunderstandings'¹²³, but it is nevertheless an impulse toward love,¹²⁴ and not to be automatically regarded as sinful because it does not accord with objective rules. Baxter's argument is that 'chastity is a flower of God often battered down by the world, but charity is the root without which the tree cannot grow',¹²⁵ and that a more human church might find a way of accommodating those who struggle in a difficult area.

(c) Sacramental

Baxter regards humanity as being the nexus of spiritual and animal life. The spiritual aspects of existence are not to be found in the absence of physical life, but rather in

¹²⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.11.

¹²¹ Baxter, "The Spirit of Mary," p.14.

¹²² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.12.

¹²³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

¹²⁴ 'It [masturbation] is connected basically with the human impulse of need-love; the love which is a need for love, a wish to be comforted, enfolded, reassured, as a child is at the mother's breast.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.10.

¹²⁵ Baxter, "Literature and Belief," p.49.

the depth of it; 'to become a living tree and to flower, the cross needs to be planted in the earth of our daily experience'.¹²⁶ True human life, therefore, is a life which is open to the spiritual significance of physical life. This is an understanding which is at least partly represented by the category of the sacramental, as accentuated in Catholic teaching. For Baxter, 'the primordial Sacrament'¹²⁷ is Christ, and the principle of incarnation, where God is present in flesh, flows outward to touch the whole of reality. Following Christ, the whole of the created order is charged with grace, revelation and mystery; a level of encounter which is readily accessible to humans. In poetry and in theology, 'the language of mysticism' can penetrate reality, provided it is invoked by 'the entire man, spirit and animal'.¹²⁸ Human experience, properly understood, is always laced with spiritual potential and divine communication.

The dimension of religiosity, in Baxter's sacramental philosophy, is not confined to the ecclesiastical arena, but rather is always and everywhere present; 'God is not only alive in thereness, beyond us - He is also alive in hereness, among us'.¹²⁹ Ordinary human commerce is laden with divine significance, even if it is not always recognised as such.

Once I would have given a friend a crucifix; now I would be more inclined to give him a cigarette... If I am not crucified, the gift of the sacramental will probably not be helpful; if I am myself crucified, the cigarette will become an effective though unorthodox sacramental.¹³⁰

Belief does not create the transcendent condition of existence; it simply provides a category of recognition and understanding for it. With faith, any aspect of life may become spiritually significant, 'containing the life of God, as a water-pipe contains water'.¹³¹ This is the substance of Baxter's sacramental theology, and his poetic emphasis on natural contemplation.

In this view, the church does not create religious depth or the category of the numinous, but it does have a role to play in opening the eyes of people to that which they might have

¹²⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.7.

¹²⁷ Baxter, "The Spirit of Mary," p.16.

¹²⁸ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.45.

¹²⁹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

¹³⁰ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.24.

¹³¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

previously overlooked. In order to do so, the church has to overcome its isolation from the general population and 'get near this kind of neighbour and share his spiritual cramps'; after all, 'the destitute God whom we love is hidden more deeply in him'.¹³² The sacramental understanding of life demands something further from the believer: the recognition that the flawed humanity of the faithful is the vital link between God and the world - '[w]e have to let ourselves be eaten by our neighbours'.¹³³ Relocation in the interests of proximity is only part of the shift necessary for the church. The other, and more costly, transition is the willingness to give her life for the sake of humanity.

(d) Kenosis

In the latter part of Baxter's life, he adopts a way of life which he labels kenosis. On one level this is his personal contemplative pilgrimage, but at another it has implications for the church: '[k]enosis means self-emptying, always with the proviso that one hopes to make more room for God and one's neighbour'.¹³⁴ The church is not a body which can legitimately live out of self-interest, but can only find authenticity in serving others - 'In the course of serving our brothers we attain union with God through Christ who is present in our brothers'.¹³⁵ Humanisation of the church means not only dis-location but also decentring of the ecclesial community, so that rather than revelling in self-righteousness, believers might do more to emulate their Lord.¹³⁶ The institutional church has become distracted from its true role through adopting a form of materialism which sees it accumulating wealth, power and truth to itself. Even the certainty of salvation can become a means of selfishness which runs counter to the gospel.

There is something ungenerous, discourteous, in a man who knows the joy of the Cross flaunting it before another man who lacks it. The best kind of destitution for us may be to learn the language of the agnostic and speak it with him, and reserve the

¹³² Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.24.

¹³³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹³⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40.

¹³⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹³⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

expressions of joy for our private prayers.¹³⁷

The path toward 'the fully human society'¹³⁸ begins with friendship toward humanity; a friendship which overlooks faults and celebrates love among the apparently fallen. Baxter finds the example of Christ inspiring, in that '[h]e did not despair of his friends, faulty as they were', but rather 'thought them worth dying for'.¹³⁹ An attitude of kenosis on the part of the church and her adherents means a risky love which leads people away from their religious certainties into the ambiguous territory of human affairs.

[Christ] is born in our hearts when we put friendship before personal security. This friendship must be extended potentially towards all human beings.¹⁴⁰

Self-sacrifice and self-emptying will lead the institution to a more vulnerable place, but also to one which is able to make contact with the lives of those who perish outside her walls. That is, in Baxter's view, the right place for the church to occupy; caught in the force-field of God's love for humanity.

5. Conclusion

Christian humanism is a philosophy which grows stronger in Baxter's theology toward the end of his life,¹⁴¹ even though the roots of it can be seen in earlier writing. It represents for him a significant shift from his initial attitude of institutional allegiance toward the church. Now he begins to separate the activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit from any necessary connection with the ecclesiastical establishment. More importantly, his shift undergirds the development of a theological orientation which is both thoroughly Christian and yet universal in its application. Baxter argues for a genuine theological humanism; one which will overcome the damage done through centuries of dualism, and locate the activity of God firmly in the midst

¹³⁷ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9.

¹³⁸ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹³⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

¹⁴⁰ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁴¹ The theme is strong in *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit*, which McKay suggests was written in August of 1972. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.316.

of the general populace. Parr claims that Baxter's 'most notable contribution to religious thought was his search for a "humanist Christianity"'.¹⁴²

By means of a humanist theology, the companion of theological humanism, the Christ-event is made proximate and relevant to the entire saga of human existence, not just to a small believing subset of the population. Convinced that '[t]he division of religious and secular categories of life is to be broken down', Baxter envisages a fruitful partnership between God and humanity:

God chooses to work with man, not merely to command him, as he worked with and through and in the man Jesus... The wholly human society of heaven will emerge from this labour, under the sovereignty of Christ.¹⁴³

There is a role here for the church, but it will need to be a dramatically reformed servant church. This vision is comprehensive and polemical. Just how radical and thorough-going Baxter's revised theology is will be the subject of the next chapter, when a late unpublished manifesto of Christian humanism will be examined.

¹⁴² Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.ii.

¹⁴³ This and previous quote, Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* pp.26.27.

Chapter Eight: He Kupu mo Nga Toa - A Handbook for the Christian Militant

1. Introduction

Many of Baxter's theological themes come to fruition in a late document which has never been published. The manuscript, clearly intended to be distributed,¹ was overtaken by the author's premature death, and so is hardly known and largely uncommented on. This is unfortunate, as no evaluation of Baxter's theology can be complete without a thorough reading of this text, which is both revolutionary and enlightening.² Thus far, due to restricted access to the document,³ almost no commentary has been offered on what may be a very significant treatise in the history of theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It is not that the general themes of the *Handbook* are not canvassed elsewhere in Baxter's corpus, but that in it is to be found his most concise and distilled theological statement. Many of the nascent developments in his theology come together in what can only be described as a manifesto of faith. This chapter will attempt to set the document in its context, and examine the theological formulations contained therein.

From the contextual perspective, 'A Handbook for the Christian Militant' is a radical and definitive essay which does much to establish Baxter's credentials as a local theologian as well as a poet. There are grounds for regarding it as an authentic parallel expression of concerns raised in Latin America during the birth of Liberation Theology. Given that the Medellin conference which gave formal identity to the movement did not occur until 1968, and that Gutiérrez's seminal *Teología de la Liberación* was only published in 1971, it is

¹ Various versions exist which demonstrate the editing process, and a substantial glossary of Maori words has been appended; a feature of most of Baxter's published books in the late period.

² Phillips argues that 'before attempting to be definitive about Baxter these texts [A Handbook for the Christian Militant] must be considered if one is to be in any way academically accurate about what Baxter wrote, and what he might have meant by it'. Phillips, "Dialogue," p.279.

³ *A Handbook for the Christian Militant* is among other Baxter materials lodged in the Hocken Archives which is under embargo, and requires specific permission to access.

remarkable that Baxter should be formulating such similar ideas before his death in 1972.⁴ Dating of the document is a matter of conjecture. Phillips places it in the years 1970-72.⁵ Paragraph 52 of the material refers to Baxter's participation in a demonstration of Nga Tama Toa at Waitangi 'in 1971'.⁶ While not definite, it is unlikely that he would specify the year if it was not the current one, so perhaps the best dating of it would be sometime in 1972. References to Wellington (CM §26) and a fascination with communism (which featured in his sojourn in that city) would tend to place it in the period following his return to Jerusalem from Wellington, perhaps in February or March of that year.⁷

'A Handbook for the Christian Militant' is a formal document with numbered paragraphs, which could equally be entitled 'Baxter's 74 theses'. It has the declaratory and polemical character of a religious manifesto; a defiant statement which not only establishes the author's position but is a rallying call for a new and more vigorous form of Christianity. Building on a condemnation of the institutional church, it goes on to locate the movement of Christ among Te Morehu, the people. Baxter issues an invitation for the people of faith to devote themselves to the poor, and to work tirelessly for the establishment of justice. The 'militancy' of the title refers to a non-violent but pro-active confrontation with civil authorities in solidarity with those who are oppressed. The effect is to transform Christianity from a quietist devotional exercise confined to the middle classes, into a politically active and revolutionary movement which challenges the very basis of New Zealand society. In this, it echoes *A Walking Stick for an Old Man*⁸, but is a much more sustained and developed argument than the earlier text.

A survey of the themes contained in the manuscript will help to understand the significance of the text, and then an evaluation of its relevance in regard to contextual and liberation approaches will be made.

⁴ For a brief history of Liberation Theology, see Clodovis Boff and Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* trans. P. Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1987).

⁵ Phillips, "Dialogue," p.279.

⁶ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". Because of the frequent references to this document necessary for analysis of it, hereinafter it shall be abbreviated to CM, with the paragraph numbers identified.

⁷ McKay dates Baxter's return to Jerusalem at the end of February 1972. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.272. That the place of authorship is Jerusalem, not Wellington, is indicated by CM §17, in which Baxter refers to 'the twigs and branches framed by a window when I wake early at Hiruharama'.

⁸ Baxter, *Walking Stick*. The year of authorship is suggested by Phillips to be 1971. Phillips, "Dialogue," p.275.

2. Themes

(a) The Church

(i) The Nature of the Church

After a traditional greeting in Maori, the *Handbook* opens with a foundational statement as to the nature of the church, which is succinct and provides the cornerstone for the ensuing argument: 'The church exists to serve her members and to serve the kingdom of Te Atua'. (CM §2). This is seemingly uncontroversial, but becomes more polemical as it is further developed. Baxter goes immediately on the offensive, asking 'How can she [the church] be a servant unless she is poor?' (CM §2), and declaring that '[t]he churches are sects' (CM §3). He includes the Catholic church in this accusation, noting that while claiming universality, 'in practice her truth also is narrowed and structuralised' (CM §3). Given that all the ecclesial structures are in fact sects, he then redefines the word church to mean '[a]ll Christians and what they may become by the power of the Spirit' (CM §3). This distinction is akin to that between the 'visible' and 'invisible' church,⁹ as developed by Martin Luther. Baxter claims that '[o]nly God can see its [the church's] size and its shape' (CM §3). Unfortunately, he then proceeds to use the term 'church' indiscriminately, at one time referring to the institution and another intending the wider community of faith.

The invisible church is much broader and more inclusive than its established companion. Baxter expresses this through the use of a Maori proverb.

'Ka iti te whare, ka nui te waka' - the house is small, the canoe is big. The people of God who gather in the church building, te whare tapu, are small in number compared to the kingdom of God, all those who exhibit mercy in their lives.

⁹ In a review entitled 'Golden Age of Devotional Writings', Baxter criticises Theo Westow for failing to make a 'definite distinction between the Church Visible and the Church Invisible'. James K. Baxter, "Golden Age of Devotional Writings," *N.Z. Tablet* XCVI, no. 10, 12 March (1969): p.22.

CM §7

It is not that he is calling on people to leave the institutional church - 'One should remain and fight the battle on the ground God has given' (CM §21) - but that there should be identification with and participation in the movement of Christ which is much more extensive than the religious assemblies. Baxter is certain that 'the house is there for the sake of Te Morehu, the people' (CM §8), and that this must never be forgotten. The failing of the institution is that she has 'married herself to Dives our capitalist Pharaoh' and her 'terrible lassitude' will only be healed when 'she returns to her actual husband, the poor man Christ' (CM §4). Bureaucracy and hierarchy are a shelter from the vicissitudes of life, albeit an illegitimate one.

The church's structure has imitated the structure of the pyramids. It is a false security. The only true security comes from the presence of Christ in souls whose love makes their courage strong in the moment of danger.

CM §63.

As a result, the church 'is standing in the shoes of the Pharisees, who had orthodoxy but lacked justice and mercy' (CM §5). The necessary reformation of the church, involving reunification with Christ, is the subject of Baxter's thesis.

(ii) The Purpose of the Church

A further definitive statement clarifies the role of the church in human affairs:

The aims of the church are twofold: to establish God's covenant of mercy among men and to construct the fully human society. The first is brought about by means of the second.

CM §6.

This declaration reinforces the centrifugal nature of Baxter's view of the church; it is to be active 'among men' and instrumental in delivering the 'fully human society'. The means of achieving this has already been established as that of service. Through this notion, the seemingly polar tensions of the inner and outer life of the church are resolved. On the one hand, the inner desire of union with Christ is achieved through encountering him in the world - 'In the course of serving our brothers we attain union with God through Christ who is present in our brothers' (CM §6). On the other, the desire to transform society for the good of all 'has a Divine source and can slowly divinise all men' (CM §6).

The Christian humanism outlined in the previous chapter comes to its most cogent expression in this document. The church is not to pursue her own goals and initiatives; nor to defend her own life. Rather she should adapt herself to God's purpose, which involves the transformation of the entire community. While Baxter acknowledges this is ultimately an eschatological longing, it provides an essentially proximate call to the church.

The parousia, the joining together of all creatures in Christ, is to be fully accomplished beyond the grave. But it begins on earth. If we do not spend our bodies and souls labouring here for the fully human society, then Heaven could have no meaning for us. Heaven is Divine and human community. Here it is a seed in the ground, a participation in the pain of Christ.

CM §12.

The risen Christ occupies the future, beckoning his followers toward the promise of fulfilment and participation. In substance this is a theological affirmation remarkably alike those of Moltmann and Pannenberg.¹⁰

He is present in the Not-Yet. He is present in our burning hunger for the fully human

¹⁰ Cf. J. Moltmann: 'Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.' Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* trans. J. Leitch (London: SCM 1967) p.21. See also Pannenberg on the proleptic nature of Jesus' resurrection; W. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man* trans. L. Wilkins and D. Priebe (London: SCM 1968) pp.53-108. It is likely that Baxter had read these theologians at Newman Hall.

society.

CM § 9.

However, the thesis is given a characteristically contextual nuance by Baxter, who continually seeks to earth his theology in local metaphors: 'But to find him in experience we have to look in front of the bow of the canoe, where the water swells before it begins to foam' (CM §9).

The purpose of the church, then, is given by the vision of the fully human society, a divinely-inspired eschatological utopia which calls for participation by the faithful. It demands commitment to solidarity with Te Morehu in their struggle for freedom and dignity: 'If it comes from deep enough, the voice of Te Morehu is the voice of Te Atua' (CM §43).

(iii) The Maori Roots of the Church

Given Baxter's universalising of the church to mean all those who work toward the establishment of the kingdom of God, it is perhaps not surprising that he refuses to limit his notions of *ecclesia* to established churches of European origin. The contextual impetus causes him to identify a largely unrecognised component of the church in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The 'dry watercourses' of the established church need the refreshment of a deeper spring: 'The Maori church in this country is like a river that flows underground' (CM §3). He is not intending what more orthodox commentators might identify as the Maori church, but rather recognises the hand of God in the broad historical tradition of the Maori prophetic movement: 'Te Kouti, Te Whiti, Rua, Ratana and certain others are her prophets and fathers' (CM §3). Baxter claims that he learned 'the meaning of Christian militancy' (CM §53) from Nga Tama Toa, a group with no overt religious affiliations. It is the resistance of generations of Maori to 'the continued destruction of the Maori culture and the seizure of the land' (CM §53) which Baxter finds inspirational, and of significance to all those who struggle against oppression.

Throughout the *Handbook*, Baxter relies on Maori terminology and uses Maori proverbs to give expression to his sentiments. This is more than mere tokenism. It is a reframing of Christian theology so that it draws from the historical and cultural strands present in the local context. Neither is he preferring Maori concerns over Pakeha; it is more that he finds

commonality of struggle among the poor, both Maori and Pakeha. However, because Maori have endured longer, they collectively constitute the 'elder brother' (CM §3) from whom Pakeha have much to learn. The joint enemy is constituted by an elaborate system (personified by Baxter as Pharaoh) which oppresses the people and demands their allegiance, while robbing them of their freedom and humanity. Church becomes those people who resist such diminishing of their liberty, and the deep roots of Maori opposition provide sustenance for the ongoing campaign.

(iv) The Failure of the Church

In a switch from his use of 'church' to refer to the 'invisible' movement among the people, Baxter has stinging condemnation of the 'visible' institution which has not only failed to follow Christ, but has become an instrument of oppression herself. Those who have rejected the church stand in judgement against her: 'Through the eyes of the atheist and the agnostic we see the world our negligence has made' (CM §11). The root cause of the failure is to be found in the disjunction between teaching and practice.

It is impossible not to mention the great scandal of our time and of all times. The moral paralysis of the church. Karl Rahner said to us, 'You have orthodoxy. Where is your orthopraxy? Where are your works of mercy and social justice?' It is the same question Te Ariki asked of the Pharisees.

CM §10.

Baxter concedes that the accusation of the Marxists against the church may be substantially correct: 'Prayer is a drug unless it leads to works of justice and mercy' (CM §13).¹¹ Unfortunately, the church has been seduced away from her calling, and has sided with the rich man Dives against the poor man Lazarus, because 'Dives will pay for the schools and the stone buildings in which she teaches doctrine' (CM §4).

¹¹ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.15.: 'The name of God becomes an aspirin if religion is used to divert men from social militancy.'

Such cooption by the ruling powers has resulted in both the 'castrated Christian' who 'wishes to give only a modicum of his goods' (CM §16), and the 'castrated church' which has an 'obsession with sexual purity' (CM §18). Baxter regards the fixation on purity as understandable but essentially misguided.

Why single out the demon of impurity? The obsession comes from the unholy marriage of the church to the affluent middle class. To fight for social justice would be to lose their support. But they have a wistful hope that their children will remain chaste even in the kingdom of Pharaoh where sex is a commodity.

CM §18.

Christian people are guilty of betraying the kingdom through 'their timidity and their Pharisaism and their idolatry of material possessions' (CM §8). Because of their partisan enmeshment in the existing society, there is a tendency to regard the poor as an object of charity (CM §15). This is to implicitly deny their humanity, and to neglect the only hope for reform; that followers of Christ must 'learn how to love from the anawim [poor]' (CM §16). A change in both attitude and practice is required if the church is ever to discover her true role.

(b) The Christian Militant

(i) Christian Militancy

Baxter regards militancy as a lost quality of the Christian tradition. The compromise of the church has caused her to value order and security above faithfulness to her Lord.

By turning her back on militancy the church is castrating the warrior Christ. He is born in our hearts when we put friendship before personal security.

CM §22.

Baxter's view of militancy is that of an active and confrontative engagement, which is nonetheless non-violent: 'Christ's militancy was no less militant for being non-violent' CM §45. He regards it as a persistent and enduring friendship with the poor ('Poverty is the blood of militancy' CM §59), which struggles against oppression while maintaining a gentle quality.

The image of a green shoot breaking through a concrete pavement. The growth of the shoot is not violent. It is tender and living. This is the image of Christian militancy. Its power comes from God.

CM §23.

It is the attempt to live out the example set by Jesus in confronting authority while yet remaining peaceful. Baxter recommends Te Whiti rather than Te Kouti as a proximate role-model for such militancy, because Te Whiti's 'blessing rested even on his enemies' (CM §51). Militancy is not a specific political programme, but rather an attitude to life. 'The first aim of militancy', according to Baxter, is not to achieve particular objectives, but instead 'to turn the hearts of slaves into the hearts of free men' (CM §55). It is this shift in perception which Baxter is advocating - the 'beauty of freedom, of creatures doing what God intends them to do' (CM §17). A change in attitude may enlighten the imagination, and thereby 'sow the seed of an alternate society' (CM §57).¹² Seeing things differently is the key to Christian action for change, and needs no programme to follow; it can begin 'wherever justice and mercy lack a voice and hands' (CM §67).

(ii) The Church Militant

In order to be transformed and assist the transformation of society, the church needs to commit herself to the sacraments of mercy and social justice. Baxter's suggestions for reform are as practical as they are demanding.

¹² Cf. Walter Brueggemann who distinguishes the oppressive 'royal consciousness' from the militant 'prophetic imagination': 'We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and coopted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternate thought.' Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1978) p.44.

Let the daughters of the middle class, if they are Christian, live and work beside those who go down to the boats, and invite them to the Ritual Meal. Let the sons of the middle class, if they are Christian, imitate Tim Shadbolt and find a just militant occasion to go to jail and carry in their souls and bodies the pains of the prisoners.

CM §18.

It is a simple matter of realigning Christian practice to more faithfully emulate the ministry of Jesus - Christ's 'lost militancy is a ghost without a resting place' (CM §46). Where middle class believers have forgotten how to love, they must learn again from the poor. This is the true Christian education, with 'communal houses' and 'practical social work' (CM §20). This is not to be confused with charity, which is a means of domesticating compassion.¹³ Too often church schools have preferred to 'educate the children of the middle class in the social fictions originated by our capitalist Pharaoh' (CM §20). The religious orders are charged with reversing this surrender to convention.

Let the monks and the brothers and the nuns open the doors of their holy jails and put down mattresses in the corridors for the houseless poor. Their 'poverty' and their 'chastity' were given them by God so that they could embrace all people as brothers and sisters, and love them and be loved by them.

CM §19.

For the laity, Baxter suggests a very similar regime; he invites them to '[g]o out and rent old houses', to 'share your goods with one another', and to [o]pen your doors to the workless and to those whose spirits are weakened and humiliated' (CM §24).

Such relocation and learning from the poor is a starting point only; a way of changing perspective in an inequitable society. Baxter hopes for a militant church which will stand as a bulwark against dehumanising forces, arguing that the church should not only join movements of liberation, but should initiate them (CM §67). He further suggests that in

¹³ 'It is not our business to be charitable. It is our business to be on fire with love and the desire for social justice.' James K. Baxter, CM § 68.

certain situations, Christians should carefully and deliberately break the civil law in the interests of justice (CM §38, 42). This is a vision of the church as a community free from allegiance to the ruling powers, which has discovered the joy of human freedom and is not afraid to risk well-being or reputation in the interests of establishing justice.

(iii) The Ritual Meal

Interestingly, the one feature of the existing church which Baxter wishes to maintain in the presence of radical reformation is that of eucharist, or the Ritual Meal as he commonly refers to it. He counsels militants not to forsake the Ritual Meal, because '[t]he people must have the type of the Last Supper to return to' (CM §71). It is clear that he sees in this sacrament something of abiding significance in maintaining a Christian orientation to social activism. Certainly Baxter is eager to liberate the rite from its captivity amid dogma and designated buildings.

Celebrate the Ritual Meal in your houses with joy and love. Let anybody receive the body and blood of Christ who knows that is what it is. The time of unity is already here if you are living at the tip of the green shoot.

CM §25.

This indicates that he views Christian militancy as an anticipation of the parousia, and regards the eucharist as having an eschatological character. It holds a proleptic dimension, invoking the fully human society which is the ultimate goal of the struggle for justice. For that reason he wants the celebration of it to be 'communal and joyful' (CM §4). The openness of it to all who desire to participate is a sign of the equally accessible kingdom of God. But as well as this function of the feast as a portent, it is also understood by Baxter to be a source of sustenance and inspiration in the task of transforming society. To devote oneself to that cause is 'to share the pain and hope of one another's inner being' (CM §73). Such is the nexus of devotion to God and devotion to humanity.

To give oneself to Te Morehu is to become a loaf of bread that is eaten. It cannot be regarded as other than a terrible destiny. Blessed be God. The law of Christ is simple -

unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, there is no wheat stalk and no harvest.

CM §73.

(c) The Rule of Pharaoh

(i) Condition of Captivity

Baxter characterises the political situation of Aotearoa-New Zealand as one of structural oppression, drawing on biblical motifs to define it. The foundational story which informs the *Handbook* is the account of the people of Israel in captivity in Egypt, and their subsequent struggle to be free.¹⁴ Baxter speaks of a Pharaoh, pyramids, whips, overseers and slavery. He is perhaps the first theologian to characterise the social situation in New Zealand in this way. Previously religious writers have largely regarded the country as socially benign and relatively equitable. Baxter, however, considers this illusion to be part of the problem; a blindness which is an integral part of the enslaving myth. Citizens consider themselves to be well off and free, not realising that '[t]he slave market is omnipresent' (CM §40).

'You are free men under me,' says Pharaoh to his overseers. He persuades them that they are not his slaves. He gives them good houses and many luxuries. In return he buys them and owns them from the crown of their head to the soles of their feet.

CM §39

The physical destitution which spawns Marxism ('the communist Pharaoh' CM §37) is not the harbinger of oppression in this land, so much as materialism. But the results are equally disastrous.

¹⁴ This is also the base analogy used by Liberation theologians, a parallel which will be further explored later in this chapter.

In the East the people lie down in the streets and die of hunger. In this country people go mad at the desks and work benches or in their own homes. In the affluent capitalist pyramid structure the evil effects of slavery are predominantly mental. Our mental hospitals are full because we are not free men and women.

CM §37.

The loss of freedom is a serious curtailment of human life, whatever the cause may be. In the West, freedom is curtailed through '[a]ttachment to possessions - material, mental or spiritual' which Baxter describes as 'the hara [sin] of Egypt' (CM §14). The inability to conceive of life in other than material terms creates a dependence on the existing capitalist structures, which gradually ensnares people and makes them susceptible to the control of Pharaoh, because 'worklessness and anxiety are near' (CM §62).

When a man bows his head and licks the boss's arse, out of fear of losing his job for some other reasons than incompetence or incapacity, then his joy in his work leaves him and misery takes its place. The food he eats tastes like sawdust in his mouth. He cannot sleep happily with his woman. He has become a slave.

CM §30.

Baxter seems to be advancing a variant on the Marxist analysis, by arguing that a state-supported materialism is equally effective in alienating the worker from his or her labour.¹⁵ He claims that '[j]oy in work is the wage paid by Te Atua', and that when 'a boss takes a man's joy in work', he is guilty of 'defrauding the labourer of God's hire' (CM §31). Such exploitation is subtle but effective, and maintains servitude under the illusion of democratic freedom. In this country, while '[t]he pyramids are an invisible structure', they still 'rest on the backs of the people' (CM §40).

¹⁵ See for example, Jurgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'," 117-145 in *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram (New York: Paragon House, 1992).; and Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press 1991).

(ii) The Whip and the Pyramid

The mechanisms of control exercised by Pharaoh are equally subtle. The entire capitalist structure is characterised by Baxter as the building of pyramids. This is the tacitly accepted goal of society, which remains dominant in the absence of any questioning. All citizens participate in pyramid construction, and as long as they do so are allowed a limited freedom by Pharaoh.

On the TV sets in their houses they can listen to discussions about pyramid-building; whether the pyramids should be built of stone or concrete, whether they should be triangular or rectangular, or even a dispute about the differences between the capitalist and the communist pyramids.

CM §39.

Such apparent intellectual freedom is an integral part of the social engineering of Pharaoh, who 'lets you discuss anything you like' (CM §39).

Pharaoh is always glad to see his slaves sitting on their backsides discussing the meaning of freedom. He knows that discussion is an excellent safety valve as long as they do not get off their arses and oppose him. Sooner or later, as hunger and habit grip them, they will begin again to hoist the blocks to build the pyramids.

CM §56.

But any challenge to the notion of pyramid-building or attempt to opt out of the construction process will reveal the true face of the oppressor: 'when you touch his power structure he becomes the tyrant and slave-owner that he has always been' (CM §39). Pharaoh 'fears the growth of any authority other than his own' (CM §49).

As already discussed, the reason that Pharaoh can exercise such control over the people is their '[d]esire for comfort' (CM §61). The compliant slave is 'tied to Pharaoh by his artificial needs that Pharaoh has implanted in his nervous system' (CM §58). Baxter claims that

'[m]oney is the blood of Pharaoh', and 'gives him power to buy men' (CM §59). Within this system of economic cooption, there are some more specific elements of persuasion: 'Four inventions of the Pharaoh: destitution in the midst of riches, the brothel, the slave market and the whip' (CM §40). Each of these is worthy of individual analysis.

a. Destitution

Pharaoh is careful to ensure that even in the midst of comparative wealth, the 'fear of destitution or fear of going to jail for being without work' (CM §27) is allowed to disturb the minds of his workers. This destitution, claims Baxter, 'does not have to be absolute' (CM §40). It is the possibility of economic failure which functions to create a compliant population. For those 'whose security is money' (CM §58), the simple mechanism of '[a] slave's dole for the workless will keep them alive so that they will creep back, when they are needed, to lick the boss's arse' (CM §40).¹⁶ The provision of wealth and comfort for those who work actually operates in Pharaoh's favour, as it functions as a stimulant to desire, and so fuels the entire social motivation.

b. The Brothel

Sex as part of the marketplace is also used by Pharaoh as a control mechanism. Through this he extends his control into even the most intimate of human encounters.

A moderate pornography is part of the atmosphere of Egypt. As long as women are undressing in front of the cameras for money, Pharaoh can have a peaceful mind. There is no part of human behaviour that his money cannot buy.

CM §40.

To treat sex as a commodity which can be bought and sold 'is one of the lies of Pharaoh on

¹⁶ Cf. Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.3.: 'Slavery can be a subtle matter. There are ten thousand different ways of licking a boss's arse to keep a job.'

which he founds an empire of brothels and pornography' (CM §66). It reinforces the essentially capitalist nature of society, in which everything has a price. The brothel stands as a symbol for a wider exploitation to which the entire community is subject: 'Men and women can sell themselves in subtle ways, for security, and poison their lives in so doing' (CM §40). Baxter protests against this commodification of humanity, suggesting it violates the essential God-given dignity of all people (CM §66).

c. The Slave Market

The slave market refers to the buying and selling of labour, and in particular to the consequent imbalance of power in favour of the bosses. While an employer can 'justly ask' for '[o]bedience, politeness, and the normal quota of work required', to demand '[m]ore than this is slavery' (CM §30). A legitimate exchange is frequently exploited so that the dignity of work is corrupted.

Money is the wage paid by Pharaoh. It can buy work. Except blasphemously, it cannot buy a man.

CM §31.

Where such blasphemy is promulgated, the hire of labour becomes a further mechanism for the control and exploitation of society. Workers become diminished in their humanity and incapable of offering resistance to the status quo. This, claims Baxter, is particularly effective 'at the intellectual level where a man employed by Pharaoh dare not speak the truth for fear of losing his job or his promotion' (CM §40). The slave market engenders the sale not only of labour but of the entire person.

d. The Whip

The whip, for Baxter, is both literal and figurative. Should the slave exhibit resistance or disobedience to the rule of Pharaoh, then the force of the state will be invoked to bring them into line: 'Pharaoh's police will follow you with whips and drag you back to the slave market and the jails' (CM §39). But in order to exercise control, '[t]he whip

does not have to be visible' (CM §40). The more effective use of it sees Pharaoh using 'economic pressure as a whip for the backs of his slaves' (CM §37). The threat of removing employment, and therefore ability to participate in the materialist venture, is sufficient sanction to maintain order in the New Zealand equivalent of Egypt: 'Fear of the loss of material security is a whip that coils around the bowels and the brain' (CM §40). After all, while '[t]he air of the desert is bitter', the slaves know from experience that '[t]he air of Egypt is warm and her houses comfortable' (CM §61). An invisible and internalised whip is every bit as effective as the real one.

(iii) Dispossession

In order to maintain dominance, Pharaoh has dispossessed the people of any alternative means of subsistence. They are therefore forced to participate in the capitalist economic system in order to be able to function. The root of this injustice lies in alienation from the land.

'Na Te Atua i hanga te whenua me te rangi me nga tangata' - God made the land and the people. He gave the land to the people to be their mother, to feed their bodies and to give their souls richness and peace. But Pharaoh seizes the land and the people. He takes away our mother and turns her into a broken prostitute, to be bought and sold for money. He turns the people into his labour force, to live in exile on the earth they no longer possess in common.

CM §36.

Here Baxter the contextualist can be seen to be combining biblical tradition and mythology, Maori and colonial history, social and economic criticism and poetic imagery. The result is a unique theological perspective which melds biblical insight with local issues. Baxter locates the real enemy as a system which, while introduced by Pakeha, is larger and more pervasive: 'Pharaoh's policy of extermination towards the Maori culture, carried out first with guns, then by the law, then by education, has borne and is still bearing its fruits of disease, death, crime and insanity' CM §53).¹⁷ But the dispossession of alternative resources and connection with the land forces both Maori and Pakeha to be reliant on the pyramid-building venture for

¹⁷ Cf. Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.8., where Baxter laments 'a system of education which is used consciously or unconsciously by the Government as an instrument to exterminate the Maori culture'.

survival, effectively enslaving them.

(d) Militant Resistance

The reach of Pharaoh is extensive, and penetrates deep into the national psyche. Baxter advocates resistance which involves both cleansing the soul from its pollution, and active rebellion. Without attention to the former, the latter is self-defeating. The imagination as well as the body is held captive by the power of Pharaoh, and only when it is enabled to participate in freedom will it sustain a revolutionary campaign.¹⁸

(i) Journey into Freedom

In order to establish some base for resistance to Pharaoh, it is first necessary to unplug from the economic system which he rules. His power to buy and sell people and so control them seems unlimited. But, claims Baxter, 'a man who needs only kai, clothing, shelter and company, cannot easily be bought' (CM §59). It is for this reason that he counsels militants to 'set up camps where you share your goods and look after one another' (CM §39). It is necessary to 'detach ourselves' from the sin of attachment to possessions; a liberation made possible '[w]hen we share our kai, when we share our houses, when we work for love, not for money' (CM §14). To do so is not only to subvert the economic base, but to purge the spirit in order to make it capable of human freedom.

Open your doors to the workless and to those whose spirits are weakened and humiliated by the dark air of Egypt. Work without complaint for your brothers and sisters. Te Atua will give you wisdom, and break up the rocks in your souls, and turn the rocks into good soil.

CM §24.

This freedom from materialism may be reinforced by symbolic actions: 'It would be a significant act to publicly wipe one's arse on a ten dollar bill every New Year's morning' (CM §60).

It is by welcoming and living among the poor that the secrets of freedom may be discovered.

¹⁸ Cf. Walter Brueggemann: 'The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing... Indeed, poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality.' Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.45.

The 'love of the anawim' is balm to the soul 'after pain and solitude and darkness'; '[n]othing in Egypt compares to it' (CM §61). Militants must 'learn how to love from the anawim' (CM §16), and are advised to '[t]rust your faults to the mercy of the anawim' (CM §64). The deprogramming will require learning a new and more trusting communal life, in an atmosphere of support and honesty.

Open your hearts to one another... Let Pharaoh tell his lies. There is no need for lies among those who would die for one another.

CM §64.

Acknowledging that '[f]riendship is the core of all love' (CM §66), Baxter concedes that 'our sisters are also our equals' and 'are often the strongest in our struggle for liberty' (CM §65).¹⁹ Love for Te Morehu must be the underlying motivation for change. Noting a painting in Madras which portrayed Jesus, Ghandi and Lenin together, Baxter finds the common element to be 'their love for the people and the people's answering love given them in a profound hope and recognition' (CM §69). While the job of the militant is 'to be on fire with love' (CM §68), this does not preclude a righteous anger which is generated on behalf of the 'smashed desecrated hearts' (CM §69) of the people. Baxter distinguishes between two types of anger, one destructive anger against the evildoer which must be purged from the soul: 'It is the vice of hatred and it puts the soul inside a dark coffin' (CM §70). The other, however, is legitimate anger against an oppressive system.

The second kind of anger is a form of love. It comes when we hate the pattern of evil with a precise hatred, because it harms both the evildoer and those to whom evil is done. To hate Pharaoh means to hate the pattern of oppression which we call Pharaoh. Pharaoh is not a man.

CM §70.

Baxter is aware that '[i]f we hate our brothers, we will also come to hate ourselves' (CM §70). The purification of motive is an important precursor to true militancy; a means of escaping from internal acquiescence to Pharaoh's methods.

¹⁹ This might be unremarkable were it not for the hint of misogyny which permeates Baxter's earlier work.

At the bottom of our hearts we must be ready to die for our brother the oppressor as well as for our brother the oppressed. Then our hearts are free and our anger does not harm us.²⁰

CM §70.

It is that sort of anger which Baxter recalls 'drove me into action' (CM §69). Purification is not an end in itself, but rather the precursor to moving against the reign of Pharaoh.

(ii) Militant Action

While militancy must be circumspect in its impetus, Baxter is not content to let it be reduced to quietism. That would be to echo the moral failure of the established church and present a 'false Christ' modelled after the image of the middle class liberal, 'who wants people to improve their personal morals but who does not challenge Pharaoh' (CM §46). For Baxter, Jesus and his non-violent resistance provides the example of Christian militancy.

Christ's militancy was no less militant for being non-violent. To feed the starving was militant. To ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's back was to be the leader of a political demonstration. At the Last Supper the first Christian militants surrounded their leader with the profound and burning joy of those who have put friendship before death.

CM §45.

His understanding of militancy is action which confronts the ruling authorities over their unjust enslavement of the people, yet which maintains dignity and peace. Though the paradigm for this is Jesus, and he admires Ghandi (CM §47), when it comes to Aotearoa - New Zealand, Baxter prefers a more proximate example:

In our own country Te Whiti is the model. His non-violent communal movement was shattered by the Government and the land-grabbers, but his spirit is very powerful.

CM §48.

²⁰ Cf. Paolo Freire, who argues: 'In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turns oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.' Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Books 1983) p.28.

He regards Te Whiti as 'the one whose example offers some hope', regarding him as 'the image of the toa Christ' (CM §51). Te Whiti's civil disobedience against the colonial authorities²¹ gives the pattern for Baxter's militancy.²² Action is preferable to the 'liberal timidity of Christians' (CM §47).

However clumsy the action may be, to move against the fear of Pharaoh, to act in concord, is invaluable. The toa Christ is born in the soul at that moment.

CM §57.

Baxter does consider the option of violence, noting that the only comment Christ made about its use in militancy was to say 'Those who use the sword will perish by the sword' (CM §44). His argument against violence seems to be threefold:

- As a strategy, it would not be effective. Any violent resistance to the culture of the pyramids 'would soon be smashed by Pharaoh's army' (CM §49).
- Violence is a blunt and indiscriminating weapon. The person harmed is likely to be 'some innocent man unaware of the issues involved' (CM 50).
- It is not the methodology of Christ. Baxter claims that the 'mana of the victim is enormously greater than that of the man who uses violence', explaining that such is 'the political and social aspect of the magnetism of the cross' (CM §54).

For these reasons, he prefers the path of breaking the law but not of engaging in any form of armed resistance to the reign of Pharaoh. Specific acts of intentional civil disobedience are the best strategies for the Christian militant.

(iii) Confronting Pharaoh

Assuming that the militants have achieved a limited form of freedom

²¹ See Dick Scott, *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka* (Auckland: Reed Publishing 1975).

²² Cf. Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.11.: '[T]he Maori revolution... needs calculated militancy in the style of Te Whiti'.

through disengaging themselves from a materialist culture, Baxter advocates that they take the fight to the heart of Pharaoh's empire. Acknowledging that solving destitution might be relatively easy,²³ but that Pharaoh is unlikely to do so, Baxter suggests that 'the people of God' offer practical help through Friendship Houses like those established in America by Dorothy Day (CM §41). However, he goes further than the offering of charity.

Today, if the people have no food, through sickness, through the poverty of age, through the lack of work that is other than slavery, or through lack of adequate dole or any dole at all - these things are increasingly common in our country - then go with the people to loot the warehouses.

CM §42.

He attempts to limit the extent of such looting by advising people to '[a]ct in an orderly fashion', to '[b]reak nothing you do not have to break', to take 'no more than the people require', and to target warehouses rather than smaller shops (CM §42). The rationale for stealing goods is that Pharaoh should be providing them anyway, and the theft 'will only be a fraction of the debt he owes to the people' (CM §42).

He uses a similar reasoning when addressing the issue of land. Arguing that 'because the land was taken by the capitalist Pharaoh from the Maori people during and after the Land Wars', then under Maori leadership, 'the people who need the land' should 'take it and use it' (CM §38). This is in recognition that divine law rather than civil law should take precedence.

God made the land for the use of the people. They do not have to wait for Pharaoh's permission.

CM §38.

Again he seeks to place the action within limits, by suggesting that it should be Crown land

²³ 'Free milk, free butter, free potatoes, free bread, the simplest kind of free shelter; at the present time, in our affluent country, these could be given to the people whether they work or not. Then the diseases of malnutrition would disappear, those who wished to get other goods could work for them and buy them, and the other goods could be highly priced to balance the cost of the free kai.' CM §41.

rather than that belonging to private owners which is occupied. The land might be used for a positive purpose in response to its liberation.

To squat on Crown lands and build huts and till the ground. This would be a militant answer to the Government that devours the Maori lands like a dog gnawing a loaf under a table.

CM §54.

Interestingly enough, such occupation occurred in 1977, some five years after Baxter's death, when Ngati Whatua established dwellings and gardens on land at Bastion Point which was under dispute, and held it for more than a year before being evicted.²⁴ Baxter believed that 'Pharaoh's policy of extermination towards the Maori culture' warranted 'the strongest militancy'.

These practical examples of what he intends by Christian militancy demonstrate that for Baxter it is certainly not a passive attitude. It goes far beyond the provision of social services, and while stopping short of the advocacy of violence, represents a serious challenge to the ruling authorities. He encourages militants to have courage - '[c]ourage is the eye of the needle through which all the other virtues come into active being' (CM §63) - and accept the costs of their militancy, arguing '[t]he jail sentences would be short' (CM §54). Baxter asserts that '[a]ny opposition, even obvious law-breaking, that does not involve violence to people, is legitimate for a Christian militant' (CM §33). Christians are urged to convert orthodoxy into orthopraxy, and by so doing join the divine movement which transforms the world and offers hope to Te Morehu.

The beauty of freedom burns in the heart of the Christian militant. It makes him refuse to treat people as possessions. It is what he is fighting for.

CM §17.

²⁴ Baxter had close association with Nga Tama Toa (see CM §52, 53), and it is quite possible that his influence may be a contributory force to the occupation, as some people from Nga Tama Toa took part in the Bastion Point struggle.

3. ***A Local Liberation Theology?***

A Handbook for the Christian Militant is comparatively brief²⁵, and could hardly be described as a major treatise. However, two factors call for treating it as an important theological contribution from Baxter. The first is that, while still panoramic in character, the document is among the more analytical and closely-argued that the poet produced, with the numbered theses attesting to an attempt at ordered thought. The second is the late dating of it, and the evidence that it contains a synthesis of many themes present in Baxter's earlier work. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the *Handbook* is its similarity to the theological worldview of Liberation Theology in South America, expressed around the same time. A tentative claim may be advanced that what Baxter has produced is a genuinely local expression of a Liberation Theology. Evidence to support this contention will now be examined.

(a) Conflict and Change

Robert Schreiter contends that Liberation Theologies are the most prevalent form of contextual approach to the theological task. In summarising the methodology of predominantly Latin American examples, Schreiter describes the common elements as follows:

Liberation models analyze the lived experience of a people to uncover the forces of oppression, struggle, violence, and power. They concentrate on the conflictual elements oppressing a community or tearing it apart. In the midst of grinding poverty, political violence, deprivation of rights, discrimination, and hunger, Christians move from social analysis to finding echoes in the biblical witness in order to understand the struggle in which they are engaged or to find direction for the future. Liberation models concentrate on the need for change.²⁶

²⁵ The *Handbook* is a little over 6,000 words, approximately one third the length of *Jerusalem Daybook*. However, it should be noted that the latter contains extensive poetry sequences.

²⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.15. Thus Gutierrez claims that 'once the situation of poverty and marginalization comes to play a part in theological reflections, an analysis of that situation from the sociological viewpoint becomes important'. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Theology and the Social Sciences," 42-49 in *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996) p.47. Assmann

While there may be some dispute as to the degree of 'grinding poverty' or 'political violence' in New Zealand society, the majority of characteristics described could accurately be applied to Baxter's approach in the *Handbook*.²⁷ He contends that the community is divided between the affluent and destitute, describes the dynamics of the social use of power to maintain privilege, employs biblical analogies to shed light on the situation, and offers a sustained argument for change. While avoiding the word 'liberation', Baxter speaks repeatedly of 'freedom'. His argument is that human beings have been created for freedom, and that this capacity has been diminished by an oppressive social system.²⁸ Through radical subversion of the social and political structures, freedom once again becomes a viable possibility.

In a relatively sophisticated analysis, Baxter highlights the dehumanising effects of a deeply materialistic society, exposes those who benefit from the existing situation, and advocates a comprehensive strategy for achieving social change. In so doing, he demonstrates 'a clear and penetrating knowledge of social evils and their causes' (CM §20). Baxter identifies racism (CM §53), exploitation of the poor (CM §40), alienation of land (CM §36), oppressive labour conditions (CM §30,31) and the lack of communal responsibility (CM §15) as major factors in an inequitable society. He attests to his own participation in political movements for change (CM §52,53), and encourages a programme of resistance through non-violent confrontation (CM §33). His vision for 'the fully human society' (CM §6) brings salvation (which is only 'fully accomplished beyond the grave' CM 12) near and gives it concrete form in a deeply divided society. He sees its approach in those movements which challenge the ruling authorities. In all of this, Baxter's methodology is entirely consistent with Liberation Theology.

argues that the 'real historical situation' of the peoples of Latin America is 'one of dominated peoples', requiring 'an act of rebellious presence' which 'implies more of a break with the past than a desire for continuity'. Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1976) p.114. Casaldaliga and Vigil characterise faith as 'a structured activity, designed to transform the social situation of our oppressed and subjugated masses'. Pedro Casaldaliga and Jose Maria Vigil, *The Spirituality of Liberation* ed. Leonardo Boff et al trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh vol. 12 *Liberation and Theology* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates 1994) p.134.

²⁷ It is surprising to find the discourse of wealth and poverty in the work of a New Zealand writer in the 1970s, given the country's relatively affluent status, its long history of comprehensive social welfare, and the fact that monetarist reforms were not introduced until well after Baxter's death. However, he was attuned to the politics of exclusion, and his voluntary relocation among the fringe-dwellers of New Zealand society made him aware of the social disenfranchising of many marginal groups.

(b) Orthopraxy

Liberation theologians place a high value on the Marxist category of 'praxis'. Marx's classic rejoinder to Hegelian philosophy was that 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'.²⁹ The emphasis on a theory-laden action which constantly returns to reflection has been a feature of Latin American revolutionary theology, and is expressed in Gutierrez's claim that '[t]heology follows; it is the second step'.³⁰ Baxter picks up this approach to theological method in his emphasis on 'orthopraxy'.³¹ In this regard he cites Karl Rahner, and it is likely that his own knowledge of Liberation themes comes from that source.³² Baxter distinguishes between '[b]elief' and 'experience' (CM §9), arguing that without involvement in the struggle for a just society, the desire for salvation 'could have no meaning' (CM §12).

He is scandalised by a church which professes faithfulness while ignoring the poor and failing to work towards the establishment of justice. He claims that 'Christians are often Sodomites', citing 'their lack of the virtue of *manuhiritanga*, that is, the practice of mercy and respect to the guest and the stranger' (CM §26). The church, by failing to act on her beliefs, places herself in the same position as the Pharisees who value orthodoxy over mercy (CM §5). Baxter quotes Marx with approval, in his criticism of religion as a social anaesthetic (CM §13). Without commitment to working for change, the church is 'paralysed' (CM §71). He argues that even if the motivation is confused and the expression of it clumsy, that 'to move' and 'to act' are of paramount importance. His vision of humanist Christianity is such that

²⁸ While Liberation Theologians interpret freedom in largely socio-economic and therefore materialist terms, Baxter's understanding is more nuanced, and has to do with extraction from the system of materialism itself; see Chapter 4, 2 (e), 'Poverty and Freedom', above.

²⁹ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 13-15 in *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969) p.15.

³⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* trans. John Eagleson and Sister Caridad Inda (London: SCM 1974) p.11.

³¹ Gutierrez reports in 1971 that the term *orthopraxis* has 'recently been derived'. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.10.

³² Under the direction of Eugene O'Sullivan, Baxter spent considerable time during the Jerusalem years reading in the Newman Hall library. See McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.268., and Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.128. Baxter frequently mentions Rahner favourably, and has a brief review of a Rahner book in James K. Baxter, "Review of Karl Rahner's *Servants of the Lord*," *New Zealand Tablet* XCVI, no. 10, 12 March (1969): p.22.

without an active militancy, it begins to distort itself and be co-opted by the civil authorities. This perspective is entirely consistent with a Liberation methodology.

(c) Exodus Terminology

The fundamental metaphor chosen by Liberation Theologians is that of the Exodus, in which the people of Israel are led out of slavery to a new land of freedom and promise.³³ They find in this biblical account an analogy with the experiences of oppression and liberation, and of the activity of God within human history. It is the tangible and political nature of salvation of the story which makes it suitable to a Liberation reading of scripture. Baxter, of course, has a mythological approach to both life and theology.³⁴ His choice of Exodus motifs to describe the social situation in Aotearoa-New Zealand may have been generated by a shared perspective with the Liberation writers, or it may have been the result of direct influence by them. Whatever the genesis of it, his framing of the domestic struggle in terms of enslavement in Egypt gives the *Handbook* resonance with the writings emerging from Latin America at the same time. While there is a credible argument that Baxter's work is derivative, there is also enough of his earlier thought encapsulated there, and sufficient originality, to suggest that he at most he has borrowed the categories and given them a distinctively local interpretation.

The controlling analogy of the document is that of Pharaoh, which is the use of the biblical character as a personification of a comprehensive social, political and economic system. His pyramid-building programme is a metaphor for the entire agenda of capitalism. It is not that Baxter prefers socialism:

The capitalist Pharaoh and the communist Pharaoh are cousins. One builds the pyramids of business and calls it free enterprise. The other builds the pyramid of the state and calls it socialism. Both of them turn the people into slaves.

³³ 'The Exodus experience is paradigmatic. It remains vital and contemporary due to similar historical experiences which the People of God undergo.' Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.159.

³⁴ Vincent O'Sullivan claims that for Baxter, 'metaphor is the only worthwhile instrument of knowledge'. O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.78.

Through the combination of whip and incentive, the capitalist Pharaoh manages to keep the people in a state of slavery, trapped in a relentless cycle of consumption. Egypt becomes a symbol of comfort and managed liberty, where the illusion of freedom prevents any apprehension of its substance. The only escape is through withdrawal to the isolation of the desert (cf. the experience of Moses in the biblical account: Exodus 2:11-4:17) where the imagination may be renewed, and subsequent re-engagement and conflict with Pharaoh.³⁵ The sustained metaphor provides a means of combining social analysis of New Zealand society with important aspects of the biblical tradition.

(d) Local Currency

For all its parallels with Latin American theology, the *Handbook* could only be a thoroughly local theological reflection. It is not a reproduction of the Marxist-influenced revolutionary analysis of Liberation Theology.³⁶ The context of Baxter's manifesto is not one of the entrenched poverty of the barrios, but of a hopeless swamp of materialism generated within a relatively comfortable economy in the Antipodes. The situation described is uniquely that of New Zealand. After a lifetime of reflecting on and contemplating the local setting, and of using metaphors gleaned from the land and its environment, Baxter is innately qualified to frame theology in vernacular terms. This he does in two senses; one the social analysis which is the foundry of his forged theology, and the other the metaphorical language in which he expresses it.

In regard to his social analysis, the community described is unequivocally that of Aotearoa-New Zealand. He speaks of destitution in the context of affluence (CM §37), identifying the malaise not so much as poverty itself, but the fear of poverty which is used to motivate the

³⁵ Baxter's strategy might be compared to Ricoeur's mediation between Gadamer's 'hermeneutic of tradition' and Habermas' 'critical consciousness', in which the French philosopher proposes acknowledgement of latent layers of recollected consciousness, reminiscence, myths, symbolic forms and narratives, while maintaining reflection and criticism, to bridge between tradition and ideological critique. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

³⁶ 'Marxism has left its mark on the Theology of Liberation in a variety of ways'; J. Kirk, *Theology Encounters Revolution* (Leicester: IVP 1980) p.117f.

workforce. The poor (anawim) in this land are identified as much by their social neglect as by any absolute deprivation (CM §15). Slavery as described by Baxter is not literal slavery, but the sense of entrapment by a materialist society which demands participation in it as a means of survival. Work becomes oppressive not because of harsh conditions but because of an expected subservience and reinforcement of social hierarchy which operates covertly, inducing the labourer to sell their soul. A history of colonial abuse and land-grabbing continues into the present as a persistent racism which demeans both Maori and Pakeha. Women are treated as commodities and homosexuals reviled in a society dominated by the centralised project of maintaining the economy. Such analysis, whether accurate or not, is distinctly local.

When it comes to the theological response which Baxter develops, the articulation of it is equally domestic in character. It is suffused in Maori language, metaphor and proverb. Baxter speaks of hara (sin), whakapono (belief), whenua (land), toa (warrior) and Te Morehu (the people), to indicate a few examples. He speaks of the water churning in front of the canoe (CM §9), and fish beginning to show their back above the water (CM §3). Maori proverbs are quoted in CM §7, CM §36, CM §49 and CM §52. Maori leaders such as Te Kouti, Te Whiti, Rua and Ratana are mentioned. Distinctly vernacular terms employed include 'lick the boss's arse', 'Islander', 'sitting on their backsides' and 'ten dollar bill'. There is mention of 'a Wellington street', 'Auckland', 'Hiruharama', 'Paremoremo prison' and 'Waitangi'. Baxter employs the term 'our country' four times, 'this country' twice, 'the country' twice and 'my own country' once. All of this is evidence of the overtly parochial nature of the theology articulated. Baxter's treatise is undoubtedly contextual in tone.

4. Conclusion

A Handbook for the Christian Militant presents the strongest argument for regarding Baxter as theologian as well as poet. It constitutes a sustained and radical theological response to the social context of Aotearoa-New Zealand. In this remarkable and previously unexamined document, Baxter synthesises many of his earlier themes into a revolutionary challenge to both community and church. Giving full expression to his humanist Christianity, he calls for Christians to be deeply involved in the social currents of humanity, working tirelessly to express mercy and champion justice. The community of Christ is imagined as a potential

resistance movement working to subvert the illegitimate reign of Pharaoh. But in order to do so, Christians must disengage themselves from the relentless materialism and social conditioning which the institutional church has been seduced by. Then they may become agents of change, living and working alongside the common people and leading them toward the human vocation of freedom.

It has been argued here that this document may be claimed as an authentic expression of contextual and Liberation theology. Given its historical context, it represents an original and passionate application of a praxis-based approach to the issues and struggles of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Baxter's reflective genius as a poet is melded with his deep commitment to the cause of Christ. When tempered with his growing appreciation of the Maori worldview, and his association with the outcasts of society in Jerusalem, the result is a statement which offers genuinely contextual insight in original terms. Had Baxter not met with an untimely death at the end of 1972, there is little doubt that the treatise would have been published, and might have sparked critical response and further reflection on the themes which he advanced. As it is, the *Handbook* is a significant voice which deserves recognition and consideration by any who would attempt to do contextual theology in the present.

Chapter Nine: He Korero - A Theological Dialogue

1. *Introduction*

Thus far Baxter's religious thought has been presented uncritically, with the intention of accurately representing his theological framework as revealed particularly in his later writings. The treatment has been sympathetically analytical, seeking to reflect the poet's distinctive perspective on life and faith in Aotearoa-New Zealand. In this chapter, a more critical dialogue will be entered into. Baxter's vision will be subject to critique both internally, and in dialogue with historic orthodox expressions of Christian theology. The purpose is to demonstrate that, like all culturally conditioned expressions of faith, this one is flawed, fragmentary and partisan. Only in dialogue can both the strengths and weaknesses of a particular theological perspective be revealed. It is a recognition of Baxter's own insight on the importance of koreo:

Words are made to convey truth. To hide one's heart from one's friend indicates some measure of fear or distrust. One has to take the risk of being misunderstood. But understanding grows if communication is truthful and also frequent.¹

One difficulty which will beset the attempt at critical interaction relates to methodological issues. As already indicated, Baxter's approach to theology is at least mytho-poetic² and arguably contextual. It would be inappropriate and unfair to measure his work with the sort of template which might be developed from more systematic approaches to theology. The question of methodology goes to the centre of this thesis, and will be explored in some depth in the next chapter. For the meantime it must be somewhat artificially bracketed out. Contextual approaches to theology are so methodologically variant from deductive and systematic endeavours that it is almost impossible to apply the criteria from one to the pursuit of the other. The most that can be done is to argue for the validity of the contextual approach,

¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.43.

² See James, "Primal Vision" p.253.

and that claim underlies the entire project of the thesis. The present critique will focus more on the *content* of Baxter's theological reflection, rather than the *method* of it, insofar as these can be separated. While some methodological elements will be touched upon, evaluation of the contextual nature of his work will be reserved.

2. *Inconsistency*

Those who come to Baxter's work often find it confusing and self-contradictory. It is difficult to reconcile the high moral ground of *The Flowering Cross*³ with some of the more vigorous vulgarity of *Two Obscene Poems*.⁴ He devoted himself to the formation of a warm and extended family at Jerusalem while abandoning his own family in the process. He lampoons the academic life but considers it worthwhile to complete a university degree.⁵ Somewhat deeper tensions in his thought will be examined shortly. Parr notes that '[one] of the major problems that arises in dealing with Baxter's work is the (sometimes alarming) amount of inconsistency or sheer contradiction in his statements'.⁶ McKay eulogises Baxter's life 'with all its contradictions',⁷ while O'Sullivan suggests 'it is absurd to argue for consistency in Baxter'.⁸ Doyle describes Baxter as '[n]ot merely a complex personality but a divided one',⁹ and Manhire describes him as 'a figure of contradiction'.¹⁰

Underlying the more obvious and accessible inconsistencies, there is evidence of a deep inner conflict. Doyle describes Baxter evocatively as 'a walking war between an acute sense of the sacramental and a bundle of appetites'.¹¹ Maher laments that the 'patient, resigned, "teach-me-to-care-and-not-to-care" Ash-Wednesday Baxter, bruised and educated by life, with a

³ Baxter, *The Flowering Cross*.

⁴ James K. Baxter, *Two Obscene Poems* (Adelaide: Mary Martin Books 1973).

⁵ Manhire notes that while Baxter 'made rather a fetish of disparaging the university world', he had 'an enormously positive relationship with New Zealand universities'. Bill Manhire, "Stranger at the Ranchslider," *Journal of N.Z. Literature* 13, (1995): p.11.

⁶ Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.27.

⁷ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.290.

⁸ O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.39.

⁹ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.163.

¹⁰ Manhire, "Stranger at the Ranchslider," p.20.

¹¹ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.163.

sympathy as wide as the world and a gentleness that is Franciscan' seems to be in mortal combat with 'the petty, still-mixed-up teenager, lashing out indiscriminately at rather old-fashioned stereotypes of Puritans, Catholic teachers, bureaucrats, middle-class conformists, repressed celibates and the rest'.¹² O'Sullivan provides a more positive interpretation by suggesting that in Baxter, '[t]he Puritan disgust with the natural world' and 'the Franciscan love of all creatures' which is in tension with it 'alternate and combine... with sometimes splendid intricacy'.¹³

This latter is perhaps more in accord with Baxter's own perspective. When challenged in an interview as to contradictions in a poem, he replies:

Of course there are contradictions - that is the drama. Men just live in contradictions: that's the nature of man.¹⁴

Baxter's aesthetic perspective values light and shade above logical coherence, and he demurs to his friend that '[y]ou know how unsystematic my thinking is'.¹⁵ It is unlikely that he would find inconsistency to be much of a failing, and more likely that he would regard it as the necessary qualification for humanity. O'Sullivan's interpretation is the most enlightening in this regard. He notes that 'personality is perhaps much more fluid' than we like to admit, and that 'a man's behaviour, however contradictory to others, is almost certainly of a piece to himself'. To bemoan that Baxter 'can shift so rapidly from pietism to smut' is to impose unrealistic expectations on him. O'Sullivan's own view is that Baxter's 'particular discrepancies, even his contradictions, tend to evaporate at a final assessment'; this because the relevant material drives us back 'constantly to biography'.¹⁶

O'Sullivan helps us to discover a basis of unity, but it may not be a sufficient one. While it is true that Baxter's life and vocation hold together the diverse streams of his work and allow the possibility of reconciliation of seemingly polarised elements, the question remains whether or not these tensions are necessary or constructive in a theological schema. In terms

¹² Kevin Maher in Lawlor and O'Sullivan, *The Two Baxters : Diary Notes* p.7f.

¹³ O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.39f.

¹⁴ James K. Baxter in Weir, "Interview," p.243.

¹⁵ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹⁶ O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.75f.

of critical evaluation, the focus must be on the viability of the religious vision rather than on the psychology of its author. Theologically, the issue is whether Baxter falls into a form of dualism which threatens to rend the fabric of his poetic synthesis. The perception is wide enough to merit closer examination.

3. *Dualism*

Dualism in the strict sense relates to any philosophical or theological perspective 'which would explain the universe as the outcome of two eternally opposed and coexisting principles, conceived as good and evil, light and darkness, or some other form of conflicting powers'.¹⁷ Its greatest influence on Christianity came through the development of Gnosticism, which grew in significance especially through the second century.¹⁸ Shaped by Persian Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism maintained that the natural physical world was flawed, but that human beings contained within them the 'divine spark'. The world was not created by God, but by one of the many emanations or 'aeons' of God. Thus the sects which comprised Gnosticism tended to set evil matter against divine spirit. Salvation lay in freeing the spirit from its imprisonment in the material world, through secret knowledge which was given through divine revelation. Schools in Rome and Alexandria, established by the Gnostic Valentinian, were prominent in spreading the philosophy. Though Gnosticism was resisted and largely defeated by the church, its dualistic outlook continued to influence Christianity through Manichaeism.¹⁹ The answer to dualism within Christian theology is the fully developed doctrine of the incarnation, articulated at Nicea and confirmed at Chalcedon.

¹⁷ Michael Maher, *Dualism* (V) [Internet Encyclopaedia] (Robert Appleton Company, 1909 [cited March 2002]); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05169a.htm>.

¹⁸ See Charles W. Hendrick and Robert Hodgson, eds., *Nag Hammadi Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986).; G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood 1991).; R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press 1959).; and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon 1963).

¹⁹ Mani (c.216-c.276), a Persian who fused elements of Christianity with those of Zoroastrianism, held to a rigid dualism. See George Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* trans. Charles Kessler (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1965). Manichaeism was vigorously opposed by Augustine, but in the extended use of the term 'dualism', Augustine himself has frequently been found guilty of it, especially in regard to his attitude to sexuality. Mabry, for example, argues that: 'Although Augustine professed to have denounced his former beliefs in the doctrines of Mani and wrote copious refutations of his heresies, the profound dualism espoused by his former teacher did not depart him.' John R. Mabry, *That Naughty Bishop of Hippo: Disfunctional Theological Innovations of St. Augustine* [Internet] (1990 [cited 8 August 2002]); available from <http://www.apocryphile.net/jrm/articles/augustine.html>.

It is not by this technical and theological sense of dualism that Baxter should be measured, but rather in regard to a more generalised usage of the term (and the meaning which frequently inhabits his own usage of it). By extension, dualism may be characterised as a tendency to unjustifiably oppose divergent aspects of experience and philosophy, thus polarising human existence. As a persistent historical tendency, it has often led to instability in religious understandings and produced expressions of Christianity which are dysfunctional at best and dangerous at worst. The failure of dualism arises from a reluctance to accept the reciprocal and ameliorating relationship between contrasting but interdependent aspects of experience. In order to simplify the tensions inherent in human existence, dualism occupies a position at one side of a perceived divide, distancing itself from, denouncing and often demonising the opposing principle. The particular forms in which dualism expresses itself vary among historical and cultural settings, but common polarities included light/darkness, good/evil, body/spirit, saved/unsaved, divine/human, sacred/profane and normal/deviant.

The charge of dualism when applied to Baxter is of particular interest given his strident opposition to it, and his tendency to find it in institutional religion and popular opinion. As discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis, Baxter is both fully aware of and implacably against dualism:

But the dualist fears too much the undeveloped half of himself. He does not see it as a potential element in mature love, but simply as an enemy.²⁰

And yet there is much in Baxter which might be described in exactly those terms. Isichei suggests that in his 'remarkably simple social vision', he renders complex situations 'black and white', and in so doing constantly 'daemonises the Other'²¹ – precisely the device of the dualist. O'Brien agrees that Baxter was a 'moralist whose universe was divided into black and white' and that his world 'had clearly defined borders'.²² And Vincent O'Sullivan notes perceptively that 'in spite of his many disclaimers, Baxter is the heir to the deeply historic

²⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

²¹ Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.240.

²² Gregory O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's: Liner Notes for an Album," *Sport* 11, November (1993): p.145.

sourness of Manichaeic thought.²³

The substance of such claims is Baxter's irrepressible tendency to dichotomise and oversimplify. While it is true that he turns conventional morality on its head, he is frequently guilty of substituting one set of stereotypical and biased language for another. Maori are innocent and wise while Pakeha are materialist and devious; the wealthy are universally tyrants without conscience, while the poor are saintly and compassionate; the bohemian is in harmony with nature while the technocrat leaves a wake of devastation; women are either gentle virgins or consuming witches. Isichei says Baxter 'idealises the Catholic meths drinker, condemns the businessman and politician'; pointing out that such 'polarised caricatures are not true to life' and tend to 'daemonise the whole political process rather than using it to effect change'.²⁴ O'Sullivan too is aware that in Baxter's later work 'the fuzz assume the malice of devils; the junkies stand beside the children of light'.²⁵ All of which suggests the exclusion of middle ground, a characteristic symptom of dualism. There is little room here for a Joseph of Arimathea who populates a more complex world in which a rich man can also demonstrate humane concern.

The problem may be illustrated through Baxter's tortured view of sexuality. He professes and practices a libertine attitude to sex,²⁶ with his poetry at times demonstrating both sensuality and eroticism. There is evidence of an understanding that unrestrained sexual expression may provide a path back to the lost Eden.²⁷

But there is a correspondingly darker element to Baxter's views on sexuality, which McKay suggests 'stems partly from its [sexuality] connection with death, partly from the frustration he felt in failing to achieve his own personal sexual integration'.²⁸ Increasingly the image of woman as witch, temptress and destroyer ('Your body is my hell', 'Henley Pub' CP 324f.) intrudes into his poetry. These tensions only deepen and polarise, with Doyle noting Baxter's

²³ O'Sullivan, "After Culloden," p.26.

²⁴ Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.240f.

²⁵ O'Sullivan, "After Culloden," p.28.

²⁶ Though McKay notes that 'Baxter's aspirations outran his performance', and that a late letter mentions 'some thirty-five' women with whom he had experienced sexual relations. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.144.

²⁷ See Baxter, 'Let Time Be Still', CP p.52f.

²⁸ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.200.

‘antithesis between Venus...and Mary’.²⁹ O’Sullivan argues that despite the poet’s protestations, in his work ‘sex often will serve to verify the corruption of natural man’.³⁰ Baxter’s obsession with the Virgin Mary seems psychologically dubious in the light of this, and Weir points out that ‘it is in his Marian devotions, in the company of a woman in whom the sexual element does not overtly exist, he has found a source of that innocence for which he has searched life-long’.³¹ The splitting between Witch and Virgin is dualism of the type which Baxter accuses Puritans.³²

Baxter himself would have none of this. He is aware of the dualism present in his poetry, and warns that ‘an unexamined devotion to the Blessed Virgin, including excessive emphasis on her physical virginity, can be dangerous, because dualist’.³³ He employs such archetypal figures because they create dramatic tension within his poetry, as they do in life. McKay explains that ‘Baxter’s mind was analogical’ and that therefore the ‘hidden, the unconscious, all that escaped the net of intellect, became his special concern’.³⁴ O’Sullivan admits that in many aspects, Baxter’s opinions were ‘emblematic, frequently with the cut-and-dried clarity of a medieval carving’, but warns that ‘we misread him if we do not allow its [his work] presentation as drama’.³⁵ On this defence, it might be argued that all of the dualism in Baxter’s work is self-conscious, not because the author is unable to reconcile existential tensions, but because he wishes to produce transcendence through the introduction of elemental mythological resonance at either end of the experiential spectrum.

While reductionist tendencies are typical of dualism, they are also symptomatic of prophetic discourse. Here inherent tensions are raised to the point where they destabilise an existing social synthesis, allowing the possibility of change.³⁶ Danielle Brown has noted ‘a series of

²⁹ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.118.

³⁰ O’Sullivan, "After Culloden," p.26.

³¹ J. E. Weir, *The Poetry of James K. Baxter* (Wellington: Oxford U.P 1970) p.51.

³² McKay argues: ‘When Baxter analysed New Zealand Puritanism, he nearly always fastened on its view of the total depravity of the flesh and its severity toward sexual deviations.’ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.198.

³³ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.78.

³⁴ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.202.

³⁵ O’Sullivan, "After Culloden," p.28.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann argues that 'The Prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined... poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality'. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.45.

binary oppositions, such as Maori/Pakeha, emotion/thought, dark/light³⁷ which Baxter employs in the interests of social reform. Perhaps this form of dualism is a strategic one, and similar in tone to much of the teaching of Jesus as found, for example, in the Gospel of John. This might allow the interesting category of a centripetal dualism, which instead of extracting value from the middle ground, acts to intensify it by highlighting the symbolic power of extremes which are present in the ordinary stuff of life. Is it possible that 'binary opposition' might be employed as a religious and dramatic device, giving the appearance of dualism but not constituting the theological category which has traditionally been regarded as heretical?

This would make more sense of Baxter's own awareness of and rebuttal of dualism as a destructive force. The most he could be accused of would then be over-intensification of his categories in keeping with a self-perceived prophetic role. Baxter admits freely mythologizing his life – 'that's what a writer does' – and confesses that '[w]hat happens is either meaningless to me, or else it is mythology'.³⁸ It is not surprising then, that his work contains 'the tragic aspect of all seasonal or redemptive myth, and what is inherent to it, the need for the fructifying victim'.³⁹ The religious drama of Christianity acts as an overlay to all his experience, and characters in that passion play tend to be aligned on one side or the other of what Baxter regards as an ongoing conflict. All of which makes his theology explicable but not necessarily defensible. In the latter years of his life, elements of utopianism and asceticism make his dualism more separatist and life-denying than orthodox faith would wish for. His sketches of New Zealand life come perilously close to being caricatures, and so lose their resonance for identification among those they are intended for. The overbearing mythology washes out the colour and leaves us with line-drawings, in the characteristic black and white of the dualist.⁴⁰

4. Utopianism

³⁷ Danielle Brown, "James K. Baxter: The Identification of the 'Poet' and the Authority of the Prophet," *Journal of N.Z. Literature* 13, (1995): p.13.

³⁸ Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.122.

³⁹ O'Sullivan, "After Culloden," p.28.

⁴⁰ It might be argued that what we are left with is line-drawings, akin to those made by political cartoonists; they in turn share with prophets a desire to heighten contrast so as to make a particular point.

Within the Christian tradition, utopianism might be characterised as the illegitimate attempt to anticipate the kingdom of God through human endeavour.⁴¹ The history of Christianity is host to a variety of expressions of utopianism, from the Anabaptists of Munster to the Davidic community in Waco. Characteristics shared by these groups include a tendency to separatism, a proclivity for dualism, a distrust and critique of the existing social order, suspicion of religious authorities, a new ethic which is based in the life of the group, the establishment of exemplary communities, a certain asceticism, often the sharing of goods in common and sometimes violent intervention to hasten the coming of the kingdom.⁴² Among such groups there is a devaluing of the present society which is seen as doomed, and a longing for a new way of life which they attempt to prefigure. There is an opting out of attempts at political reform of a corrupt system,⁴³ with the alternative strategy of preparing oneself for a new order which will inevitably rise out of the ashes of the existing one. Correspondingly, the values championed by society are rejected in favour of an internally generated ethic.

In an interesting article published not long before Baxter died, Tony Simpson argues that the

⁴¹ The term 'utopianism' is more commonly associated with secular dreams of a new order; while the more common theological categories would be 'apocalyptic' and 'millenarianism'. Both of these terms have reasonably precise meanings within theological discourse, are closely associated with scripture, and are not necessarily considered heterodox. Apocalyptic (derived from the Greek 'apokalypsis' meaning 'unveiling') has to do with the making known of heavenly secrets, generally concerning cataclysmic judgement and delivered via dreams or visions, and phrased in symbolic terms (see Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1993) p.163ff). Millenarianism is a specifically Christian term, and concerns the expectation (Rev 20:4-6) that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. Varieties include premillennialism (the end of the world precedes Jesus' reign), postmillennialism (Christ rules and then the end comes) and amillennialism (the rule of Christ is collapsed into a present social agenda). Cohn notes that the more precise usage of the term 'millenarianism' has been softened through its use by sociologists and historians in a generalised sense to signify future-oriented groups; see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* 3rd ed. (London: Temple Smith 1970) p.13. The broader term 'utopian' is used here to encompass such Christian understandings and groups, but also to include secular political groups 'so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it'; Karl Mannheim, "Theology and the Sociology of Knowledge," 79-90 in *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, ed. Robin Gill (London: Cassell, 1996) p.80f.

⁴² Cohn notes that millenarian sects or movements operate from a perspective on salvation which is: '(a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity; (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven; (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly; (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself; (e) miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies'. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* p.13.

⁴³ The apolitical option is typical of religious communities which Troeltsch categorises as sects: 'Their attitude towards the world, the State, and Society may be indifferent, tolerant, or hostile, since they have no desire to control and incorporate these forms of social life; on the contrary, they tend to avoid them; their aim is usually to tolerate their presence alongside of their own body, or even replace those social institutions by their own society.' Ernst Troeltsch, "Churches and Sects," 56-68 in *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, ed. Robin Gill (London: Cassell, 1996) p.57.

Jerusalem experiment fits many of the classic criteria of a utopian movement. Excerpting from Baxter's late work, and particularly *Six Faces of Love*, Simpson finds evidence of millennialist thinking.

In this attenuated description of his doings at Jerusalem, Baxter is expressing many of the outward and visible signs of the apocalyptic view of the world – the new relationships both physically (the sharing of goods, the embrace, the welcome to the guest) and spiritually (the need for honesty, truth and love), new ways of relating human being to human being... In this respect Baxter is no different from most millennial thinkers. The world of his images is often sordid and suggestive of social breakdown, which is a possible prospect of our society but not an exclusive one by any means.⁴⁴

Simpson stops short of classifying Jerusalem as an apocalyptic community, arguing merely that much of the poet's late writing amounts 'to a restatement of primitive Christianity in its apocalyptic centuries, and what I've been trying to suggest is a tendency of Baxter's in this direction'.⁴⁵ O'Brien concurs with Simpson, noting that '[I]n removing himself from the bounds of societal expectations and propriety, he [Baxter] was – unconsciously perhaps – raising himself above that society'.⁴⁶ He suggests that Baxter's 'communal ideals fell somewhere between the Utopian socialists and the spirit of late 1960s hippy communes in North America'.⁴⁷

While it might be stretching the evidence to proclaim Jerusalem as a thorough-going utopian venture, there are indications of a certain apocalyptic bent in Baxter's theology, particularly in the late period. His lifelong yearning for a lost paradise seems to find a home in Jerusalem, which he describes as 'an experiment'⁴⁸ and part of 'Te Atua's plan for us'.⁴⁹ He describes the towns of New Zealand as 'the smoky passages of that burning house out of which his [God's]

⁴⁴ Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," p.33.

⁴⁵ Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," p.35.

⁴⁶ O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's," p.126.

⁴⁷ O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's," p.130.

⁴⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.41.

mercy delivers us'.⁵⁰ The alternative ethic of Jerusalem, 'the Love of the Many',⁵¹ involves the apparent 'rejection of civilised values',⁵² but restores the ability of people to choose what is right. Baxter himself develops a self-conscious asceticism,⁵³ which stands in judgement of a materialist society. In a remarkably apocalyptic vision, he recounts a dream:

I was back in Auckland. Great heaps of rags and rubbish, tarry with filth, like ancient hospital bandages, were burning in the streets, on iron brackets, and men in greasy clothes were tending the fires. The smoke blew through the town, through the otherwise empty squares, among buildings of high concrete with windows like blank eyes. The wind came from the horizon, over the harbour, under a lid of cloud, as if from the space behind the stars. The wind overturned one of the rusty brackets and sent it spinning in my direction, bashing against the walls of the buildings like a huge bird. I had the sense of panic that comes from life out of control. The pain of sharing the world's evil, of being a leper in a city of lepers – this clung to me like the drifting smoke.⁵⁴

This portrayal of the doomed city has the symbolic character of an impending judgemental cataclysm, typical of some strains of apocalyptic thought.

However, in evaluating Baxter, we must consider Simpson's assertion that 'until the reign of Constantine in the fourth century Christianity is all apocalyptic',⁵⁵ and that therefore the poet's utopianism constitutes a 'restatement'⁵⁶ of something which was an integral part of Christianity's primal tradition.⁵⁷ After all, there are those who suggest the only framework for

⁵⁰ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.44.

⁵¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.41.

⁵² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.46.

⁵³ See Richard Matthews, "James K. Baxter and Kopua," *Journal of N.Z. Literature* 13, (1995): p.261. where he lists the practices of prayer-beads, fasting, hair-shirt, discalcement, prostration, flagellation and hermitry as aspects of Baxter's later life.

⁵⁴ Baxter, *Autumn Testament* p.47.

⁵⁵ Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," p.29.

⁵⁶ Simpson, "Baxter at Jerusalem," p.35.

⁵⁷ 'In apocalyptic and New Testament thought generally, the hope of the kingdom, though historically related or even historically realized, is nevertheless essentially future-oriented.' D.S. Russell, *Apocalyptic: Ancient and Modern* (London: SCM 1978) p.?

understanding Jesus is that of Jewish apocalyptic.⁵⁸ The question then becomes whether Baxter exaggerates this perspective in a heterodox fashion, or whether his theological outlook simply reflects the faith he lives out of. Towards the end of his life, he came into contact with the Pentecostal movement, and spoke of it in approving terms.⁵⁹ It is possible that the strong element of apocalyptic theology present in that stream of Christianity may have influenced Baxter.⁶⁰

However, there is an important difference between his understanding of eschatological fulfilment and that of classic Pentecostalism. For the enthusiasts, the impending parousia empties history of all human influence, and the corresponding exhortation is to faithfulness in an evil world.⁶¹ Baxter, in contrast, recognises that any divine new order will arise out of present endeavour, and therefore promotes a Christian humanism.⁶² The Pentecostal utopianism devalues social change, while Baxter recognises a limited form of it as the call of God. This is a significant distinctive element of his theology, in that it is grounded in a love for the world and its inhabitants, and so resistant to a complete flight into other-worldly refuge. There is an important difference between utopianism and the 'theology of hope' which springs from the Christian motif of the kingdom of God. While Simpson may have accurately charted utopian tendencies in Baxter's Jerusalem experiment, the description of his theology as utopian is misleading. While sharing mistrust of the current social order, Baxter is committed to working in the midst of it for the establishment of God's kingdom.

⁵⁸ See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* trans. W. Montgomery (London: A&C Black 1910).

⁵⁹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5. McKay notes that Pentecostalism 'had recently caught Baxter's interest' - McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.277. Phillips notes that Baxter 'came into contact with the Pentecostal Church movement in the early seventies', and has 'no doubt that Baxter saw this movement as a positive contribution to this land'. Phillips, "Dialogue," p.272. See also Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.150.

⁶⁰ For the association of the Pentecostal movement with apocalyptic interest in the end times see W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* trans. R.A. Wilson (Mineapolis: Augsburg 1972) pp.415-421. Hollenweger notes that 'The Pentecostal movement arose in an atmosphere of fervent expectation of the second coming of Jesus'; p.415.

⁶¹ Hollenweger notes that Pentecostal eschatological fervour 'makes them indifferent to the political and social problems of the world. It works as a palliative which prevents them from despairing in the wretched circumstances in which they live'; but, interestingly, that as their social conditions improve, 'the fervent expectation of the imminent second coming disappears'; Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* p.417.

⁶² Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". Baxter's view is thus closer to classical post-millennialism or amillennialism.

5. **Syncretism**

The charge of syncretism against Baxter only really has validity if some credence is given to his contribution toward contextual theology.⁶³ Syncretism is characterised by Schreiter as 'the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity'.⁶⁴ This is a missiological understanding, and not as broad as Bevans' description of the mixing of 'Christianity and culture in a way that does not enhance but compromises and betrays Christianity'.⁶⁵ Syncretism, as Schreiter notes,⁶⁶ has always been regarded negatively within orthodox theology. However, it is a charge which is notoriously slippery and difficult to establish. There is a scope for a great deal of subjectivity in deciding what 'enhances' and what 'compromises and betrays' Christian faith. In addition, Christianity itself carries in its tradition a large number of widely accepted religious and cultural accommodations which represent local adaptation,⁶⁷ and might be found to be on the wrong side of scrupulous definitions of syncretism.

In relation to Baxter's work, the imputation of syncretism is most helpfully addressed on two levels. The first is his interaction with local culture, including *taha Maori*. The second is his approach to other religious systems, and in particular Buddhism. Such a division is arbitrary and to a certain extent artificial, but it does allow for the treatment of slightly different themes.

(a) Local Culture

There has been relatively little scholarly examination of the way in which Baxter mixes

⁶³ His work as a poet would not attract the charge of syncretism.

⁶⁴ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.144. Schreiter acknowledges the difficulties of definition, p.146.

⁶⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.17.

⁶⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.144.

⁶⁷ Bevans notes that there 'has never been a genuine theology' which has no 'reference to or dependence on the events, the thought forms, or the culture of its particular place and time'. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.4.

Christianity with indigenous culture.⁶⁸ This is perhaps because he has not been considered seriously in regard to his theological contribution.⁶⁹ If, however, the argument of this thesis that Baxter is a progenitor of genuine contextual theology is accepted, then his blend of faith and culture is significant and warrants examination. As a poet, Baxter knows the importance of 'voice'; of using local idiom to craft verse which will both resonate and extend its audience. His immersion in the geographical and social landscape is complete, and he understands the way in which common cultural symbols work.⁷⁰ Baxter comes to faith as a poet, rather than as a theologian to culture. His emphasis is not on how traditional Christianity might be interpreted in the setting of Aotearoa, but rather how 'the intense inner solitude of the urban New Zealander, mocked by material comfort in a community where most spiritual roads turn out to be blind alleys - and less consoled by domestic pieties, more tormented by foreknowledge of the grave, than one might imagine',⁷¹ might be brought to the healing grace which Christianity has revealed to him.

In Tracy's terms, Baxter is at home in both 'Christian texts' (tradition) and 'common human experience and language' (situation), and engaged in an act of 'critical correlation' which validates the theological process.⁷² He identifies the spiritual struggle inherent in daily existence, and seeks to express it in terms of his own Christian faith. At the same time, he searches for metaphors to make Christianity accessible to those afloat in a common cultural current.

...I tell my Catholic visitors

The chestnut explains to us our own religion

With the nut of love well hidden under spikes of fear

⁶⁸ The term 'indigenous' is used here to incorporate both Maori and Pakeha culture; this in keeping with Michael King's argument that Pakeha constitute 'another kind of indigenous New Zealander'. Michael King, *Being Pakeha Now: Reflections and Recollections of a White Native* (Auckland: Penguin 1999) p.239.

⁶⁹ See McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.218.

⁷⁰ See Baxter, "Symbolism in N.Z. Poetry." Interestingly, at this early stage of his career, he can state 'There is no reason, actually, why a New Zealand poet should use Polynesian symbolism rather than the Greek myths of Orpheus and Prometheus, or the medieval legend of Faustus', p.62. But he provides a list of New Zealand symbols (p.69), and increasingly his work develops a doggedly local character and idiom.

⁷¹ James K. Baxter, *Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Caxton 1967) p.41.

⁷² David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press 1975) p.43f.

In case we become rash...

'The Moon and the Chestnut Tree', CP 496f.

The theological question is whether in this synthesis of faith and culture, Baxter is sufficiently critical. Does his work betray 'a cultural romanticism'⁷³ which naively celebrates local culture and fails to identify conflictual elements within it? Is Christian tradition diluted or debased in some way to make it more comfortable within the context? These are questions which are commonly addressed to contextual theologies, and may be legitimately asked of Baxter's work.

In regard to the first question, that of cultural naiveté, the answer must be somewhat equivocal. In his handling of Pakeha culture and history, Baxter is only too aware of the category of 'sin' which taints it. He acknowledges that 'the pakeha's gut has grown big with swallowing the land'⁷⁴, that Pakeha are spiritually 'weak, lonely and stupid',⁷⁵ and that they are condemned to a 'more or less anti-communal secular abyss'.⁷⁶ The sins of Pakeha culture include a legacy of historical injustice, a loss of tribal identity, a desacralisation of life, a materialist worldview lacking compassion, alienation from the land and structural oppression. While at times he expresses a certain romanticism toward his Scots forbears,⁷⁷ in general Baxter exercises a thorough-going hermeneutic of suspicion in relation to his own cultural heritage. He thunders like an Old Testament prophet demanding justice and repentance from a people who have fallen short of divine expectations. If anything, his stance toward the culture is somewhat more negative than might be warranted by the evidence.

However, when it comes to his treatment of Maori culture, the lack of critical perspective quickly becomes apparent. O'Sullivan notes that by the time of *Jerusalem Sonnets*, 'Maori is the synonym for spontaneous, traditional, close to God; *pakeha* for self-centred and spiritually dead'.⁷⁸ Maori represent the 'elder brother'⁷⁹, demonstrating a superior attitude toward

⁷³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.14.

⁷⁴ CM §52.

⁷⁵ Baxter, *Walking Stick* p.14.

⁷⁶ Baxter, "Maori Life and Death," p.59.

⁷⁷ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.28.

⁷⁸ O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.52.

communal values, sacral existence, relationship with the land, dealing with conflict, processing grief and death, hospitality to strangers, and expressing genuine love. In Baxter's mythical worldview, while Pakeha are sinners, Maori are the sinned against. This is an oversimplification of history of the type which King describes as 'patronising distortion' overlooking the fact that 'no culture has a monopoly on virtue or on vice'.⁸⁰ Baxter seems to enthusiastically baptise Maori culture in such a way that it brooks no criticism.

Such ethnographic romanticism stems perhaps from Baxter's longing for Eden, and his belief that the 'natural man' in tribal societies is closer to that realm than those who have been corrupted through education and technology.⁸¹ Nevertheless, it constitutes an unwarranted privileging of Maori culture and a lack of critical perspective. Schreiter warns of the dangers of creating a 'somewhat mystical concept of "the people"', who 'live a simpler and less alienated life'.⁸² The tendency is to invent a culture which 'does not exist today, except in some people's romantic fantasies'.⁸³ It can be legitimately asked whether the picture Baxter paints of Maori has much correspondence with the complexity of their post-colonial reality. There is also the problem from missions history of the Christian outsider attempting to describe the workings of a culture which they have not grown up in. This smacks of paternalism, however much Baxter may have made an act of self-identification with Maoridom. Brown notes that his adoption of the 'prophet' mantle means that his 'privilege' militates against any 'identification with indigenous culture'.⁸⁴

The second question is whether Baxter somehow diminishes the Christian tradition in his movement toward cultural accommodation, and is therefore guilty of syncretism. This question pertains not so much to differences in his theological product, as the history of theology is characterised by innovation and refinement. Rather it is the issue of whether Baxter's theological perspective is in keeping with the broad stream of Christian tradition; whether it is orthodox or heterodox. In points of conflict between Christianity and culture, does he sacrifice one for the sake of the other? Once again, a definitive ruling is made

⁷⁹ See Chapter Six, Section Four, pp.161ff. of this thesis for a discussion of the motif.

⁸⁰ King, *Being Pakeha Now* p.236.

⁸¹ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.21.

⁸² Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.135.

⁸³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.20.

⁸⁴ Brown, "Poet and Prophet," p.140.

difficult because of the complex issue of what constitutes the Christian tradition, and where the outer boundaries of orthodoxy might lie in this regard. Arguments rapidly become tautologous, particularly given the relativising of all external authority in a context of postmodernity. Perhaps the most that can be done is to examine the way in which Baxter brings faith and culture into correlation, so that his theological method is transparent rather than covert. Judgements as to orthodoxy will ultimately be made by historic communities of faith rather than measurement against some supposed authoritative standard.⁸⁵

Two examples must suffice.⁸⁶ One concerns Baxter's handling of the sensitive topic of sexuality, as treated in a passage from *Jerusalem Daybook*.⁸⁷ He begins, as always, from experience. This is human experience, not only grounded in the local social context, but in his own existence and struggles. Baxter speaks from his 'own experience', and acknowledges 'a very dark road' and 'certain difficulties with women'. He is apprehensive about discussing the issue in the shadow of Christian tradition, fearing that to do so might 'invite immediate martyrdom at the hands of the Jansenists, if the Calvinists have not ripped out one's liver first'. Having located his topic as that of human experience in the context of moral theology, he turns not at first to Christian tradition but to a 'flicker of light' which has come when Baxter visited a Maori prophet at Taumarunui. On sharing his sexual problems, he is told by the prophet 'That comes from the aroha'. Here we are introduced to Baxter's central motif, that of aroha, which he translates as the Love of the Many.

Thus far the poet has introduced a core element of Maori culture as a possible solution to a question arising from human experience. Only now does he turn to the Christian tradition, by introducing the parable of the Good Samaritan. With considered irony, he suggests that perhaps 'a modern version of the parable' should be devised, 'in which the man beat-up by the roadside was not a man but a woman'. Events might be different in this scenario, he contends.

⁸⁵ Contextual approaches require the dialogical dimension of catholicity to preserve Christian identity; see Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1997) p.4.

⁸⁶ Both of these are from Baxter's late period, in which his contextual method is most easily recognised. Looking at his earlier material, and particularly that prepared for internal consumption among Catholics, might justify McKay's evaluation that 'Baxter's theology was simple and old-fashioned and reflected the pre-Vatican II instruction he had received'. McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.218. This does not stand in light of Baxter's Jerusalem material, however.

⁸⁷ The passage is to be found on p.9f in that publication; subsequent quotations are from that section. Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook*.

Half the priests I know would have a simple solution to the Samaritan's dilemma. He should ring the ambulance and take to his heels smartly, for fear of an occasion of sin. The other half go around as I do, waiting for a bludgeon on the back of the head from somebody who thinks they are trying to corrupt people.

The response might seem flippant, but Baxter is using the subversive nature of the parable to draw attention to inconsistencies within the church's moral teaching. Does love (aroha) require taking scandalous risks, or is it concerned with the maintenance of a circumspect appearance?

Baxter, of course, is advocating the former, and referring to the Gospel tradition in support of his position. 'Meanwhile', he continues, 'the wicked world goes on healing the wicked world'. In other words, in the absence of genuine Christian compassion, the call of love is responded to by those who do not bear the name of Christ. If, as Baxter asserts, 'Where love is, there the Lord is',⁸⁸ this suggests that those who preserve their morality by avoiding ambiguous situations are those who are guilty of heteropraxy. While he somewhat disingenuously claims that 'I do not want to scandalise anybody', Baxter lays a challenge at the door of the church: 'I dare to hope for a theology of sexuality that does justice to the human situation'. He wishes to make aroha the guiding principle of a sexual ethic; one which incorporates relationships and sexuality which fall outside the formal bounds of marriage, and yet express genuine love.

The outcome of his theological synthesis is the implied critique of Christian views of sexuality as remote and lacking in love.⁸⁹ While this may be unorthodox, it is not necessarily heterodox. The methodology is one of critical correlation, whereby a man deeply immersed in both the human situation and the Christian tradition struggles to reconcile the two. Far from devaluing the tradition, Baxter seeks to drive to the heart of it by employing the motif of love. He is critical of the way in which the tradition has been forged into a rigorous ethic. But he is

⁸⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.16. See also his further exploration of this concept: 'I am gambling on the assumption that no human love, if it implies, however dimly, the Love of the Many, is separated at its root from the love which is Christ given to us to love one another with.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.11.

⁸⁹ In *Six Faces of Love*, Baxter continues the argument, arguing that a compassionate adulterer, while not exactly 'a model of the Good Samaritan', nevertheless 'does recognise the wounds of his companion - and his response to her includes an effort to heal those wounds by showing love and respect'. While he recognises the breach of moral law, he argues that '*charitas* - the love of person for person - is present in a struggling fashion' in the soul of the adulterer. Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.15.

also implicitly critical of social mores. The cultural climate of his time and location was one of 'free love'; Baxter wants to step back from this in recognising the moral significance of sexual intimacy. He feels the tension between situation and tradition, and concludes 'I can hardly claim to know the answers'. The direction of his theologising is from experience to tradition and back to experience.

A second example bears this out. In another passage from *Jerusalem Daybook*, Baxter begins by recounting a visit to the graveyard at Jerusalem.⁹⁰ Before entering, he addresses 'those who are inside it'. His salutation is 'He manuhiri au, ko taku haere e te haere o aroha', which he translates for his readers as 'I am a stranger. My coming here is motivated by love'. Some things are apparent already. Once again, Baxter begins by reflection on his own experience. Within the first sentence, he has introduced once more his controlling motif of love. The significant point of this passage, however, is his dealing with Maori culture. Not only is he using *te reo* (Maori language), but he is adopting Maori custom and worldview by addressing the dead as being present to him. 'This is the pa of the dead', he explains, 'and I think they do receive me'. He goes on to pray beside the grave of 'the kaumatua, the Maori elder who lived in the house before us'. Baxter is praying 'that the souls of the Maori dead may have light and peace, and asking them to bear with our stupidity and put the coat of their aroha over us'.

It might seem that he is uncritically accepting Maori lore, and therefore guilty of syncretism. While there is a tradition of praying to the saints in his own Catholic faith, this is theologically distinct from Maori beliefs of the presence and power of ancestors. But while Baxter may be inhabiting the culture, he has not substituted it for his Christian foundations. He speaks of his hope that he might be buried there when he dies, explaining:

Then, when Te Atua raises our bodies from the dead, I will be able to look for a moment at the faces of those who were bone of my bone and soul of my soul, before entering the fire reserved for those whose love is earthly and not heavenly.

Here there is the inevitable return to the Christian tradition, with motifs of the resurrection of

⁹⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.13f. Subsequent quotations in this discussion are from that passage.

the dead (1 Cor 15:50-52) and the refining fire (1 Cor 3:10-15).⁹¹ His addressing of the dead, while in keeping with Maori practice, is interpreted by Baxter as a foreshadowing of the Christian hope of the resurrection in which 'the dead will be raised' (1 Cor 15:52). His accommodation to Maori religion is funded by his Christian faith. In case the point should be missed, Baxter repeats his theological maxim: 'Ko to aroha i Te Ariki - Where love is, there the Lord is', and glosses it 'It is so also among the dead'.

In other words, the Christian revelation makes possible the embrace not only of Maori culture, but of the Maori dead. When the Christian concept of unconditional love is extended toward humanity, it makes of all people kinfolk. Baxter claims that through this understanding, 'we cease to fear the death of the body as we slowly recognize that to love is to die the deaths of all men with them'. Death is robbed of terror and becomes a rite of human unity through the hope contained in the love of Christ. Because of his faith in this love, Baxter finds a proleptic connection with the Maori dead in the graveyard. Maori culture and Christian faith remain distinct and in tension, but reach reconciliation through *aroha*, which Baxter regards as an analogy for *charitas*. But once again the poet returns to the solid ground of common experience, admitting that he is not yet free of fear, and acknowledging that 'to ask for it to be otherwise would be to ask not to be a member of the human race'. And Baxter is deeply committed to humanity.

What emerges from this brief examination of two examples of Baxter's methodology, is that his handling of faith and culture respects the integrity of each element. He neither subsumes Christian tradition in culture, nor raids culture to bolster faith. As a genuine inhabitant of both territories, he maintains a certain critical distance between them. But he does find a ground of reconciliation, which is the irreducible love of God as shown to him in Christ. Baxter refutes any suggestion that he needs to divest himself of either humanity or faith, but celebrates both in the difficult dance of theological interaction. This approach resists the accusation of syncretism. There can be little doubt about Baxter's theological orientation.

Since I am a Christian, I offer Christian explanations. But the problem cannot be

⁹¹ This latter passage is used in association with the Catholic conception of purgatory, and may be what Baxter has in mind here.

solved by any intellectual diagram. It can only be solved by loving.⁹²

(b) Other Religious Systems

As suggested earlier, this division is somewhat artificial, given that religious systems such as materialism or animism may well be present in the local context in which Baxter worked. However, the focus of this section is to examine his interaction with identifiably religious streams which are independent and distinct from Christianity. O'Brien makes the sweeping claim that Baxter's 'Catholicism often wandered off in the direction of pantheism, his work incorporating this, as well as a poetically-useful animism and a few errant strains of Zen Buddhism'.⁹³ The implication of casual and instrumental syncretism needs careful examination to test its validity. There is ample evidence of Baxter's understanding of and sympathy for Buddhism, and Isichei notes his 'enduring attraction to eastern religions'.⁹⁴ McKay records the longstanding interest,⁹⁵ with Oliver suggesting that Baxter was strongly influenced by his son's Buddhism.⁹⁶ Certainly the poet demonstrates more than a surface knowledge of the teachings of Buddha, and recognises the truth in them.⁹⁷

In one place, Baxter marks the initially startling confession: 'I am a Buddhist, in the sense that I reverence the Buddhist saints, and believe that the phenomena of fear and craving originate from the projection upon things of mental images that we carry in our own minds.'⁹⁸ He also suggests that '[t]hrough a theology of kenosis, Buddhist and Catholic stand on the same

⁹² Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.8.

⁹³ O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's," p.137. Frank McKay, in his preparation for Baxter's biography, seems concerned about any evidence that the poet may have changed his allegiance late in life. He asks Eugene O'Sullivan, 'You would regard Jim as a syncretist?' O'Sullivan replies in the negative, commenting '...to say he was a Buddhist in the end - it's like saying - it's just ignorance I think.' Transcript of interview between Frank McKay and Eugene O'Sullivan, F. M. McKay, "Interview with Eugene O'sullivan". Transcript of Interview, Frank McKay Papers, FM 1/5, Beaglehole Room, Wellington, .

⁹⁴ Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.251.

⁹⁵ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.265.

⁹⁶ Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.145.

⁹⁷ In an interview with John Weir, Baxter comments: 'When Gautama Buddha Sakyamuni went out and took his robe from the bodies of the dead - the yellow robe - and said "The ego is a hole in the ground; it is a gap." People would be scandalized, wouldn't they? And when he held up a flower for half an hour and said nothing people would be scandalized, wouldn't they? You see? But this was truth.' Weir, "Interview," p.246f.

⁹⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.20.

ground'.⁹⁹ These apparently syncretistic statements, however, need to be read in the light of Baxter's own commentary upon them. He suggests that Buddhism and Christianity 'are in no way contradictory', but rather 'supplement one another'.¹⁰⁰ The key to his easy use of other religions lies in his broad understanding of ecumenism. This allows him to inhabit different traditions without any sense of betrayal of his own.

I am a Jew because Bon is a Jew. I am a Buddhist because my son Hoani is a Buddhist. We do not only understand the essence of a religion other than our own, if we see it through the eyes of those we love, who are members of it. Mystically we do become members of it, without any betrayal of any doctrine or principle of our own. That is the meaning of ecumenism.¹⁰¹

Elsewhere Baxter tells the story of a Muslim friend who harboured a Hindu family who were under attack by other Muslims. This man defended his guests on the basis of the Koran, diverting the anger of his compatriots in Islam. 'Was Christ present in my Muslim friend?' asks Baxter. 'He was undeniably present', he retorts, 'though not recognized by name.'¹⁰²

Once again we discover the controlling motif of love present in Baxter's theology. His understanding of that love is unashamedly formed through his knowledge of Christ, but once grasped, is recognised at work in diverse religious contexts.¹⁰³ He is well aware of the points which divide religious traditions such as Christianity and Buddhism,¹⁰⁴ and is of the opinion that '[i]ndifferentism would breed a poor ecumenism'.¹⁰⁵ In other words, there should be no dilution of any particular religious perspective, but rather an imaginative appreciation of the way in which they might share wisdom. Contradictions must be acknowledged.

⁹⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40.

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.20.

¹⁰¹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.27.

¹⁰² Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.11.

¹⁰³ This understanding seems similar to that advanced by Karl Rahner as 'Anonymous Christianity'; see Rahner, "Anonymous Christians." It also resonates with R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1981).

¹⁰⁴ See Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.20., where he discusses the important differences regarding theism and compassion in Buddhism and Christianity.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.10.

But underneath the surface contradiction, there are secret similarities. Christian and Buddhist both recognise that one has to die in order to live. It is a matter of loving well or not loving well.¹⁰⁶

Once again, he comes back to his characteristic principle, '[w]here love is, God is'.¹⁰⁷ It is on this basis that he is able to remain firmly rooted in Catholicism, and yet admit the presence of Christ within other religions. This perspective, while still controversial, is by no means unusual within contemporary Christian theology.¹⁰⁸

The charge of syncretism must fail, because Baxter self-consciously draws his categories from Christianity and interprets other religious claims on that basis. There is never any question as to his allegiance. In a deceptively simple statement, Baxter makes transparent his theological framework.

A Christian follows the God-man Christ. The Person of Christ is essential to his way of life. He discovers Christ hidden in the hearts of others and in his own heart.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, when it comes to what O'Brien describes as 'a poetically-useful animism', the question must be not whether Baxter incorporates and even exhibits animism, but whether he does violence to the Christian tradition in so doing. In instances when Baxter confesses his inclination to 'turn to the least demanding and most supporting reality, Gea, the earth itself, the oldest of the tribe of gods',¹¹⁰ it is tempting to see this as an explicit admission of what is implicit in his poetry. But even here, he is careful to explain that while this 'may seem a contradiction of the Christian revelation', that 'it is not intended so'.¹¹¹ The fact that he feels the need to defend himself is an indication that Baxter is always conscious of and in control of religious symbolism, and that the well from which he drinks is that of Christianity. All other perceptions and influences are integrated by and evaluated according to a deep commitment to

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.21.

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, "Ice Cream and Ecumenism," p.11.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1985).

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.21.

¹¹⁰ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.25.

¹¹¹ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.26.

Christ as the revelation of divine love.

6. **Misogyny**

While misogyny may not be a traditional theological category,¹¹² the development of Feminist Theology has helped to demonstrate that the history of Christian theology has been distorted by the maintenance of patriarchal power and a corresponding suppression of women and their theological insights.¹¹³ A pervading suspicion that Baxter shared this prejudice has already been touched upon,¹¹⁴ and at the risk of employing anachronistic categories, is worthy of examination. Doyle notes that 'Baxter's whole view of woman was traditionalist',¹¹⁵ suggesting a combination of Pauline and Augustinian attitudes towards women. McKay admits that Baxter 'was never really comfortable with strong women', and that this may have been because 'he feared his susceptibility to their sexuality would allow them to threaten his independence'.¹¹⁶ There is certainly ambivalence reflected in the poet's attitude to women, which might be evidence of a lack of equanimity toward gender relations. The deeper question is whether this influenced his theology in a detrimental fashion.

There is from the early stages of Baxter's poetry an association between sex and death, with the recurrent theme that it is the feminine archetype which is the source of death and corruption.

In the bed of a girl with long plaits
I found the point of entry,

¹¹² While misogyny (fear and hatred of women) is not directly equivalent with patriarchy (a hegemonic system establishing male power), there is a clear link between them. This is particularly true for Western culture, given the long association of Christianity with civil power during Christendom. Thus Ruether speaks of 'patriarchal anthropology, noting that: 'Males, as the monopolizers of theological self-definition, project onto women their own rejection of their "lower selves".' Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM 1983) p.94.

¹¹³ 'All the categories of classical theology in its major traditions - Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant - have been distorted by androcentrism. This not only makes the male normative in a way that reduces women to invisibility, but it also distorts all the dialectical relationships of good/evil, nature/grace, body/soul, God/nature by modeling them on a polarization of male and female.' Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* p.37.

¹¹⁴ See above, Section Three, p.246f.

¹¹⁵ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* p.123.

¹¹⁶ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.199.

The place where father Adam died.

'Pig Island Letters (3)', CP 276.¹¹⁷

Baxter of course works consciously with such associations, identifying 'the decay of female sexuality into a malicious energy that belongs partly to the grave' which is in turn a representation of 'the *anima*, that mysterious archetype who has been called variously Venus, Cybele, Artemis...'.¹¹⁸ Doyle lists symbolic figures of Mother, Virgin, Temptress, Witch and Kitchen God as recurrent categories for the feminine in Baxter's work.¹¹⁹ To these might be added succubus, Delilah, Mara and Circe. Baxter himself defends his description of woman as 'corpse-like', explaining that for poetic purposes 'she is becoming an object, the living corpse of the negative projection'.¹²⁰ But still O'Sullivan suspects that this 'frequent association of sex and death, destruction and female demand' masks an underlying 'eager and constant distaste for the world and for the flesh' which puts him in the company of Augustine and Calvin.¹²¹ Indeed, it is this very association which drives the theological regime which has traditionally excluded women and their experience.¹²²

McKay, however, feels that 'it would be extreme to call Baxter a misogynist'.¹²³ He was simply overwhelmed by mythology, and could not keep it out of his work or his life. When examining Baxter's attitude to women over the course of his lifetime, something of a progression can be observed. The starting point seems to be a combined fear of domestic entrapment, coupled with a vigorous sexual appetite. He regards the price of a sexual relationship in civilised society to be that of temporal damnation:

The taste of porridge, the smell of fresh linen, old and half-remembered phrases out of

¹¹⁷ Similarly negative perceptions of sex may be found in poems such as 'To a Travelling Friend', 'To Mate With', 'Mill Girl', 'Green Figs at Table', 'Henley Bridge', 'Ballad of Calvary Street' and 'Venetian Blinds'.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, "Man on the Horse," p.115f.

¹¹⁹ Doyle, *James K. Baxter* pp.123-131.

¹²⁰ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.83.

¹²¹ O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.25,27.

¹²² Ruether argues: 'Particularly in clerical misogyny, woman's body is described with violent disgust as the image of decay. Her physical presence drags down the souls of men to carnal lust and thus to eternal damnation.' Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* p.81.

¹²³ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.199. He somewhat strangely defends this claim by arguing that even if the poet associated women with death, he sometimes regarded death as liberating.

hymns - the savour of innocence which he brings with him can tempt any man, especially if he is feeling tired or sick or lonely, to retreat from the area of self-knowledge and go back to the pieties of childhood...¹²⁴

The prospect of 'sex presented like a box of dice / Each Saturday'¹²⁵ is something he dreads and yet participates in. It is a transaction which he feels demeans both men and women; suppressing equally Priapus and Venus. Oliver notes the odd ambivalence this creates for Baxter: '[he] was at once disenchanted with domesticity and fearful of women's emergence from it'. Despite protestations, it seems that in this stage of his life he was indeed 'traditional' in his attitude to women. The mythology he employs may support him in his views, but there is a suspicion that it provides a ready vehicle for existing prejudice.

Later in life there is the hint of change. He quotes with approval Doris Lessing,¹²⁶ and McKay notes his 'record of consistent encouragement and support for women writers'.¹²⁷ But Oliver, while recounting Baxter's admiration of Germaine Greer, notes that he was uneasy about Women's Liberation, and felt unsure how to respond to it.

Later, at Jerusalem, he wore a women's liberation lapel badge on his fly for a time; he shifted it to a place 'over my heart' when his son told him that the feminists would emasculate him... James disliked female domesticity and its alternative about equally. He would have liked, as with all forms of radicalism, to believe that his heart was in the right place, but he was not sure where that was. He did not know where to pin the badge.¹²⁸

This insightful comment reveals the continued ambivalence which haunts Baxter's attitude to women. In a late document he sounds remarkably liberated:

The women who are our sisters are also our equals. They are often the strongest in the

¹²⁴ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.73.

¹²⁵ James K. Baxter, 'The Perfect Wife', CP, p.342.

¹²⁶ Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.81.

¹²⁷ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.199.

¹²⁸ Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.121f.

struggle for liberty.¹²⁹

A woman who lived in Jerusalem concedes that Baxter 'made no secret of his belief that women should have the right to choose abortion' and 'stood tall for the resurrection of the orgasm'; but she considered he 'had a *droit de seigneur* attitude - the right of the master to take the virgin'.¹³⁰ It seems that his intellectual commitment to liberation was still complicated by a simultaneous sexual attraction to and fear of women. This explains his long devotion to Mary, 'a woman who represents the mercy of God and also innocence'.¹³¹ Despite his reluctance to admit dualism in response to the feminine archetype,¹³² Baxter lives in a force field between Virgin and Venus, offering homage to one to save him from the other.

The effect on Baxter's theology is to taint it with an inevitable patriarchal cast. It explains his firm grip on what is ultimately a very traditional and conservative Catholic devotion, where he was 'at home in a style of piety which even then was becoming old-fashioned'.¹³³ He upholds the male priesthood, 'our Christs and fathers',¹³⁴ and resists the concept of a married clergy lest it should produce 'the problem of the hen-pecked priest'.¹³⁵ More importantly, his ambivalence towards women resonates with equivocation toward the 'earth mother' of the natural created realm. The following sentiments, while addressed to the earth, might equally have described Baxter's relationship with women: '...away from her I feel lost; yet because all men die, she can only comfort, never save, and I go on from her towards the sea, which is the image of death, the separating and dividing void, which nevertheless is the source of my joy'.¹³⁶ His longing for Edenic bliss is forever unrequited because of original corruption.¹³⁷ This causes Baxter to introduce an idealisation of nature which suits his Romantic poetry, making it desirable but ultimately unattainable. The seeming elevation of both nature and women, a romantic strategy, serves to objectify both and has been interpreted by some as a

¹²⁹ CM §65.

¹³⁰ Mike Minnehan, quoted in Loates, "The Man Who Shot Angels," p.44.

¹³¹ Weir, *The Poetry of James K. Baxter* p.52.

¹³² Baxter, "Virgin and the Temptress," p.78.

¹³³ Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.238.

¹³⁴ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹³⁵ James K. Baxter, "Why Shouldn't Our Priests Marry?," 119-125 in *The Flowering Cross* (Dunedin: N.Z. Tablet, 1969) p.121.

¹³⁶ Baxter, "Conversation with an Ancestor," p.25f.

¹³⁷ See Chapter Three, Section Two, pp.51ff. of this thesis.

theological distortion. Ruether criticises such an attitude as 'aesthetic, personalistic, and escapist',¹³⁸ and one which functions to impede a genuine relationship of harmony with that which is 'other'. Baxter's intimate understanding of the operation of mythology within human consciousness, does not ultimately preserve him from the effect of some ancient negative stereotypes.

7. Ethical Liberalism

While espousing a relatively conservative Catholic faith, Baxter managed to combine this with a lifestyle which many fellow participants in the faith found to be scandalous. It is at first sight incongruous to reconcile traditional Catholic moral teaching with his practice of sexuality, his sanctioning of abortion, his abandoning of marriage and family, his tolerance of drug abuse and even his determined vulgarity. Many contemporaries considered him 'a very odd sort of Catholic since he did not appear to regard the ten commandments as of central importance'.¹³⁹ Oliver describes him as 'ostentatiously pious and irrepressibly randy'.¹⁴⁰ It is in his sexual ethic that the discrepancy between his own morality and that of the Church becomes most evident. But it would be misleading to imagine that Baxter has no moral foundation to his life and faith, or that he simply chooses to selectively ignore it. In fact, a sophisticated argument is established in *Six Faces of Love* for an ethic based on love.

Here he confronts the process of ethical decision making in relation to moral law as taught by the church.¹⁴¹ Baxter doubts whether any objective external guide will suffice in making moral decisions; he derides this approach as 'a science of moral traffic rules, as it were, given to us by the Divine Head of the Universal Traffic Department'. The use of 'a legalistic approach' ends up condoning acts which we instinctively feel are immoral, while punishing what are essentially trivial transgressions. It is necessary to invoke conscience. But Baxter shies away from the extremes of situational ethics,¹⁴² noting that Hitler seemed to satisfy his conscience while exterminating six million Jews. Any suggestion that he was wrong invokes

¹³⁸ Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* p.85.

¹³⁹ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.218.

¹⁴⁰ Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.125.

¹⁴¹ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* pp.9-16.

¹⁴² See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1966).

once more the notion of an 'objective moral code, applying to all men'. The capacity for self-deception means that 'very few people would want to carry a theory of situational ethics to that extreme'. For that reason, conscience still needs the assistance of an objective moral foundation 'to guarantee that our reason will not be swept away by prejudice or passion'.

Baxter provides a case study, with two alternative scenarios both involving adultery.¹⁴³ In one, a predatory traveller takes advantage of a woman's loneliness to get her into bed. The other describes a traveller who at first offers simple friendship to the same woman, and then realises that to back out of sleeping with her would be regarded as a rejection. So he spends the night with her out of love. In Baxter's view, 'there is a genuine ethical difference' between the two instances, even though 'both have committed a breach of the objective moral law that requires chastity outside of marriage'. The difference is one of 'motivation', with the first being an 'I-it relationship' and the second constituting an 'I-thou relationship'.¹⁴⁴ While Baxter admits that both are 'adulterers', he wants to argue that '*charitas* - the love of person for person - is present in a struggling fashion in the soul of the second traveller'. He argues that the love of God is present within human love 'even in relationships that are morally defective'.

The force of this is to relativise objective ethical standards through the introduction of the category of love. This very quickly slides in the direction of a full-blown situational ethics, given that evaluation of any moral choice is dependent on what Baxter admits to be 'subjective factors'. He considers that however difficult it may be, it is truer to human experience.¹⁴⁵

All the same, I think there is a real intuition which people try to comprehend or express by situational ethics - in religious terms, a genuine collision between love that deserves the name of love and obedience to the clearly expressed will of a loving

¹⁴³ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* pp.12-14. It is somewhat ambiguous for Baxter to be using the issue of marital infidelity as an ethical test case, given that it is so close to his own experience. Phillips suggests that 'Baxter may be wrestling with his own self here more than he is wrestling with an issue'. Russell Phillips Russell Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript". author's possession, Auckland, 1996.

¹⁴⁴ See Martin Buber, *I and Thou: A New Translation, with a Prologue and Notes* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone 1996).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Paul Lehmann's basis of ethics which is 'what it takes to make and keep human life human'. Paul Lehman, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row 1963).

God... Love and the law seem to conflict more often in this area than in any other.

However difficult such an ethic might be to maintain, it is at least theological in that its basis is the gospel love of God. And whatever tendency to self-justification may be inherent to this approach is moderated by Baxter's insistence that '*charitas* is the love of community, the Love of the Many'.¹⁴⁶ Ethical living is, for him, a by-product of communal and compassionate existence.

Baxter's view is that the moral status of a person cannot be evaluated by an examination of their circumstances. Because the degree of love which influences any act is hidden, it is only God who can rightly judge.¹⁴⁷ It is a Christian ethic, in that it derives from revelation, is only comprehensible to those who share the faith, and is more suited to a theocracy than to a secular society. While Baxter gives tacit approval to the objective standards of Catholic moral teaching as providing a methodological 'presumption',¹⁴⁸ the effect of his ethic of divine love is to produce a climate of relativism. It goes some way to explaining the severe tensions between his overt allegiance to Catholicism and the conflicting behaviour which accompanied it. While some suspicion must remain that his ethical system acted as a *post factum* justification for that fundamental tension, there is little evidence of intentionality in this regard. The moral reasoning proposed by Baxter is sustainable as a view of theological ethics, even if unacceptable to many. By the standards of the youth culture in which he lived during his latter years, he was something of a conservative. The fact that many church authorities regarded him as libertine is due to his status as 'a boundary rider who intersected with Church and community'.¹⁴⁹

8. Conclusion

The major failing in Baxter's theological approach is a persistent dualism which, fired

¹⁴⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.40.

¹⁴⁷ 'And the judgement has to be left to God. No man can make it.' Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

¹⁴⁸ This term is not found in Baxter, but is used by J. Philip Wogaman to describe an underlying moral orientation. See J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press 1993).

¹⁴⁹ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

by a utopian element, tempts him to interpret existence in terms of binary oppositions. While he is anxiously critical of the dualism of others, and particularly Puritans of any type, he replicates the fundamental problem which he is objecting to. The unconscious Manichaeism which O'Sullivan points to is present in much of his work, and expresses itself in such elements as his treatment of women. Another area of interpretation which suffers from his dualism is a cultural romanticism in regard to Maori. In all of this, his perceived vocation as prophet pushes him to ignore the middle ground. However, other apparent theological problems, such as syncretism or relativism, are generated by the contextual and correlative methodology which Baxter employs. While giving the appearance of insufficient attention to Christian revelation, on closer examination these elements can be explained by his consistent commitment to human experience as the crucible of theology. There are certainly inconsistencies in Baxter's theology, but he acknowledges his unsystematic approach to the task. It is his move toward a contextual methodology which causes the majority of misgivings as to the theological value of his work. That is only a major critique if a contextual approach is ruled out *a priori*. The argument of this thesis is that it is not only a suitable methodology, but that Baxter exemplifies it in a helpful way. It is to that proposition that discussion now turns.

Chapter Ten: Te Koha o Hemi te Tutua - Funding Contextual Theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand¹

1. Introduction

The task remains to evaluate Baxter's contribution to theological reflection in Aotearoa-New Zealand. While his literary status is secure and widely acknowledged, opinions as to his significance for religious life in Aotearoa-New Zealand are divided. He is variously acknowledged as a prophet, a mystic, a spiritual guide, a Catholic poet, a theologian, a heretic or a charlatan. It is Baxter's role in relation to the development of Christian theology within his homeland which will be the focus of this final chapter. In particular, the nature of his contribution will be evaluated, as well as an attempted overview of the specifics of it.

In resolving such questions, it will be necessary to address the issue of methodology. Many of the evaluations of Baxter's theological importance proffered thus far rely on methodological assumptions which are themselves open to challenge. As postmodern critiques have maintained, post-Enlightenment theology has been beset with universalising, totalising, deductive, systematic and Eurocentric approaches to theology.² Local and contextual theologies, employing significantly different methodologies, have been welcomed as a viable alternative.³ This shift in understanding of the task of theology has relevance to evaluation of Baxter, and whether in a new environment, 'a poet can tell us how we should go about theology'.⁴ Some attention therefore will be given to contextual theology before considering

¹ Literally, 'The contribution of Hemi (James) the nobody'. Te tutua was Baxter's adopted title for himself in the Jerusalem years.

² 'The European attempt at world domination was not only a military, political, and economic domination. It was also, and I suggest most fundamentally, an attempt at theological domination. This world expansive enterprise was underwritten by a European belief in the superiority of its own theologies.' Darragh, "Theology from Elsewhere."

³ Bevans describes contextualization as 'a theological imperative' which 'is part of the very nature of theology itself'; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.1. It is not that traditional Western theology has ever been anything other than contextual. But often it has paraded itself as universal, thus masking its hegemonic character. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.3f.

⁴ Choan-Seng Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (London: SCM 1988) p.xii.

Baxter's status under this new category.

Finally, a brief synthesis of the poet's theology will be attempted under traditional theological categories, largely for the purposes of identifying his distinctive 'voice' within the wider spectrum of theology. In doing so, the argument is advanced that in Baxter we find the expression of something unique and necessary to the task of producing truly contextual theology with Aotearoa-New Zealand.

2. *Is Baxter a Theologian?*

Given the tendency of commentators to disagree over Baxter, it is not surprising that opinions as to his theological status vary widely. Gregory O'Brien declares Baxter to be '[N]either a theologian nor a mystic'.⁵ His justification for this conclusion is that Baxter lacked 'a deep understanding of theology as a system'. Frank McKay, biographer of Baxter, concurs that Baxter lacked qualification as a theologian. He states:

When it is said that he could be considered New Zealand's first indigenous theologian, what is meant is his spirituality, not his doctrinal or moral theology. Theology reflects on religious experience and systematizes it; spirituality is less systematic and speaks directly about religious experience. Baxter's theology was simple and old-fashioned and reflected the pre-Vatican II instruction he had received.⁶

Contained in this objection are two separate but common perceptions concerning Baxter and theology. The first, and most relevant to this discussion, is that of the nature of theology itself. O'Brien's understanding that theology is a 'system' accords with McKay's assertion that theology 'reflects on religious experience and systematizes it'. It is a familiar post-Enlightenment view of theological method, with James agreeing 'Baxter was not a theologian'⁷, and that the 'task of theology is to criticise and systematize'.⁸ In considering the

⁵ O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's," 127.

⁶ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.218.

⁷ James, "Primal Vision" p.253.

assertion in relation to Baxter, the issues to be considered are:

- Does he make any attempt to systematise his thought theologically?;
- Is the criterion of systematisation a necessary one to theology?

The second objection raised by McKay is the conservative and unremarkable character of Baxter's Catholic theology. This raises a third consideration:

- Is Baxter's theology derivative or generative?

In the opposing camp, there are those who champion Baxter as not only a theologian, but a significant one. Eugene O'Sullivan is in no doubt that 'he was writing theology'⁹ and that this constituted 'the first great statement of what we could call a truly indigenous expression of Christianity'.¹⁰ Phillips describes Baxter as 'an original theologian'.¹¹ This difference in evaluation betrays a different understanding of theology itself. O'Sullivan argues that theology 'is the way faith finds words to express itself' and that '[e]ach culture must do this for itself'¹²; while Phillips explains that Baxter's 'theological authenticity is being outworked in relational human terms rather than a more authoritative, dogmatic and distant style'.¹³ These sentiments arise from the acceptance by both commentators of the validity of contextual theology, with its different approach and methodological criteria. In turn, a further and fundamental issue is introduced for examination:

- Is Baxter a contextual theologian?

These questions will now be pursued in more detail. Those more readily disposed of will be dealt with first.

⁸ W.T.G. James, "New Wine for Old Wineskins: The New Zealand Poet as Theologian," 28-32 in *The Religious Dimension: A Selection of Essays Presented at a Colloquium on Religious Studies Held at the University of Auckland, New Zealand in August 1975.*, ed. John C. Hinchcliff (Auckland: Rep Prep, 1976) p.31.

⁹ O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.37.

¹⁰ O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.34.

¹¹ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

¹² O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.34.

¹³ Phillips, "Dialogue," p.274.

(a) Is Baxter's Theology Derivative or Generative?

McKay's pessimism as to the essentially conservative and pre-Vatican II nature of Baxter's theological outlook is a distorted perspective. It is influenced by two factors. One is the fact that in his biography, McKay makes comparatively little use of the late prose materials published by Baxter, which contain the most sophisticated theological reflection.¹⁴ McKay's description of Baxter's theology as 'old-fashioned' refers to an earlier period of Catholic orthodoxy and piety, as represented in *The Flowering Cross* and his articles in *NZ Tablet*.¹⁵ The second factor is that McKay is making a point concerning the distinction between theology and spirituality, characterising the former as derivative while allowing that the latter might be significantly creative.¹⁶

When he reflected on his own spiritual experience he was not confined by traditional formulations but was able to express himself in his own way. Whenever he did that, he might write something memorable. The originality and force of some of his insights carried them beyond the confines of Catholicism to a statement of universal truth.¹⁷

Anyone contemplating the radical theological synthesis occurring in 'Handbook for a Christian Militant' could scarcely doubt the generative nature of Baxter's theology. While he built upon a base of orthodox conservative Catholicism, in the Jerusalem period, Baxter was moving into new territory.

There are no dogmatic monoliths of truth to hedge him in, nor even to direct him. There is indeed the memory that people in other times and places have looked for this road: but the footprints are of little use in today's search.¹⁸

¹⁴ Phillips notes that *Six Faces of Love* is not listed among Baxter's publications by either McKay or Oliver, and that many significant late documents 'have been in the past overlooked by the Baxter biographers and critics'. Phillips, "Dialogue," p.269.

¹⁵ Isichei also notes this uncritical conservatism in the early period, but allows for significant development in his later years. Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church."

¹⁶ Gutierrez claims spirituality as an historical and still relevant source of theology: 'The spiritual function of theology, so important in the early centuries and later regarded as parenthetical, constitutes, nevertheless, a permanent dimension of theology.' Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.5.

¹⁷ McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.219.

¹⁸ O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.34f.

The claim that Baxter's theology can be ignored because it contains nothing significantly new must be rejected as inadequate to the evidence.

(b) Is Baxter Systematic?

Given Baxter's self-confession that '[y]ou know how unsystematic my thinking is',¹⁹ it would seem straightforward to declare that he does not meet the criterion of systematisation. Systematic theology as taught formally receives Baxter's universal disdain for the remoteness of academia: 'Anybody who's been through a seminary has an overloaded brain.' Somewhat disingenuously, he advocates abstention from reading:

Talk with people who have small vocabularies... I think one should give up reading and start talking and listening.²⁰

Involvement in living rather than reflecting leads to simple and direct communication: 'A theologian, especially since the Second Vatican Council, would take several pages to get the point across.'²¹ The fragmentary and unsystematic nature of his theologising relates to two earlier aspects of Baxter's method: his reflection is narrative rather than analytical, and he has a commitment to praxis. Thus *Jerusalem Daybook*, perhaps the finest collection of his theological tales and fables, he describes as more like 'a bucket of water taken from the creek than a logical explanation of a mode of living.'²²

In this daybook I offer only a bundle of anecdotes, intuitions and conjectures - points where the shell of my own egocentricity has been broken through by the occasions of communal life.²³

¹⁹ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

²⁰ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

²¹ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

²² Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45.

²³ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

Parr sees a haphazard approach reflective of Baxter's poetic methodology,²⁴ while O'Brien claims that Baxter's religious books suffer 'on account of their erratic learning and hurried composition'.²⁵ Nevertheless, Phillips, while conceding that Baxter 'never wrote a systematic theology', wants to argue that 'it can be demonstrated that his thought was often systematic'.²⁶ The narrative and fragmentary nature of Baxter's theological method 'does not mean that he did not have a systematic or rational understanding of theology', asserts Phillips, pointing to 'theological complexity and dexterity' in *The Flowering Cross*.²⁷ The explanation provided for this seeming contradiction is that 'what he wrote was not the process but the conclusions to the process'.²⁸ Phillips is sure that 'Baxter had the ability to present his thought in a more academic fashion than he chose to'.²⁹ Even if this is true, it is evident that the majority of Baxter's *corpus* is unsystematic, in the sense that is associated with systematic theology. The possible exception is 'Handbook for a Militant Christian', with its numbered paragraphs and attempt to develop a sustained theological argument. But the overall judgement of Baxter as unsystematic is accurate. A lack of systematic organisation, however, does not necessarily disqualify Baxter as a theologian.

(c) Is Systematisation Necessary to Theology?

This question drives to the heart of whether Baxter's religious writings may be admitted as theology, or rather dismissed as 'spirituality' (McKay), 'creative religious thought' (Parr) or 'mythopoeic' (James). Those who reject Baxter's status as theologian have a uniform judgement as to what constitutes theology. McKay's understanding has already been touched upon, as has O'Brien's. Parr regards Baxter as a 'creative religious thinker' rather than a theologian, because his religious work was 'intuitive and experiential', and not 'a disciplined academic examination of religious concepts within prescribed doctrinal limits'.³⁰ James

²⁴ 'Baxter's religious thought benefited (and suffered) from the same qualities as did his poetry: his inventiveness, his unconventionality, his commitment to life and to his beliefs, and the great diversity of his interests and ideas.' Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.2.

²⁵ O'Brien, "After Bathing at Baxter's," p.127.

²⁶ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

²⁷ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

²⁸ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

²⁹ Phillips, "Unpublished Manuscript".

³⁰ Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.2.

concludes on similar grounds that what we have in Baxter's work is not theology: 'The theologian will be found to pursue a chimera if he expects Baxter to conform to the conceptual schemata of theology, for although there is much of theological interest it is not of a technical nature.'³¹ If theology must of necessity be systematic, and if Baxter's contribution is of an altogether different character, then it follows that whatever Baxter may be producing, it is not theology.

It is the question of what constitutes theology, and more significantly, how theology should be done, which is subject to current debate. Traditional theology has seen philosophy as the dialogue partner of theology. This is the pre-understanding which leads Tracy to stipulate 'internal coherence' as an essential criterion for the method of theology.³² If, however, the dialogue partner of theology is advocated as human experience embedded in cultural life, then both the methodology and evaluative criteria of theology shift. Schreiter notes that increasingly, 'other ways of engaging in theological reflection' are being utilised.³³ While traditionally, 'theology has been regarded as a scholarly, academic discipline', Bevans argues that 'theology has not always been done discursively, nor need it be done so today.'³⁴ Meta-theology, often seen as originating in the West, has come under the same critiques as have metanarratives, and is regarded by some as another example of covert hegemony.³⁵

Attention has shifted to the possibility of local and less totalising approaches to doing theology:

The time is past when we can speak of one right, unchanging theology, a *theologia perennis*. We can only speak about a theology that makes sense at a certain place and

³¹ James, "Primal Vision" p.246.

³² Tracy argues that the criterion of 'internal coherence' is 'crucial for philosophical and theological self-understanding. Many metaphors, symbols, images, myths, or even concepts are meaningful in the initial sense of disclosive of our lived experience. Yet some of these, once conceptually formulated, do not pass the legitimate philosophical test of internal coherence.' Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* p.70.

³³ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.4.

³⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.12.

³⁵ E.g.: 'Theology done in a foreign way, using non-Asian texts, alienated from the Asian socio-political and cultural-historical contexts, disregarding the Asian experiences and despising without discrimination the richness of the Asian spirituality will be far from the hope of nourishing but, on the contrary, will certainly bring destruction on the integrity of the Asian people.' Archie C.C. Lee, "Prophetic and Sapiential Hermeneutics in Asian Ways of Doing Theology," 1-11 in *Doing Christian Theology in Asian Ways: Atesea Occasional Papers No.12*, ed. Salvador T. Martinez and Alan J. Torrance (Singapore: ATESEA, 1993) p.1.

in a certain time.³⁶

Costas notes that 'long-range universal formulations of the older theologies have had to give way to shorter range, situationally-oriented discourses'.³⁷ While this perception has arisen in non-Western settings, it is pervasive enough to influence continental theologians such as Moltmann.³⁸ Doing theology in historically and culturally conditioned 'local' settings falls under the broad heading of 'contextual theology', and will be discussed in some depth shortly. For the present, it is sufficient to note that the shift in theological method not only supports alternatives to 'systematic' theology, but casts doubt on the validity and acceptability of all attempts at universal or comprehensive theology.³⁹

This change in perspective regarding theological method means that Baxter's approach to theology cannot be discounted *a priori*, simply because it does not fulfil expectations of being systematic, abstract and codified. The 'university model, with its emphasis on clarity, precision, and relation to other bodies of knowledge'⁴⁰ has given way to alternative models. The shift from philosophy to culture as dialogue partner has meant that 'theologians have become increasingly interested in the need to begin theological reflection not with abstract thinking, but at the level of people's lives or cultures - their anxieties, hopes, frustrations, joys...'.⁴¹ The analysis of culturally-bound human experience allows for 'modes of expression other than discursive', raising the possibility that the 'activity of the artist might be a better analogy for doing theology than that of the philosopher or mathematician'.⁴² While it may be agreed that Baxter's methodology is not systematic, it is by no means certain that what he is

³⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.2.

³⁷ Orlando E. Costas, "Contextualization and Incarnation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 29, December (1979): p.23.

³⁸ Moltmann has himself moved away from a distinctly 'systematic' approach to theology: 'By using the word 'contributions', the writer recognizes the conditions and limitations of his own position, and relativity of his own particular environment. He makes no claim to say everything, or to cover the whole of theology. He rather understands his own 'whole' as part of a whole that is much greater. He cannot therefore aim to say what is valid for everyone, at all times and in all places.' *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, (Trans. M. Kohl) San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, p.xii.

³⁹ 'What became clear from these contextual theologies was that the universal theologies that had been presented to them were in fact *universalizing* theologies; that is to say, they extended the results of their own reflections beyond their own contexts to other settings, usually without an awareness of the rootedness of their theologies within their own contexts.' Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* p.2.

⁴⁰ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.4.

⁴¹ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1990) p.5.

doing is not theology. Within the new horizons of the discipline, it may be that he might be characterised as a contextual theologian.

(d) Is Baxter a Contextual Theologian?

James, whose study of Baxter is perhaps the most theologically engaging of analyses thus far, argues against the notion of seeing the poet as a contextual theologian.

Since Baxter was not a theologian it cannot be argued that he has developed an indigenous theology, but his vision is grounded in the source of all theology - the crucible of experience. Through the praxis of faith, worship and community, Baxter, as poet and neither anthropologist nor theologian, reverently, mythopoetically, expressed the primal vision - rooted in the land but true to the eternal - for which he longed.⁴³

This description is remarkable in that it denies the status of contextual theologian at the same time as appearing to endorse Baxter's qualifications for such recognition. The classification of his religious vision as 'rooted in the land but true to the eternal' is a necessary condition of contextual theology.⁴⁴ James' point, however, is that Baxter is primarily by vocation a poet, using mythopoetic methodology, and therefore should be evaluated in such terms. The primary classification of Baxter as poet need not be contested in order to further investigate the nature of his theological significance. Developments with theological method, outlined in a preliminary way above, mean that the work of a poet working *as a poet* may still contribute to a contextual theology.

The new approach to theology embraces human experience as a fundamental source. Such experience can only be accessed by and is of immediate relevance to those who exist within a particular cultural matrix. The group who contribute to this process is thereby extended.

⁴² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.101.

⁴³ James, "Primal Vision" p.253.

⁴⁴ 'Contextual theology is done by people of a certain region aware of and committed to the life of that region, but above all committed to the interpretation of God for their own peoples, which commitment by definition includes other people as well.' M.E. Andrew, "Contextual Theology as the Interpretation of God for the Peoples of a Region," *Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2, October (1988): p.435.

If theology is to take culture and cultural change seriously, it must be understood as being done most fully by the subjects and agents of culture and cultural change. The process of contextualization... is too complex and important to be left to professional theologians.⁴⁵

While the experience of the whole incultured community is of value to theological reflection, Schreiter draws attention to 'the role of smaller groups within the community who actually give shape to that reflection', including such figures as '[t]he poet, the prophet, the teacher'.⁴⁶ If the doing of theology is 'essentially an instance of creativity',⁴⁷ and artists are the 'antennae of the race',⁴⁸ then perhaps a poet may be a theologian of sorts. Song laments that 'poetry has been abandoned by our theologians' and theology has therefore become 'a matter of the head'.⁴⁹ If imagination and passion are to return to the enterprise, he suggests that we must listen to the poets of a culture: 'Throughout the ages poets have been magicians of language, manipulating and exploiting it until it yields glimpses of the mystery of life inaccessible to human rationality'.⁵⁰

But what exactly is the role of the poet in relation to contextual theology? Can a poet as such be construed as a theologian, or merely an articulator of a particular culturally-conditioned subset of human experience? Schreiter raises precisely this question:

The poets in the community, who can capture the rhythm and contour of the community's experience - cannot their work be considered a genuine local theology?

⁴⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.13. Costas claims the essentially local nature of theologising: 'There is no such thing as a timeless or non-spatially related knowledge, since knowledge is a fundamental part of life, which is, in turn, a complex, interrelated phenomenon. Costas, "Incarnation," p.24. Song comments: 'Christian theological activity must, then, take place within a culture with which Christians and theologians are related especially by birth. There is no such thing as Christian theology outside, apart from, detached, set apart from, a particular culture.' Choan-Seng Song, *The Stranger on the Shore: A Theological Semantic of Cultures* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press 1992) p.12.

⁴⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.17.

⁴⁷ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1988) p.263. Hardy agrees that the 'task of theology' is 'to fashion the creative poesis by which it is sung as a hymn of praise to God'. Daniel Hardy, "The Future of Theology in a Complex World," 21-42 in *Christ and Context: The Confrontation between Gospel and Culture*, ed. Hilary Regan and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) p.33.

⁴⁸ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* p.12.

⁴⁹ Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* p.12.

⁵⁰ Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1994) p.113.

Is not some of the more authentic theology, especially that which captures the imagination of the majority of people, to be found in their work rather than in theological monographs or church documents?⁵¹

His answer is that poets have a valuable but limited role; that of herald of human experience. While the poet may be capable of gathering 'symbols and metaphors which best give expression to the experience of a community', it remains true that 'theology is not simply any experience of a community, but that experience of believers coming into encounter with the Scriptures and the authentic experiences of other believing communities, past and present'.⁵² This is a recognition that human experience represents only one side of the theological polarity, and that without some process of correlation with what Tracy calls 'Christian texts',⁵³ what is produced may be culturally reflective but not theologically significant.

While this may be true of poets in general, however, a new dimension is introduced when a particular poet shares Christian faith, and has their work shaped by that faith. In this case, some internal correlation may be presumed to have taken place. Thus James, while discounting Baxter as a theologian *per se*, allows that there are parallels between the work of the Christian poet and the theologian. In describing this relationship, he identifies:

- a common creative tension which strains language;
- a shared use of symbols, in which the 'poet generally appeals to a common tradition while the theologian appeals to a select tradition';
- a tendency on the part of the poet to stretch traditional theological expectations, and;
- a consequent iconoclasm as typical of the poet.⁵⁴

James regards Baxter's methodology as 'mythopoeic' rather than theological in nature. While not specifically defining the term, James draws on the work of Eliade⁵⁵ and Frye⁵⁶ for his

⁵¹ Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.18f.

⁵² Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.19. Schreier adds that 'the validity of poetic insight has to be tested on more than aesthetic criteria or resonance with a community's experience'.

⁵³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* p.43.

⁵⁴ James, "Wineskins," p.31.

⁵⁵ See M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed & Ward 1958), M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* trans. W.R. Trask (London: Harcourt, Brace & World 1959). and M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* trans. P. Mairet (London: Harvill Press 1960).

understanding that Baxter's approach is to be understood as primarily cosmological and myth-bearing. His major point of distinction seems to be that the work of the theologian is a subset of that of the cosmological poet, in that the former works with a more limited 'select tradition'. Thus Baxter's scope is regarded as universal and open-ended, in comparison with the more circumscribed world of Christian theology.

James understands Baxter's methodology, in keeping with poetic artistry, to be 'founded upon the regional, the local and particular',⁵⁷ and grounded in 'the crucible of experience',⁵⁸ while flowing 'toward the open sea'⁵⁹ in terms of religious and mythical significance. In systematic and deductive theologies, the movement is often seen in the other direction, from the universal to the particular. But Andrew for one believes that contextual theology has more sympathy for Baxter's method:

...I suspect that New Zealanders, for example, see concrete examples as the primary material from which to start. Concrete examples can become part of the ground through which regulative principles are formed.⁶⁰

Choan-Seng Song is but one example of a theologian who has adopted this approach, drawing on specific cultural and historical resources to launch his reflection. He argues against the self-imposed limitations of theology.

Images and symbols from daily life are the authentic language of faith. This should not be difficult to understand. After all, faith is a matter of life, not just a part of life called "spiritual", not merely a section of experience designated "religious". Faith has to do with the total life, body as well as soul, matter as well as spirit.⁶¹

⁵⁶ N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* Princeton Paperback ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1971).

⁵⁷ James, "Primal Vision" p.247.

⁵⁸ James, "Primal Vision" p.253.

⁵⁹ James, "Wineskins," p.31.

⁶⁰ Andrew, "Contextual Theology for the Peoples of a Region," p.437. Andrew asserts this against 'European' theology, and in particular Dietrich Ritschl.

⁶¹ Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* p.120. Note also Bevans: 'Revelation does not happen in set-apart, particularly holy places, in strange unworldly circumstances, or in words that are spoken in a stilted voice. It comes in daily life, in ordinary words, through ordinary people. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.16.

There is therefore a valid argument that theology, while it might historically have operated in a demarcated territory smaller in scope than that of the poet, needs to relocate itself into the mainstream of human experience. Thus Tanner points out that theology 'is something that human beings produce' and so 'cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of human sociocultural practices'.⁶² It has already been demonstrated that Baxter favoured the humanisation of Christian faith, and that in his view the 'Christian apologist has to recognize that Karl Barth, or the Council of Trent, have not said the last word about human nature, and that Dostoevski or even Sartre may shed light on our problems'.⁶³ On this revised view of theology, it may be that there is not as much difference between James' understanding of mythopoesis and a culturally grounded contextual theology as may at first be apparent.

Another significant factor in the evaluation of Baxter is that he functions as more than a poet. His own rather grandiose understanding of the poet as 'a cell of good living in a corrupt society'⁶⁴ may encompass all the strands of his life, but it goes beyond conventional expectations of the role. Of particular interest to assessing his theological role is the production of many texts which clearly fall outside the genre of poetry or literary criticism. Many of these have a directly theological character; among them might be mentioned *Six Faces of Love*, the 'Letters to a Priest' series, *Thoughts about the Holy Spirit*, *Walking Stick for an Old Man*, 'A Handbook for the Christian Militant' and *The Flowering Cross*. These are explicit reflections on the interface between Christian faith and local culture, without even considering the theological overtones of *Autumn Testament*, *Jerusalem Daybook* or *Jerusalem Sonnets* (which O'Sullivan characterises as a 'truly indigenous expression of Christianity'⁶⁵).⁶⁶ In the prose texts, Baxter moves beyond his role as an articulator of culture, and becomes an interpreter of faith for his local community. This contribution falls outside interpretations such as Schreiter's of the limitations of the poet in the formation of local theologies.

There is broad consensus on two points. The first is that Baxter works self-consciously in the local cultural context of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Though early in his career he was dismissive

⁶² Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* ed. Paul Lakeland and Kathryn Tanner *Guides to Theological Inquiry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997) p.63.

⁶³ Baxter, "The Creative Mask," p.48.

⁶⁴ Baxter, *Recent Trends* p.18.

⁶⁵ O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.34.

of 'regional' approaches, he was soon convinced that 'a poet or an artist must choose here and now whether he is a transplanted Englishman or a New Zealander... [i]f the second, then he must accept as his own and explore with a free mind our shifting and amorphous modes of living'.⁶⁷ James notes as a strength of Baxter's work 'the way he locates universal themes within the New Zealand situation.'⁶⁸ Through his commitment to experience, his understanding of history and his facility with cultural images and symbols, Baxter is undoubtedly earthed in the local soil. The second is that there is a growing preoccupation with religious themes. His own confession that 'God was his problem; God and the universe'⁶⁹ is a cryptic expression of how central theological issues were to Baxter in the final years of his life.⁷⁰ He brings to bear the fruits of a lifelong immersion in Christian symbols to locate 'the archetypal themes of the Fall and Redemption, Eden and Jerusalem, within the antipodean milieu with its slang, place-names and distinctive 'feel'; making it clear that 'the Universal is never truly universal except it be also utterly particular and contextual'.⁷¹

It is precisely this combination which suggests that Baxter's theological method is essentially contextual. However, the reservations which have been expressed in the preceding material must be allowed to have their weight. There may be little doubt that at times (and particularly in texts such as 'A Handbook for the Christian Militant'), Baxter is engaging in contextual theology, pure and simple. The broader question, however, of whether this makes him a contextual theologian, is subject to the following arguments to the contrary:

- In terms of vocation, Baxter is clearly 'poet' rather than 'theologian';
- While Christian tradition is in constant dialogue with cultural experience in Baxter's work, it is not generally reflected upon critically;
- There is minimal dialogue with other historical or cultural theological endeavours;
- The cultural context in which Baxter operates is blurred because of his adoption of Maori

⁶⁶ W.H. Oliver comments in regard to Baxter's late work: 'Theology permeates the poems...', Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.147.

⁶⁷ Baxter, "Yanz," p112.

⁶⁸ James, "Primal Vision" p.6.

⁶⁹ 'Song for Sakyamuni', CP p.502.

⁷⁰ Note O'Sullivan's recollection that 'As far as I know, all of James K's writing in the last four years was directly concerned with this.' O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.36.

⁷¹ James, "Primal Vision" p.247.

terminology and culture;

- His increasingly troubled relationship with the church undermines his ability to reflect theologically alongside the 'community of faith';
- Baxter's universalising of his own experience is problematic given the extreme nature of his social location; and
- While not disqualified by an absence of systemisation, there is a lack of sustained enquiry evident in his *ad hoc* approach.

Given these apprehensions, it may be more appropriate to stop somewhat short of describing Baxter as a contextual theologian.

Instead, the proposal advanced in this thesis is that Baxter be considered as a primary, original and significant *funder* of contextual theology. The concept of funding as a symbolic resourcing is drawn from the work of Walter Brueggemann, who employs it to suggest the role of Christianity in relation to postmodern imagination. He describes the nature of funding in the following terms:

...to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined. Our responsibility, then, is not a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations.⁷²

To propose Baxter as a 'funder' of contextual theology is to recognise him as a vital contributor to the task of inculturation, but to recognise that that his theological work is preliminary and indicative. It is more than the poetic expression of cultural experience described by Schreier, but less than a self-conscious and accessible contextual theology. This understanding makes it clear that the substantial work of doing theology contextually remains to be done for Pakeha.

⁷² Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993) p.19f.

3. **Baxter's Theological Contribution**

It remains then to assess exactly what Baxter's contribution to the process of contextual theology is. In what specific ways does he fund such engagement and reflection? By way of evaluating this, traditional theological categories will be employed. This is done in recognition that doing so distorts the integrity of the material itself, and is a subtle means of introducing systematisation where none has been provided nor found necessary. It neglects James' warning that theological categories 'can only be formally disengaged or condensed at the risk of violating the works themselves'.⁷³ However, doing so is in keeping with what Hiebert terms 'metatheology'⁷⁴ and Schreiter describes as a new catholicity.

Theology must also have a universalizing function, by which is meant an ability to speak beyond its own context, and an openness to hear voices from beyond its own boundaries... Theology cannot restrict itself only to its own and immediate context; if the message of what God has done in Christ is indeed Good News for all peoples, then the occurrence of grace in any setting has relevance for the rest of humanity.⁷⁵

The use of historically transmitted theological symbols (with due recognition of their Western bias) allows a means of comparison and evaluation of contextual theologies, and in this case will enable assessment of Baxter's insights. The intent is not to change or pollute the integrity of the material already surveyed, but rather to situate it within the broader stream of Christian theology. It may also allow a clearer perspective on what contextual tasks remain to be undertaken within the setting of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

In teasing out Baxter's theological topology, the study will rely on material already surveyed

⁷³ James, "Primal Vision" p.246.

⁷⁴ See Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1994). 'Just as believers in a local church must test their interpretations of Scriptures with their community of believers, so the churches in different cultural and historical contexts must test their theologies with the international community of churches and the church down through the ages.' p.103.

⁷⁵ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* p.4. Stackhouse warns against 'contextualism': 'the dogmatic denial that anything universally true exists', arguing that 'It is doubtful whether only people in a particular context can understand what is true or false, what is just or unjust, in that context, or that others must take what they say in that specific context as indisputable truth.' Max L. Stackhouse, "Contextualization, Contextuality, and Contextualism," 3-13 in *One Faith, Many Cultures: Inculturation, Indigenization, and Contextualization*, ed. Ruy O. Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988) p.8f.

in earlier chapters of the thesis. The extensive tracking associated with that phase of the investigation will not be duplicated here, and such quotes as are employed may be regarded as illustrative of the more detailed analysis previously undertaken.

(a) Soteriology

The starting point for Baxter's soteriology is a primal sense of loss, which is both a personal existential experience, and by extension a universal human predicament. The world is out of joint in some fundamental sense which is beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals to repair. While in keeping with the Catholic doctrine of original sin,⁷⁶ it is important to remember that the experience of loss prefigures Baxter's Catholicism, and is thereby regarded as a category of existence which later finds theological clothing. A vital part of Baxter's sense of primal disjunction is his attraction to the natural order and simultaneous distance from it. He longs for that which is always unattainable: an uncomplicated humanity in organic relationship with the natural world. That which separates him from the object of his desire is a fundamental angst which pervades a lifetime of personal and artistic exploration. Because for Baxter his own pilgrimage 'is either meaningless to me, or else it is mythology',⁷⁷ it is not surprising to find the experience universalised into a necessary component of human life. Typically, the prime requirement for Baxter's theological construction is that it accords with his personal experience.

Nevertheless, his understanding of sin and the need for salvation is broadly orthodox. Baxter's view of the Fall is Augustinian in tenor, with pervasive and far-reaching consequences.⁷⁸ The whole of creation is corrupted by it, and carries the 'odour of mortality'.⁷⁹ All humanity suffers under the burden of separation from both God and the natural realm which God has made, experiencing such alienation in every aspect of existence. There follows a consequent loss of

⁷⁶ '...no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures... Sin is present in human history; any attempt to ignore it or give this dark reality other names would be futile'. Catholic Church, *Catechism* p.86f.

⁷⁷ Baxter, "Education of a Poet," p.122. O'Sullivan comments that Baxter 'could no more *not* think mythically than he could stop talking, or believe that his life was not being acted out on a cosmic stage'. O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.76.

⁷⁸ 'There's no true words a man can tell / But the dirt will be in it / Because the Fall has flattened us / And rammed us in the grit...' James K. Baxter, 'A Ballad for the Men of Holy Cross', CP p.358.

⁷⁹ James K. Baxter, 'Haast Pass', CP p.62.

tribal existence, a distancing from harmonious relationship with the organic world, and an eternal loneliness which seems never to be extinguished. Attempts to bridge the abyss of separation, whether through sex, intoxication or shamanism are ultimately futile. In keeping with Catholic teaching,⁸⁰ Baxter links awareness of sin with the proximity of Christ, but does not expect that redemption somehow relieves humanity of the burden of sinfulness.

The presence of Christ convinces me I am a sinner. I am not aware that he has actually taken away my sins... The longer I stand in his presence, the more convinced I am that I am a sinner.⁸¹

The contextual contribution arises from the specific setting of the condition of sin within the local cultural and historical environment. The universal becomes concrete in Baxter's imagery. The distance from creation is experienced in the Matukituki Valley or Haast Pass or on the banks of the Whanganui River. A lack of communal life is located culturally as suburban exile or technocratic desacralisation or marital loneliness. Spiritual life is characterised by trivial materialism, Puritan moralism and 'the cramp of a lifelong separate pain'.⁸² Historically, Pakeha bear the burden of their utilitarian assault on the land and their record of injustice toward Maori. Politically, the condition of sin is expressed through exploitation of workers, exclusion of the marginalised and the tight regulation of society which maintains conformity. It is in these specific cultured ways that the theological symbol of sin is experienced, and any corresponding notion of salvation must address such issues. For Baxter, as for Liberation theologians, sin 'cannot be encountered in itself, but only in concrete instances, in particular alienations'.⁸³

In his theological schema, Baxter regards sin as of lesser importance than the overwhelming extent of God's love in Christ. He is certain that 'God is full of joy when He looks at us, because He loves us', and merely wants to remove the obstruction of sin so as to 'continue the dialogue of love and joy for ever'.⁸⁴ This is not to trivialise sin, but rather to put it into it's

⁸⁰ 'Only the light of divine Revelation clarifies the reality of sin...' Catholic Church, *Catechism* p.87.

⁸¹ Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

⁸² James K. Baxter, 'Travelling to Dunedin', CP p.366.

⁸³ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.175f.

⁸⁴ Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

proper perspective as a breach of relationship with God.⁸⁵ There is little explicit discussion of atonement mechanisms in Baxter's work, but such indications as there are would emphasise the grace-filled recognition of God's love in Christ as being the transforming power which allows the recipients to themselves express love.⁸⁶ This revelatory understanding allows for a framework of meaning within which human tragedy is shown to be significant rather than pointless:

This is to believe that the suffering of the Lord Christ on the cross gives meaning and value to all human suffering. It is to believe that our suffering is not worthless, not separated from his suffering – because he allows us to be joined to his life and death – that he uses our voluntary suffering, our poor human love, in a redemptive way.⁸⁷

This correspondence between the suffering of Christ and that of humanity is a key aspect of Baxter's soteriology. It highlights his Christian humanism, with its key understanding that human life, when understood theologically, is redemptive. Salvation, in Baxter's understanding, is never a call away from human and earthly existence, but rather to participate in it more fully. In his theological development, he moves from the celebration of religious verities to the discovery of transcendent depth in the midst of common life. This approach might be described as sacramental. His theology, as well as his personal spiritual quest, undergoes a radical de-centring.

When the poet forgot to be a poet, and the religious man could no longer distinguish good from evil - only love from non-love - I found the whole country came into my heart to occupy the larger gap where an ethical code and (I suppose) the desire for personal salvation had been torn out by the roots.⁸⁸

The resulting belief system is universalist in scope, given Baxter's broad view of the

⁸⁵ 'To try to understand what sin is, one must first recognize *the profound relation of man to God*, for only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity as humanity's rejection of God and opposition to him, even as it continues to weigh heavy on human life and history.' Catholic Church, *Catechism* p.87.

⁸⁶ This view falls into the category of 'subjective' views of the atonement, and has some basis in the teaching of Peter Abelard.

⁸⁷ Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

⁸⁸ Baxter, "Talk to Students".

relationship of Christ and his resurrection to humanity.⁸⁹ Salvation is not the unique gift of Christians, but rather a common quality given with humanity, and based on the eternal mercy of God. It is not a thoroughgoing universalism however, because Baxter still has a place for divine judgement, and is not at all confident that he will fare well under it.⁹⁰ This apparent contradiction arises from the tensions of advocating the relentless love of God, while still reserving the importance of human responsibility.⁹¹

In Baxter's view, participation in human suffering is a *de facto* participation in the sufferings of Christ, whether it is recognised as such or not.⁹² This ground of encounter is not merely symbolic, but almost ontological in character. It may be more accurate to describe the *mythological* union of human and divine suffering, with a strong version of myth's actualising power. His view of the atonement is that through the sacrifice of Christ suffering is of itself redemptive; it is not belief which constitutes participation in Christ but sharing in pain and exclusion. Belief and explicit faith act to recognise and uncover the dimensions of an existent reality - the pervasive suffering love of God in the world. This explains Baxter's constant orientation toward the destitute, and his assumption that poverty is grounds for inclusion within the kingdom of God; 'that there is no obstacle between the poor and the mercy of God'.⁹³ The Christian myth colours Baxter's understanding of the structures of existence, so that all of humanity is caught up within it.

Within the setting of Aotearoa-New Zealand, the drama of salvation plays itself out with a cast of local characters. In an inversion of social hierarchy, the central role is given to that assembly of misfits included in Baxter's term 'nga mokai'. Their exclusion from the social community qualifies them for participation in the mercy of God. By their very presence, they become bearers of the image of Christ, challenging society to an indicative response. Baxter's

⁸⁹ 'Christ is in you (not "can be in you") because by his life and death and resurrection he united himself to all men. The assent of the believer is the positive recognition of an already existing relationship. The assent does not create Christ in his soul. That would be beyond human power; and at any rate, Christ is already there.' Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.16.

⁹⁰ See Baxter, "Confession to the Lord Christ".

⁹¹ 'God values before all else in us the capacity for free choice, without which we would be unable to love.' Baxter, *Thoughts* p.27.

⁹² 'But the central icon of the Christian is always the crucifix. For there we see the representation of our own central condition, laid open, made plain, by the image of our God who joined Himself to the destitution of the poor, the sick, the old, and even of the dead.' Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9.

⁹³ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9. Cf. 'Poverty is the door broken in the wall between man and man and man and God.' Baxter, "Talk to Students".

soteriology is peopled by '[t]he penniless, the squalid, the drug-users, the homosexuals, the urban street gangs, the workless and those who flee from work, the alcoholics, the jailbirds, the mental hospital patients, the lonely and despairing old'.⁹⁴ In a special position are Maori. This is due to their twin status as victims of historical injustice, and continued impoverished position. Within the complex map of New Zealand's social structure, they reflect the very visage of Christ and bring judgement or salvation according to Pakeha response. While occupying a lead role as 'elder brother', Maori form one part of the contemporary incarnation of Christ.

The underlying angst which constitutes the condition of sin in the local setting finds a corresponding redemptive mercy at work. But that mercy has a hidden character, to be accessed only by reconciliation with and inclusion of those excluded. Distance from the natural world and tribal life is something which Maori could provide insight on, given that they have maintained a much closer relationship with such sources of spiritual life. The death-dealing materialism and isolation of Pakeha society needs the healing embrace of sharing, community and acceptance which is to found in the heart of the poor. But these gifts of salvation are only to be received through corporate repentance and reconciliation. Where this is not forthcoming, the harder face of the warrior Christ might be unveiled, in the form of militant action against the Pharaohic rule of the Pakeha middle class. Nga mokai are the bearers of divine love and mercy within the culture, but they might become equally the bearers of judgement if rejected. Salvation in the context of Aotearoa-New Zealand is inextricably bound up with the fate of the poor.

None of this should be taken as an indication that Baxter's soteriology contains an entirely realised eschatology. The fact that salvific mercy and judgement are at work within the local socio-political-cultural matrix, does not mean that salvation has been evacuated of fuller content. The kingdom of God is present in a preliminary way through the poor, but not in its definitive and final manifestation, which will only be achieved 'beyond the grave'.⁹⁵ This view maintains an essential eschatological tension, similar to the approach of Gustavo Gutierrez.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

⁹⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". Nevertheless, he explains, 'it begins here on earth'.

⁹⁶ 'Moreover, we can say that the historical, political, liberating event *is* the growth of the Kingdom and *is* a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not *all* of salvation.' Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.177.

It values the salvific significance of response to nga mokai, while not equating this with the whole of salvation. While in Baxter's view there is much which can and must be done to build the fully human society, it remains true that:

God will deify man through Christ. Man cannot deify himself.⁹⁷

The church, in this understanding, consists of those who consciously participate in the myth of Christ, and so understand the economy of salvation. Their role is to both uncover the presence of divine love, and to work as midwife in the birth of the new order.

In summary, Baxter offers a contextual depiction of sin and redemption by recognising both as proximate realities which are encountered within the socio-cultural environment of Aotearoa-New Zealand. It is not simply that the drama of salvation is 'imaged' in culturally and semiotically relevant terms, as might be the case in what Bevans describes as the 'Translation model'.⁹⁸ Rather Baxter finds the concrete experience of loss and alienation as felt by local participants, and correspondingly uncovers a redemptive current active within the immediate cultural and political context. In this soteriology, it is not necessary to relinquish one's unique cultured humanity in order to be caught up in the historically grounded but ultimately transcendent myth of salvation.

(b) Christology

The genesis of Baxter's Christology is, like that of the disciples, the humanity of Jesus.⁹⁹ In unison with them, he uses that humble starting place to develop what can only be regarded as a high Christology:

Jesus is God. The world was made in Christ. And the new creation, the wholly human

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19.

⁹⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* pp.30-46.

⁹⁹ Knox argues that the disciples had no choice but to begin with Jesus' humanity: 'He would have been thought of simply as the human being he was. It would not have occurred to anyone to affirm that Jesus was human, for the obvious reason that it would not have occurred to anyone that he might have been anything else.' John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1967) p.5.

society and the perfecting of non-human creatures, grows like a tree from the root of his incarnation.¹⁰⁰

This deceptively simple declaration incorporates the divinity of Christ, his agency in creation, pre-existence, humanisation, cosmic redemption, eschatology and incarnation. The orthodox polarity of humanity and divinity is maintained by Baxter. It is the humanity of Jesus which makes him relevant, and the divinity which grants him redemptive significance. For all his explorations of other avenues, Baxter's thought is fundamentally Christocentric.

King Jesus, after a day or a week of bitching
I come back always to your bread and salt,

Because no other man, no other God,
Suffered our pains with us minute by minute...

'Autumn Testament (21), CP p.551.

The category of suffering is the organic point of connection between the person of Christ and the humanity of all people. The historical Jesus is characterised as a 'poor man' by Baxter, and that in many ways may be regarded as the poet's definitive title for him.¹⁰¹ The marginalised of the Jewish community understood 'that he was one of them, one of the poor',¹⁰² and this experiential bond has continued down through history. This is at once an act of mutual identification, and an underlining of the theological significance of suffering, through which humanity is redeemed.

Baxter's Christology is essentially kenotic.¹⁰³ The initiative lies with the incarnation, through which Christ makes an act of union with the human condition. This is the highest form of love, in taking on the pain of mortal existence. Baxter explains how the immersion of Jesus in

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.12.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of titles as a means of doing Christology, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* trans. S.C. Guthrie and C.A.M. Hall 2nd ed. (London: SCM 1975).

¹⁰² Baxter, "Madness and Sanity," p.7.

¹⁰³ 'Te Ariki emptied himself by his suffering and docility to the unknown will of Te Matua.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.40. For a study of kenotic Christology both ancient and contemporary, see Knox, *Humanity*.

history creates a current of divine love for all.

Then he goes out to his death in their company - and his manner of dying is such that he does not exclude himself from the pain or the faults of any other member of the human community. It is not virtue as we know it. It is not a process of self-perfecting. It is the expression of a love in which the respect is so great that he is not prepared to rubbish the weakest or the worst of the human race, or take away their freedom. Instead of that, he shares our hell with us and calls us brothers.

As a result, the weakest and worst - to whom I belong - get up and want to die with him - not in order to reach Heaven, no, that is quite irrelevant - but in order to share his pains as he shared ours. Then this love flows out to all men, particularly to those who suffer most.¹⁰⁴

In this indicative statement, it becomes clear that the very act of self-emptying which actualises the incarnation also makes possible and engenders a corresponding approach from those who follow.

The death of Christ has a seamless unity with his life, and makes both his identification with and love for humanity complete and visible. In a declaration redolent of Moltmann, Baxter argues that in 'the face of the Crucified God' we are able to discover 'the key of life and death - the sorrow of man that hides in its ultimate depth the smile of the Divine Liberator'.¹⁰⁵ The exchange involved in the person of Christ is bi-directional. Baxter emphasises not only the sacrificial entry of the divine into the human sphere, but also the consequent entry of humanity into the divine life, under the condition of friendship.¹⁰⁶ The whole of humanity is drawn into Trinitarian life through the resurrection of Christ, and therefore enabled to live out of the love which has been demonstrated. Jesus is thus genuine man, prototypical man, universal man, redemptive man and divine man. In him the tragedy of human suffering melds with the compassionate love of God, redeeming the one and satisfying the other.

¹⁰⁴ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.23.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter, "Central Icon for Christians," p.9. Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* trans. J. Bowden and R.A. Wilson (London: SCM 1974).

The figure of Christ is appropriately contextual. Baxter confesses that 'Te Ariki is God himself',¹⁰⁷ with his breath smelling of 'mussels and paraoa'.¹⁰⁸ He may have been 'only a working man', but 'now he is God on high'.¹⁰⁹ 'Christ is the winter sea whitened by whirlwinds',¹¹⁰ the 'toa',¹¹¹ a 'broad-leaf' giving shelter to the saplings.¹¹² The myth of his vicarious death lingers in familiar surroundings: 'his agony in the mental hospitals, his scourging in our jails, his daily humiliation in our schools and factories, his carrying of the cross of an unwished-for materialism, his crucifixion as the pas die one by one like stars going out in the sky'.¹¹³ Messianic figures include Rua and Te Whiti.¹¹⁴ His resurrection is prefigured in Maori custom,¹¹⁵ and his risen presence may be felt in the sharing of a cigarette.¹¹⁶ His disciples include housewives, call-girls and office clerks,¹¹⁷ and are to be found wherever love is practised.¹¹⁸ Their role is to live his life after him, through a similar process of kenosis giving themselves for the sake of the other. There is a special role reserved for Pakeha - that of cleaning and restoring the Maori face of Christ. In all of this, Baxter, like a literary McCahon, is locating the events surrounding Jesus in the local context, giving them sharper resonance.

Baxter's major contribution to Christology in Aotearoa-New Zealand is the relocation of the Christ figure. In post-colonial religious history, Christianity was associated with foreign and hegemonic interests.¹¹⁹ The significance of Baxter in this context is twofold. Firstly, he takes

¹⁰⁶ 'In a very faint and limited way, I believe He allows us to think his thoughts after Him - to share in that relationship of love which is the foundation and meaning of the whole universe.' Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.8.

¹⁰⁸ James K. Baxter, 'The Maori Jesus', CP p.347.

¹⁰⁹ James K. Baxter, 'Song', CP p.477.

¹¹⁰ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.16.

¹¹¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.7.

¹¹³ Baxter, "Jerusalem Journals".

¹¹⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹¹⁵ Baxter, *The Flowering Cross* p.64.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.42.

¹¹⁷ James K. Baxter, 'The Maori Jesus', CP p.347.

¹¹⁸ Baxter, *Six Faces of Love* p.45.

¹¹⁹ Colless and Donovan note 'a common assumption that the religious life of New Zealand society comes down to the present day from a distant source, distant in time and place, rather like water drawn from an unseen and remote reservoir'. B. Colless and P. Donovan, "The Religion of the New Zealanders," 9-14 in *Religion in New Zealand Society*, ed. B. Colless and P. Donovan (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980) p.10. John Harré notes 'we

Christianity outside the restrictions of institutional ecclesiastical life. His emphasis on humanisation leads him to situate Christ within the broad existential experience of being human, and to make correlations between the suffering of ordinary people and the suffering of Jesus. A strong view of the incarnation causes Baxter to locate the divine narrative within the social and cultural life of the masses, rather than confined within creeds and ceremonies. The second development is to place Christ among the poor and dispossessed, rather than among the wealthy and powerful.¹²⁰ This is arguably a gospel imperative and so radically orthodox, but could hardly be regarded as an historic characteristic of the Christian church in this land. In Baxter, the messianic movement is found outside the social mainstream, with Jesus being identified with groups such as prostitutes, homosexuals, psychiatric patients, alcoholics and drug addicts, Nga Tama Toa and other militant movements. Christology thus becomes a subversive and potentially revolutionary force.

(c) Pneumatology

The developing interest which Baxter has in pneumatology is indicated by his late publication, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit*. This fascination was stimulated by his personal experience of the Pentecostal movement, described earlier.¹²¹ Baxter notes that 'the Holy Spirit gave me peace and the healing of old wounds through the hands of an undenominational pastor'.¹²² The encounter led to the supplementation of his 'simple theology' through the addition of 'a fifth leg to the chair of belief', which he describes as follows:

...that without the power of the Holy Spirit we cannot do the works of mercy that God requires, and that he, the Spirit, must be waited for and supplicated and welcomed when he comes.¹²³

cling to a unity of church and polity with Britain, and our individual identity as a cultural unit remains elusive'. John Harré, "To Be or Not to Be?: An Anthropologist's Perspective," *Landfall* 76, March (1966): p.38.

¹²⁰ 'The church has married herself to Dives our capitalist Pharaoh.' Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹²¹ See Chapter Nine, Section 4, p.252.

¹²² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5.

¹²³ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5. The other four legs are: 'Jesus is God. It is necessary for us to join in the ritual meal and sacrifice. The works of mercy must be done if we are to be united with the Lord Jesus in this world and the next... [and] the European face of Christ should not be allowed to obscure or annihilate his Polynesian face, since the Risen Christ is a spectrum of all races and all cultures'.

In *Jerusalem Daybook*, he maintains that a 'theology of the Holy Spirit is what we need'.¹²⁴

Baxter's awakening to the importance of the Spirit does not lead to a reordering of his theology, but rather to an empowering of it. He comes to see the necessity of divine assistance in the pursuit of Christ.

Baxter's understanding of the Spirit is intimately linked to his Christology. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ at work in the world, and thus is in continuity with the incarnation.¹²⁵ The agenda is that of the messianic movement: 'Wherever justice, truth and mercy increase, it is the work of the Spirit.'¹²⁶ The difference is that the work of Christ has been multiplied, because the Spirit is universally present. Also, the Spirit confers the power for people to achieve that which is asked of them by Christ. The works of mercy, frequently cited by Baxter as an essential accompaniment of faith, cannot be joyfully performed 'without the power of the Spirit'.¹²⁷ The gift of the Pentecostals is to restore this dynamic dimension to the orthodox but moribund faith of churches such as the Catholic. Baxter acknowledges that his own faith includes the category of the Spirit, but that the sacramental conferring of it in confirmation is akin to the planting of a seed without taking care to water it - consequently it lies dormant 'like the grains of wheat in the tombs of the Pharaohs'.¹²⁸

The work of the Spirit is much wider than the territory occupied by the churches, however. In his memorable and expressive analogy, Baxter confesses that the wind of the Spirit blows '[i]nside and outside the fences'.¹²⁹ It is significant that *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* is not only Baxter's major treatise on the Holy Spirit, but also a significant statement about humanisation. There he argues that all humanity contains Christ, regardless of belief. But it requires the nourishment of the Spirit to bring that hidden mystery to life, and bring the potential into full blossom. Baxter distinguishes between a false and genuine humanism, with the valid expression being theologically grounded and self-aware of its genesis in God. While

¹²⁴ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.2.

¹²⁵ 'The death of Christ and his return to the Father releases among men the power of the Spirit'. Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.27.

¹²⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19.

¹²⁷ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* 9.11. 'What God commands he also gives the power to do. It is our first business, then, to demand from him the power of the Holy Spirit', p.28.

¹²⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.12.

¹²⁹ James K. Baxter, 'Song to the Holy Spirit', CP p.572.

not denying the Spirit 'may indeed begin to move in the heart of the one who hopes for miracles from man', he believes that a false humanism is 'ultimately valueless and self-frustrating without the indwelling love and peace and power of the Holy Spirit'.¹³⁰ The picture seems to be one of the Spirit falling like rain on the just and the unjust, and in certain instances bringing germination of the buried seed, which eventually flowers in a loving humanism.

One of the chief ends of the Spirit is the building of community.¹³¹ This is the active expression of the communal love which lies at the heart of the Trinity.¹³² The existence of genuine community is regarded by Baxter as the essential fruit of the Spirit, because it bears tangible witness to the kingdom of God.¹³³ It demands a willingness to relinquish control of individual life and possessions; something that was as difficult for the disciples as for us, and requires a miracle.

The first Christians did not start to share their goods in a free and full manner till after the bomb of the Spirit exploded in their souls at Pentecost. Before then, they would be morally incapable of this free and joyful sharing... To say, "This is ours, not mine," and to carry the words into effect is as much a miracle of God as the raising of the dead.¹³⁴

Once again, the Spirit provides both the inspiration and power to fulfil what Christ asks of humanity. It follows that where people are living in harmony and cooperation, the Spirit is at work like 'a fish that has begun to show its back above the water'.¹³⁵

Perhaps the most comprehensive statement of Baxter's pneumatology is contained, unsurprisingly, in his late poem entitled 'Song to the Holy Spirit' (CP 572). Part of a series of

¹³⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.19.

¹³¹ See above, Chapter Five, Section 5 (c).

¹³² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.33f.

¹³³ 'Communities are seeds planted by Te Wairua Tapu.' Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.7.

¹³⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.11.

¹³⁵ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

Trinitarian 'songs',¹³⁶ the poem is a hybrid of liturgy, theology and devotion. In its six stanzas Baxter uses concrete analogies to refer to various aspects of the Spirit's operation in the world. These may be summarised as follows:

- Freedom & universality: the Spirit blows 'like the wind in a thousand paddocks, / Inside and outside the fences'.

- Gestation & nurture: the Spirit is 'the sun who shines on the little plant', providing warmth, life and growth.

- Refuge & protection: the Spirit is like the 'mother eagle with her young', guarding them in the heights 'above the storms of the world'.

- Revelation & guidance: the Spirit provides the bright cloud (cf. both exodus and transfiguration symbolism) through which 'we know already that the battle has been won', and leads us to 'our brother Jesus / To rest our heads upon his shoulder'.

- Passion & mission: the Spirit is the 'kind fire who does not cease to burn', inspiring and motivating us 'like sparks to set the world on fire'.

- Community & anticipation: the Spirit is 'building a new house' in the love of friends through which the poor are welcomed and consequently 'Heaven is with us'.

This prayer/poem is deceptively comprehensive in its theological construction, and has entered into common currency among New Zealand churches. It was included in the Anglican Church's local revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*,¹³⁷ thereby contributing to the contextualisation of faith in the region.

Baxter's phraseology, relying on analogies within the natural realm, helps to firmly locate the

¹³⁶ See also 'Song to the Lord Jesus' CP p.571, 'Song to the Lord God' CP p.572, 'Song to the Father' CP p.587 and 'Song to the Lord God on a Spring Morning' CP p.591.

¹³⁷ Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa* (Auckland: Collins 1989) p.157f.

work of the Spirit within Aotearoa-New Zealand: the Spirit 'can melt that frost',¹³⁸ lifts spirits 'as the tide does when it rises',¹³⁹ causes love 'to spring up like water',¹⁴⁰ warms us 'as the sun reaches into the dark earth',¹⁴¹ will flash 'like lightning across the sky',¹⁴² blows 'where he wishes to blow',¹⁴³ brings 'the vigorous happiness of a healthy bride',¹⁴⁴ reveals the risen Christ 'like a rainbow in the sky',¹⁴⁵ and makes us 'shine like the noonday sun'.¹⁴⁶

Theologically, the thrust of his pneumatology is to break the cold formalism of religious captivity, and to set the Spirit free to roam widely and indiscriminately in the realm of human activity. 'The movement of the Spirit', he says, 'is always to personalise, localise, sacralise'.¹⁴⁷

In other words, the Spirit actualises the story of Christ within the local setting, making Christianity potent and relevant.

(d) Ecclesiology

Some examination of Baxter's ecclesiology has already been undertaken.¹⁴⁸ It is not necessary to repeat that descriptive and analytical work. However, it may be worthwhile to make some summative comments, and to place Baxter's ecclesiology within the broader spectrum of historical approaches. In doing so, it is essential to specify that it is the late period of his theology which is the focus of attention. Prior to that, he held an unwavering fidelity to the religious institution which had welcomed him, and 'embraced Catholic piety with an uncritical totality'.¹⁴⁹ As late as 1967 he was able to write:

My belief is founded on the rock of the magisterium. Either God gave an infallible

¹³⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.36.

¹³⁹ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.5.

¹⁴⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.9.

¹⁴¹ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.17.

¹⁴² Baxter, *Thoughts* p.22.

¹⁴³ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.45.

¹⁴⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.31.

¹⁴⁵ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.44.

¹⁴⁶ James K. Baxter, 'Song to the Lord God', CP p.572.

¹⁴⁷ Baxter, *Thoughts* p.26.

¹⁴⁸ See above, Chapter Seven, Section 4, pp.201ff; and Chapter Eight, Section 2(a), pp.213ff.

¹⁴⁹ Isichei, "Religious Sensibility and a Changing Church," p.237.

teaching authority to His Church; or else we have our little private notions about Himself and ourselves. I choose to believe that He did give that authority to His Church.¹⁵⁰

Within a few years, however, he speaks of that same church as 'our paralysed paranoid mother' and accuses it of 'standing in the shoes of the Pharisees'.¹⁵¹ The major shift in his evaluation of the church coincides with his act of identification with those who have no connection with the church. It is not that Baxter ceases to be a Catholic in identity; rather that he moves from a position of simple fideism to one of critical reform, operating from the perspective of those outside the faith.

His late ecclesiology is, naturally enough, driven by his Christology.¹⁵² If Christ is a suffering human, then the movement of Christ is to be found in the midst of suffering humanity. Those who are caught up in this movement cannot be recognised by membership in a particular religious institution: '[o]nly God can see its size and its shape'.¹⁵³ The key influences in Baxter's ecclesiology are those of humanisation and universalism. He wants to locate the purpose and identity of the church within the much broader stream of God's interaction with the whole of humanity. In intention, but not in substance, this has similarities with the *Missio Dei* approach to ecclesiology.¹⁵⁴ The fundamental orientation is not to tradition, which might be suspected of being self-serving, but to the discernment of the activity of Christ within the world. This of course must be informed by tradition, but by a critical approach to that tradition. Baxter's ecclesiology is in keeping with that of many other contemporary theologians, who seek to drive back to the early gospel understandings of Jesus as the litmus

¹⁵⁰ Baxter, *The Flowering Cross* p.10.; though first published in the *NZ Tablet* in 1967.

¹⁵¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁵² 'If, for the church of Christ, Christ is the "subject" of the church, then in the doctrine of the church christology will become the dominant theme of ecclesiology.' Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM 1977) p.6.

¹⁵³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁵⁴ 'It is not the church that has a mission to fulfil to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way.' Moltmann, *Church Spirit* p.64. See also Karl Barth: 'First and supremely it is God who exists for the world. And since the community of Jesus Christ exists first and supremely for God, it has no option but in its own manner and place to exist for the world.' Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* trans. G.W. Bromiley vol. IV, 3, pt.2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1962) p.762.

test of authenticity.¹⁵⁵ He seeks a 'deep return to the Gospel realities'¹⁵⁶ which might refresh the church's self-understanding.¹⁵⁷

Even in this more critical phase, Baxter is an advocate of reform rather than revolution. He still holds a place for 'the ritual meal and sacrifice'.¹⁵⁸ He counsels dissident religious to 'remain and fight the battle' within the church, rather than taking the easy option of leaving it.¹⁵⁹ Whatever the institution's many failings, she still 'carries a beautiful child in her womb'.¹⁶⁰ But the level of reform called for by Baxter is radical, at least by the standard of Catholic orthodoxy. He wants to see Mass celebrated in homes, using ordinary bread and wine; 'Let anybody receive the body and blood of Christ who knows that is what it is'.¹⁶¹ And in doing so, the church should not be 'constrained by fetichism (*sic*)', but motivated by 'works of mercy, and the virtues of Maoritanga, and the indwelling love and peace of the Spirit'.¹⁶² Those who are stakeholders in the institution must not allow their vow of obedience to keep them from faithfulness to Christ.¹⁶³ Above all, Baxter desires the breaking open of a 'narrowed and structuralised'¹⁶⁴ church to embrace the tragedies, hopes and yearnings of ordinary people caught up in the tensions of their everyday existence.

Ecclesiologies have often been classified according to various central images, whether these are biblical or drawn from theological interpretations.¹⁶⁵ In relation to such traditional models, Baxter's late ecclesiology would have to be described under the rubric of 'Fellowship of the Spirit'. The essential characteristic of the church of Christ is to be found in the generative

¹⁵⁵ 'God's salvific act in Jesus Christ is the origin of the Church; but it is more than the starting-point of the first phase of its history, it is something which at any given time determines the whole history of the Church and defines its essential nature.' Hans Kung, *The Church* trans. R. & R. Ockenden (London: Burns & Oates 1967) p.14.

¹⁵⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.7.

¹⁵⁷ Baxter advocates that 'we may have to go back in spirit and see the Lord and ourselves through the eyes of men who lived before the council of Chalcedon'. Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.39.

¹⁵⁸ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.5.

¹⁵⁹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁶⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.21.

¹⁶¹ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁶² Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.21.

¹⁶³ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁶⁴ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

presence of the Spirit within it.

The "secret plan" is not a formula of salvation to be repeated by the lips or contained in a book, or, for that matter, to be crystallised in a particular church structure. There will be books. There will be structures. But the plan of God is his work already commenced among us, something that we ourselves are free to experience as co-creators of the new spiritual universe. Truly what we do is done by the Spirit working in us and through us.¹⁶⁶

Baxter argues that once we admit that no denomination can contain the fullness of Christ, 'the word 'church' begins to mean: all Christians and what they may become by the power of the Spirit'.¹⁶⁷ This understanding of the church is common to Pentecostal groups, and Baxter was no doubt influenced by them.¹⁶⁸ But it is also the result of his conviction that Christ is active outside the confines of the institutional church, and his desire to acknowledge this manifestation as belonging to the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁹

In Baxter's understanding, the Spirit stands sovereign over the church. While the charism of the Spirit might be imparted at confirmation, the reality of inspiration is not automatic. It is the Spirit who generates faith, who nurtures growth, who provides sustenance and power for the following of Christ, who enables miracles, who forms communities and makes of them signs of divine love. There is a constant eschatological element to the Spirit's work in the church, which while begun in Christ and continued in communities of faith, is yet to be completed. Nevertheless, something significant is already under way.

We see the people gather, clumsily, narrowly, even at first coldly, to cry out, "Jesus is God", and ask for the power of the Spirit. And the Spirit answers them because they

¹⁶⁵ See for example, Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday 1974)., Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1960). and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press 1954).

¹⁶⁶ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.27.

¹⁶⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant".

¹⁶⁸ Hollenweger notes the Pentecostal desire to downplay the organisational aspects of church life as something of a necessary evil. He entitles his chapter on Pentecostal ecclesiology 'Not an Organisation but an Organism'; Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* pp.424-456.

¹⁶⁹ Baxter warns: 'He chooses whom he chooses, and we dare not deny fellowship to those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus and are filled with the Spirit.' Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.35.

are poor and because they ask. And he gives these poor and feeble men the armour of Christ's truth and love, and the power to heal the sick, and to share their goods with one another, and perhaps to cast out demons... It is my opinion, Eugene, that the Spirit in these days is shifting mountains of despair from many souls and making crooked roads straight for the feet of those who will run to do the works of mercy.¹⁷⁰

For the context of Aotearoa - New Zealand, Baxter's ecclesiology is important for several reasons. Firstly, it broadens the concept of Christian community beyond the confines of religious institutions or historical denominations. In doing so, it enables interaction with expressions of human spirituality and religiosity which are frequently excluded from more rigorous interpretations of church. Secondly, its impetus toward reform and strong Christocentric focus allows for new and diverse forms of church which might be inculturated. Thirdly, as has been established earlier, the grounding of his concept of community in Maori virtues, and particularly that of arohanui, gives his ecclesiology resonance with local history and culture. Fourthly, his identification of Christ at work among the poor provides for a church which is socially and politically active within its own context. And finally, Baxter's consistent emphasis on humanisation locates the church within the universal working of the divine in cultured human experience. The effect is to radically open the church.

What shall we say then about the structure that we too narrowly call the church? One could say we had our chance and missed it, by failing to receive the fullness of the Spirit in whom we already believed. But better to say that the Spirit blows where he wishes to blow.¹⁷¹

(e) Praxis

Though not regarded as a traditional theological category, praxis has become a central element of many contextual theologies, and particularly of Liberation Theology.¹⁷² In broad terms, praxis may be regarded as the theory-laden active pole of the action-reflection

¹⁷⁰ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.45.

¹⁷¹ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.45.

¹⁷² See Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* pp.6-15., who argues that theology as critical reflection on praxis has its roots in the early centuries of Christian tradition.

continuum.¹⁷³ Despite the term's associations with the 'revolutionary' praxis of Marxism,¹⁷⁴ there is no necessary relationship with Marxist thought. Praxis may even be interpreted as referring to the biblical imperative to the 'doing' of faith.¹⁷⁵ In its wider sense, praxis has come to be regarded as a central element of any truly contextual theology, and is included by Schreiter as one of his five criteria for maintaining Christian identity.¹⁷⁶ The term 'orthopraxy', which is used by Baxter,¹⁷⁷ attempts to bring some balance to intellectualised versions of theology by reasserting the importance of living out beliefs in some manifest fashion.¹⁷⁸ In the vivid shorthand Baxter employs:

It is one thing to have ideas. It is another thing to change one's style of life.¹⁷⁹

The last years of Baxter's life, which included the establishment of crash-pads in Grafton and Wellington as well as the community at Jerusalem, are best interpreted as an attempt, however ill-founded, to translate his faith into concrete action. What Parr describes as one of Baxter's greatest poetical achievements - 'to take poetry out of books alone, and make it an actual part of the world: the community at Jerusalem'¹⁸⁰ - is, in a different interpretive scheme, also a major theological achievement. Just as the Jerusalem writings are considered by many to be a distillation of his life's poetic craft, so the physical community might be regarded as the fulfilment of his theological convictions.¹⁸¹ O'Sullivan describes Baxter's 'final form' as that

¹⁷³ Schreiter comments: 'The dialectical process of reflection and action are both essential to the theological process. Theology cannot remain only with reflection; nor can it be reduced to practice. Good reflection leads to action, and action is not completed until it has been reflected upon.' Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.92.

¹⁷⁴ Marx's understanding of 'praxis' is described by Lobkowicz as '...a relatively homogenous human activity which can take on many different forms; it may range from bodily labour of the most humble sort to political revolutions; and it may be anything in between as long as it results in transformation of mind-independent realities which entails a humanization of man.' Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame 1967) p.419.

¹⁷⁵ See J. Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1975) pp.27-41, and Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology* p.66.

¹⁷⁶ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* p.119.

¹⁷⁷ Baxter, "Handbook for the Christian Militant". §10.

¹⁷⁸ Gutierrez suggests that 'orthopraxis' is an attempt 'to recognize the work and importance of concrete behaviour, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life'. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* p.10.

¹⁷⁹ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.1.

¹⁸⁰ Parr, *Introducing James K. Baxter* p.50.

¹⁸¹ McKay comments: 'Jerusalem was an answer to Baxter's own needs, but from its conception it looked well beyond them. It would be a place where certain values could be lived and communicated once a community had been gathered, the tribe of 'Ngati Hiruharama'. That idea was the culmination of his lifelong search for unity.' McKay, *Life of J.K.B.* p.256.

of 'confronting the lovelessness of society with the alternative of Jerusalem'.¹⁸² The poet's gathering commitment to the poor, his exploration of Maori culture as a repository of revelation, his belief in the necessity of the Love of the Many, and his lifelong yearning for Edenic reconciliation with the natural world are all expressed in the concrete social experiment of Jerusalem.

If 'A Handbook for the Christian Militant' can be considered Baxter's 'most concise and distilled theological statement' as has been argued here,¹⁸³ then Jerusalem must be seen as the practical equivalent of it. Baxter himself regards the community as 'an experiment that involves the Love of the Many'.¹⁸⁴ It is of no great significance if that experiment is judged to have succeeded or failed; the import of it is that it was a self-conscious effort on the part of Baxter to translate his theology into action. By so doing, he challenged the materialism of New Zealand society not just with words, but through a living alternative. This is in keeping with the contemporary emphasis on 'doing' theology: 'Theology is concerned primarily with how we live, and only secondarily with theological concepts'.¹⁸⁵ A constant critique of Baxter is the suspicion that he 'stage-managed his life'.¹⁸⁶ By this is meant that many features of his public persona were consciously selected with an eye to their effect. However, one might equally interpret this phenomenon as 'prophetic symbolism' in which Baxter is attempting to make his theological protest visible and effective.¹⁸⁷ Visible poverty, communal living, alignment with the marginalised and public prayer might all be cited as examples of this.

As a contribution to contextual theology, Baxter's praxis demonstrates a commitment to taking theology out of the lecture theatre and into the mainstream of local life. His choice to invest himself in the communal outworking of his faith rather than in academic theological reflection should neither be underestimated nor misinterpreted. Whatever judgements may be

¹⁸² O'Sullivan, *James K. Baxter* p.55. Parr comments: 'It is my conviction that Baxter's deep commitment to the alleviation of social injustice and unhappiness and their consequences for individuals led him directly to Jerusalem, where he sought an alternative to the causes of evil and suffering in modern Western secular society, as he understood them, and where he put into practice his concept of a 'humanist Christianity'. Parr, "Earth Lamp" p.80.

¹⁸³ See above, Chapter Eight, Introduction, p.211f.

¹⁸⁴ Baxter, *Thoughts About the Holy Spirit* p.41. Oliver says of Jerusalem: 'It was to be more than a refuge for troubled young people; it was to be a demonstration of a good society...' Oliver, *James K. Baxter* p.132.

¹⁸⁵ Darragh, *Ourselves* p.32.

¹⁸⁶ O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.83.

¹⁸⁷ See Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.66f.

made of it, the decision was a considered one.

It is one thing to propose a philosophy. It is another thing to try to found a tribe.¹⁸⁸

It means that it is not possible to separate his faith from his poetry or his living.¹⁸⁹ The last years of his life reflect a complex expression in word and deed of a theological orientation toward life in a particular and historically conditioned society. One of the signs of his success is the continued public profile of his work and his life, and the way in which both have introduced theology into cultural conversation, in places where the church is not normally welcomed. Another is the way in which he connected Christianity with social and cultural themes of the land, both through commentary and involvement in political and social action. In such ways Baxter earthed theology as a local, living and transformative force.

4. Conclusion

The brief survey of Baxter's major contributions to contextual theology indicate that he must be considered an important figure in the development of Christian theology within Aotearoa-New Zealand. While it may be necessary to stop short of describing him as a 'contextual theologian', it is possible that he might be considered the single most significant contributor to the establishment of a genuinely contextual theology for Pakeha. O'Sullivan's contention that Baxter has produced 'the first great statement of what we could call a truly indigenous expression of Christianity'¹⁹⁰ is at least worthy of consideration. The methodology employed by Baxter is unusual in historically orthodox terms, but as has been demonstrated, is consistent with contemporary approaches to local theology. His way of doing theology, enmeshed with poetry and social experimentation, makes it less accessible to those who have in the past regarded theology as their private domain. But if Brueggemann is right that 'poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality',¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Baxter, *Jerusalem Daybook* p.45. Baxter expresses frustration with cerebral theology: 'A few words - salvific, kerygma, eschatology, semantic - the words make sense, no doubt, but multiplied by a thousand they cover a great deal of paper.' Baxter, "Letters to a Priest (I)".

¹⁸⁹ 'Among other things, this means one cannot draw the usual boundaries between a man and his work, or say "this is a literary matter, that a religious, that third a personal". O'Sullivan, "Two Baxters or One?," p.84.

¹⁹⁰ O'Sullivan, "Prophet," p.34.

¹⁹¹ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.45.

then perhaps there may be a hopeful modelling in Baxter's work. Certainly it is a theology which has engaged the general population in a way that few other religious writers have achieved.

The final section of this chapter has attempted to show that Baxter's theological explorations may be mapped in relation to some of the broad historic themes of Christian theology. By locating them in relation to other expressions of the faith, it becomes apparent what direction his contextual theology moves in, and thus what specific and unique contributions he makes in funding the ongoing local task. There is the implicit dual recognition that Baxter is in continuity with orthodox Christian reflection on faith, and that he provides a culturally distinctive voice within that debate. Baxter's theology stands thus as a guide toward the contextual task, and a challenge to continue it.

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