The War on Terror in Ruatoki

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Abstract
This article offers some theological reflections on a recent episode in Aotearoa (New Zealand) in which a Maori community housing an alleged terrorist network was subjected to a police raid. Many innocent people, including children, were caught up in the raid thus bringing to mind other episodes in New Zealand's history in which Maori have been subjected to police and state aggression. These episodes provide a starting point for reflection upon public theology and the limits of state power, upon the nature of forgiveness, and upon the offering of public apologies for past offences.

Keywords
Ruatoki, Rua Kenana, Maungapohatu, public theology, forgiveness, apology, war on terror

On the morning of 15 October 2007, the quotidian calm of Ruatoki, a small settlement in New Zealand's North Island, was shattered by the invasion of scores of armed police intent on flushing out members of an alleged terrorist network who, it is claimed, had been staging military style training camps in remote areas of the region. According to police, the raids in Ruatoki and at several other sites around New Zealand were the culmination of a year-long surveillance campaign that discovered and monitored the training camps. Seventeen people were arrested in the raids, the most well-known of whom was veteran Maori activist Tame Iti who grew up in Ruatoki and has lived most of his life there. Police allege that Iti was preparing for an IRA style 'war' on New Zealand with the goal of establishing an independent state within the bounds of traditional tribal land.

1) I am grateful to the Rev Wayne Te Kaawa for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.
Ruatoki itself lies in the heart of the Urewera, the heavily forested hills and mountains that are home to the Tuhoe, one of the tribes or ‘iwi’ of Aotearoa’s (New Zealand’s) native Maori people. Tuhoe is one of several iwi that did not sign the Treaty of Waitangi, an instrument by which, in 1840, five hundred Maori chiefs agreed terms of colonial settlement and governance with the British Crown. Precisely which rights of governance were ceded to the British Crown by the Maori signatories remains a matter of dispute, but as far as Tuhoe are concerned, they have never ceded to the Crown any right of sovereignty over their lands and people. Any concessions to government demands, particularly in a series of land deals around the turn of the nineteenth century, were granted with great reluctance in face of considerable and unreasonable pressure. Tuhoe acquiescence, furthermore, was ‘rewarded’ by the Crown’s unjust confiscation of further lands not included in the original deals.

On 15 October, during the police raid, the region between Ruatoki and Taneatua, a neighbouring settlement, was closed off by police roadblocks precisely at the confiscation line that marks the Crown’s illegal seizure of Tuhoe land. All traffic approaching the roadblocks was stopped, vehicles were searched and the occupants were questioned, often at gunpoint. Among the vehicles stopped was a bus carrying school children. While police spokespersons have denied it, the driver of the bus reports that the bus was boarded and searched by police carrying rifles. Whatever the veracity of that testimony, no one disputes that the police raids caught up many innocent people, including children, who were subjected to a siege upon their community by heavily armed police dressed in riot gear.

The raids, conducted under the aegis of the ‘Terrorism Suppression Act’, involved three hundred police in an operation spanning several other New Zealand locations, but only in Ruatoki was the area closed off, and only there were ordinary people going about their lawful business subjected to the ‘stop and search’ operation of the police. Four people were arrested in Ruatoki and thirteen at locations elsewhere in New Zealand. Search warrants were executed under the Firearms Act and the Terrorism Suppression Act. News quickly spread to other parts of the world that New Zealand police had apprehended members of a terrorist network predominantly comprised of militant Maori ‘rights activists’.

The New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark, who had been briefed in advance of the police operation, defended police action and attempted to indicate the seriousness of the situation by alleging that those arrested had been training with firearms and napalm. To date, eight weeks after the raids, no credible evidence of the use or possession of napalm has emerged. Media
reports indicate that four firearms were seized in the raids, one of which was an air rifle seized from the home of a pensioner, whose house was ransacked by police during his absence. The four firearms were seized from a community reliant on hunting as a food supply, although one of the four firearms was a semi-automatic military style weapon. Other evidence of terrorist activity so far made public is sketchy and unconvincing. Meanwhile, on 8 November 2007, the Solicitor General of New Zealand declined to support prosecutions under the Terrorism Suppression Act because of inadequacies in the legislation. Various prosecutions under the Firearms Act currently remain before the courts.

For Tuhoe people the raids have refreshed bitter memories of similar police actions in the past. In the late nineteenth century Tuhoe were subjected to police tactics designed to starve out the ‘fugitive’ religious leader Te Kooti, who, though not himself Tuhoe, had taken refuge in Tuhoe territory. Shortly after these police actions the confiscation of Tuhoe land began. Then, in 1916, police raided a peaceful religious settlement at Maungapohatu, arrested the leader of the community, Rua Kenana, and killed Rua’s son and one other of his followers. Rua was charged with sedition and eventually sentenced to nine months in prison. Rua’s career as a religious leader had begun in 1904 with a series of visions following which he issued a series of prophetic utterances about the restoration of Maori sovereignty under his leadership. Rua gained a ready hearing amongst Tuhoe still suffering the hardships inflicted upon them by the police pursuit of Te Kooti and by their reluctance to acquiesce to colonial claims over their land. Rua drew heavily on the Christian Scriptures in forming an account of his own identity as the ‘Maori Messiah’, the ‘brother of Jesus Christ’, the ‘Holy Sprit’ and a new ‘divine incarnation’. Gathering about him a community of followers, Rua led his people into the remote interior of the Urewera and established the ‘New Jerusalem’ under the shelter of Tuhoe’s sacred mountain, Maungapohatu. While not intended to do so, Rua’s actions, combined with his religious rhetoric, succeeded in further irritating a New Zealand government that had long found Tuhoe to be somewhat troublesome. Clearly, Rua would have to be suppressed. A strategy was devised to strip Rua of the ‘mana’ or esteem in which he was held by his people. A first campaign against Rua charged him with selling alcohol without a licence, an offence for which Rua served three months in jail. Far from stripping him of his ‘mana’ however, the arrest and imprisonment were interpreted by his followers, with

\[2\] Rua’s repeated attempts to obtain a licence so that he could regulate the sale of alcohol among his community had been denied by the authorities.
Rua's encouragement, as the inevitable persecution and suffering inflicted on the Messiah.

Government and police disquiet at the flourishing of Rua's settlement continued and in 1916 new charges of sedition were laid against him. The charges referred to Rua's consistent proclamation of a future for Maori freed from the strictures of colonial governance, but the more immediate basis was Rua's opposition to the enlisting of Tuhoe men to serve as soldiers in the First World War. In both cases Rua's actions and pronouncements were perceived as a threat to New Zealand security and the rule of law. That perception, along with the remoteness of Rua's settlement which was accessible only by foot or on horseback, fuelled considerable speculation about the magnitude and nature of the threat. 'By early 1916, rumours were spreading all over the country that Rua was arming his followers. He was said to possess a machine gun and to favour a German victory' in the war in Europe.3 In response to the rumours, Rua invited a Minister of the Crown to visit the community at Maungapohatu 'so that he could see for himself its peaceful nature'.4 Rua said, 'I want to draw your attention to the fact that the policemen have lied throughout. They said that I had machine guns and cannons when I did not'.5 The invitation to the Minister was not taken up. Instead, seventy armed police raided Maungapohatu, arrested Rua and, as reported above, killed two members of the community.

That episode is now widely acknowledged in New Zealand to have been a shameful abuse of state power. It offends not just against Tuhoe sensibilities but is rated, alongside Pakeha precipitation of the prejudicially named 'Maori Wars' of the 1860s and the invasion of Parihaka in 1881, as a paramount example of Pakeha aggression against Maori.6 It is not difficult to see why

4) Ibid., p. 88.
6) Parihaka was a Maori settlement in Taranaki led by Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi. The 'threat' these men and their community posed to the crown was a desire to remain on their ancestral lands. Drawing upon Christian teachings and ancestral Maori wisdom, both men were committed to non-violence. When, in 1881, an army of fifteen hundred militia and armed constabulary invaded the settlement they encountered two thousand members of the community sitting quietly on the ground and a band of children who greeted them with singing. Te Whiti and Tohu were arrested and led away, and in the following months the village was destroyed and livestock killed. Lands were confiscated and some Parihaka men were imprisoned for up to eighteen years without trial.

Tuhoehue, along with many other New Zealanders, see stark parallels in the recent raid on Ruatoki. The terror inflicted, for which the Crown has so far seen no need to apologize, is a far more troubling feature of the police operations that day than the terror allegedly suppressed.

The day after the Ruatoki raids, Wayne Te Kaawa, a Presbyterian minister and descendent of Rua Kenana, wrote an open letter to the Presbyterian Church, appealing for support for the traumatized community at Ruatoki and urging assistance in protesting the actions of the police to the government.7 Those of us who took up that challenge called on the government to apologize for the police actions. Without prejudice to the legal processes still to be conducted, it was argued that the manner of the raids was grossly out of proportion to any real threat posed by the training camps in the Urewera, and that the impact of the raids upon innocent bystanders was wholly unjustifiable. It was also pointed out that, in light of the history briefly outlined above, the actions of police were highly inflammatory. The letters of protest from members and parishes of the Presbyterian Church were supported by public statements from the Anglican Church. A runanganui or ‘parliament’ of the Maori strand of the Anglican Church passed a resolution expressing shock at the Ruatoki raids and concern for the ‘trauma, fear, terror and humiliation experienced by the Tuhoehue people’.8 It called upon the government and police to apologize to Tuhoehue and to the people of Ruatoki in particular. In a speech reported in the public media, Archbishop Brown Turei, Anglican primate and head of the church’s Maori stream, states, ‘This is Pharoah and the Hebrews in Egypt all over again. Acts of suppression are the instruments of the powerful to bring the people into line with an acceptable system’.9 And further, ‘Moses said: “Let my people go.” Maybe we can say: “Leave our people alone”’.10 Although many Presbyterians were involved in protesting the actions of the police at Ruatoki, it was decided, following advice from local Maori, that the National Church Office, the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Moderator of the Maori Synod would refrain from making public statements on the matter. As the church most closely associated with the Tuhoehue people, the Presbyterian Church as such refrained from public condemnation of police action in favour of playing a leading role in efforts to work toward reconciliation.

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7) Wayne Te Kaawa’s great-grandfather was the son of Rua who was killed in the police raid on Maungapohatu in 1916.
9) Ibid.
10) Ibid.
between Tuhoe, the police and the government. Work toward this goal continues behind the scenes. The church has also been heavily involved in the pastoral care of those caught up in the raid on Ruatoki, including some members of the police force who were personally unhappy with what went on.

All of this work by the churches, both the letters and statements of protest and the efforts to achieve healing and reconciliation, constitutes ‘a collaborative exercise in theological reflection on public issues which is prompted by disruptive social experiences that call for our thoughtful and faithful response’ and is thus an instance of public theology as defined here by William Storrar.11 In what follows I propose to extend that theological reflection in two particular directions; first by considering public theology as a challenge to unlimited state authority, and secondly, by considering what might be involved in the issuing of public apologies for past wrongs.12

Public Theology and the Limits of State Sovereignty

However questionable, from an orthodox Christian perspective, might be some of the theological claims made by the religious leader, Rua Kenana, they constitute, nevertheless, an interesting form of public theology.13 Rua drew heavily on Rabbinical themes in the construction of his theological vision. He saw his people as a new Israel, subjected to oppression and bondage as were the original Israelites in Egypt, and he styled himself as their Messiah.14 His visions on the mountain of Maungapohatu were likened to Moses’ visions on Mount Sinai. He constructed a box containing a large Bible which became the

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13) Despite the unorthodox nature of Rua’s theology he gave his blessing to and allowed land to be provided for the establishment of a Presbyterian School and Mission House at Maungapohatu. The relationship with the Presbyterian Church was strengthened over the years. Rua entrusted the teaching of doctrine to the several Presbyterian ministers successively stationed at Maungapohatu, and to the Reverend John Laughton who, with Sister Annie Henry, established the mission and eventually led Rua’s funeral service. The *tangi* or ‘period of mourning’ itself was attended by large numbers who gathered in expectation that Rua’s prediction of his own resurrection would be fulfilled.

14) He named his community, ‘*Te Iharaira*’ (the Israelites).
new Ark of the covenant and for which a covenant house, often referred to as ‘Rua’s temple’, was built at Maungapohatu. He explained to an audience at Pakowhai that, [t]he people were now living in bondage and he had come to deliver them… Rua went on to say that Adam had two children—Cain and Abel—Cain being the pakeha [white man] and Abel the Maori. And so it is today that the pakeha continues to attack the Maori’. Rua’s construction of his new movement followed very closely upon biblical precedent. A key text for him was Isaiah 62:4 from which he took the name Hephzibah for himself, rendered in Maori as Hepetipa. Isaiah 62:4 reads: ‘You shall no more be termed Forsaken,/And your land shall no more be termed Desolate;/But you shall be called My Delight is in Her [Hephzibah],/And your land Married [Beulah];/ For the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married’. This is a small sample of evidence, to which much more may be added, suggesting that Rua saw himself and his followers as repeating Israel’s story; a central feature of which was allegiance to a Lordship other than that of those who would oppress them.

It is this alternate allegiance, with the accompanying denial of any claims to absolute sovereignty by the ruling political authority, that is the especially salutary feature of Rua’s public theology. The proclamation of an alternate authority, whether implicitly or explicitly, should be, I suggest, a central characteristic of public theology. The authority of the state is not absolute and theology, of all disciplines, is best placed to say so and to present in the public sphere a conception of how human life might best be ordered under an authority not of our own devising. Rua gathered from the authority of the biblical texts a conviction that the good ordering of human life meant liberation from oppression and the realization of a new form of community referred to in the Bible as the New Jerusalem and coming kingdom of God. Rua set about making that vision a reality for his people. It is not surprising that the New Zealand government of the day decided that such efforts were seditious. All public theology is seditious in the sense that it sets forth an ordering of things that is based not on the authority of the state but on the authority of God. Rua’s error, Christianly conceived, was that he identified divine authority too closely with his own person, but his challenge to the authority of the state bears strong resemblance to the prophetic character of the biblical texts upon which Rua’s vision was based.

15) Te Pipiwharauroa, C (July 1906), 6, tr. Merimeri Penfold, as cited by Binney et al., Mihaia, p. 29.
16) This and all subsequent biblical citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
There are occasions in the biblical narration of Israel’s story in which confrontation with political authority becomes quite explicit. The book of Daniel, for instance, narrates the story of the intentionally typological and exemplary figure of Daniel, who holds fast to the faith of Israel despite insistence from the political authorities that he submit to their dictates. Daniel’s story is the public manifestation of an alternate allegiance, told to the Israelites precisely in order to encourage their faithfulness to Yahweh in the face of demands upon them that challenged that allegiance. Daniel, the exemplary hero, challenged successive political authorities, who demanded conformity to statutes that constrained his freedom to live faithfully before Yahweh. That theme has a long heritage in Israel dating back to Moses’ confrontation of Pharaoh with the demand for liberation of God’s people. It reappears in the New Testament as well, not least in the story of Jesus’ birth as it is told in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew crafts the story of the nativity in order to make clear that with Jesus’ birth a conflict of authority is looming. On one side is a child born in Bethlehem and proclaimed to be ‘king of the Jews’ (Mt. 2:2). On the other side is Herod, a man of brutal reputation, and a big spender intent on impressing Caesar from his remote outpost of the Roman Empire. Herod’s pretensions to absolute authority were threatened by the spreading word that in Bethlehem had been born a new and rightful king of the Jews. Matthew heightens the political tension by citing the prophetic text: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the country of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel’ (Mt. 2:6). The crux of the story comes with Herod’s instruction to the wise men to return after they have found the child, and bring news to him of where Jesus may be found. To whom will the wise men pay homage? That is the dilemma whose poignancy, also for the reader of the gospel, has been finely crafted by Matthew. That this is a matter of public importance is stressed by Matthew’s further remark that when Herod heard the news of Jesus’ birth he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him (Mt. 2:3).

Public theology, then, and in our own time, involves the proclamation of another Lord, and a denial of the absolute authority of the ruling political power. The conflict of authorities will not always be as stark as it appears in Matthew’s birth narrative, of course, and, while the deliverances of public theology may sometimes be directed towards cooperation with the state, if they are genuinely to be instances of public theology, then their basis will be found, as Rua Kenana understood, in the authority of the biblical witness to a God whose purposes for human life have a superior claim upon us than any that might be demanded by the public institutions of our day.
Uneasiness in the face of a perceived challenge to the authority of public institutions might account, I suggest, for the heavy-handed response to the activities of disaffected Maori in Ruatoki and in the wider ‘nation of Tuhoe’. An especially worrying feature of those raids is that the catching up of ‘innocents’ in state efforts to quell the threat seems to have troubled the present government in New Zealand no more than it troubled Herod in his determination to assert his kingship in Palestine.

Dealing with the Past

A second issue arising from the recent raids upon Ruatoki and its rekindling of concern at past injustices is the manner in which a society attempts to deal with the past. As noted above, many who wrote letters to the government protesting the actions of police called for an apology to be issued to the people of Ruatoki. The apology could well extend to the Tuhoe people as a whole who are together in the conviction that they have been violated once again. I propose to explore here what an apology might entail.

The issuing of an apology entails, in the first place, that a wrong has been done. It involves, indeed, an acknowledgement of that wrong, an acknowledgement, that is, of the truth. Apologies are issued by those who have faced up to the truth about the past and who have given up trying to rewrite history in their own defence. An apology, secondly, presents to those injured by past wrongs a set of options about how they may move forward. It presents them with the option to accept the apology and thus to forgive the wrong that has been done, or to reject it, and so to remain committed to the settling of scores. In these matters the Christian gospel has important things to say, for the gospel has at its heart the story of a truth being revealed, of a past being acknowledged and forgiven and of a future opened up that the wrongs of human history had hitherto precluded.

In the drama of divine forgiveness played out at Calvary we see, first of all, a laying bare of the truth of things. Human pretension and evil are exposed—the political pretensions and evil of Herod, the religious pretensions and evil of the Sanhedrin and those other devout ones who brought Jesus to trial, the popular pretensions and evil of those who bayed for blood, and the military pretensions and evil of those who mocked and spat and finally drove the nails. The pretensions and evil of all human history come to their end there at the ‘place of the skull’; and they end with death. That is the truth laid bare at Calvary and it is on account of this truth-telling that the crucifixion of Jesus is
spoken of in Christian tradition as an exercise of judgement. To judge is to declare what is true. At Calvary the truth of human history is told.

But it is not yet all the truth. For, besides the truth of human pretension and evil, there is another truth at work in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the truth of God’s loving persistence with a people who have done wrong. The repentant centurion’s confession of faith, recorded in Mark’s gospel, that the man crucified at Calvary was after all the Son of God (Mk 15:39) is that gospel writer’s affirmation that Calvary can only be understood aright when it is recognized that it is God himself who bears the full weight of human pretence and sin. God’s forgiveness of his creatures, the persistence of his love, comes at the cost of his bearing their fault. God remains faithful to his promise to dwell with his people even where they do their worst. The gospel writers in their various ways accent the opportunities Jesus had during his ministry to withdraw from that commitment. Matthew and Luke tell of the temptations in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13); Mark does so more briefly (Mk 1:12–13). Matthew and Mark report the possibility presented to Jesus by Peter that he should avoid the way of the cross (Mt. 16:21–3; Mk 8:27–30). John has Jesus contemplate another road that would save him from the hour of the cross (Jn 12:27)—a story more extensively told in Matthew, Mark and Luke (Mt. 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk. 22:39–44)—and each of the synoptic gospels reports the challenge to Jesus to come down from the cross (Mt. 27:40; Mk 15:30; Lk. 23:35) and thus to abandon the thoroughgoing acceptance by Jesus of a place at the side of sinners. The irony of the mocking cry that Jesus should save himself were he truly the Messiah of God (Lk. 23:35) is that the true Messiah is not in the business of saving himself, but rather of saving his people. The cost of the forgiveness thereby accomplished is Jesus’ bearing in his own person the death that was due to them.

Here is a first central feature of what forgiveness entails. Forgiveness does not mean an agreement to forget. It means, rather, a commitment by the party offended against to go forward without all scores having been settled, and thus to bear the cost of the wrong that has been done. The alternative, of course, is persistence in the effort to settle scores. Hannah Arendt argues that the desire for revenge is grounded in what she calls ‘the predicament of irreversibility’.17

We cannot undo the past. What is done is done, and the inability to rerun the events of the past engenders in those offended against a desire to give an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Yet forgiveness brings an end to that escalat-

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ing spiral of wrong. It is the courageous declaration on the part of the injured that ‘the evil stops with me; I will bear its cost’. As Miroslav Volf has put it, ‘forgiveness breaks the power of the remembered past and transcends the claims of affirmed justice and so makes the spiral of vengeance grind to a halt’.18

In the case of past wrongs committed against Maori in Aotearoa (New Zealand), forgiveness thus means, if Maori are willing to offer it, the laying aside of a desire to get even and the bearing of a cost. This reality bears on the often discussed question of whether apologies may be offered and forgiveness granted for wrongs committed by and against generations long gone.19 It is commonly claimed in public debate that the present generation has no cause to apologize for wrongs committed by their forbears, nor is anything owed to the present generation descended from those offended against. However that claim fails to recognize the spiral of bitterness and mistrust in which successive generations are caught up or the cost that is borne by succeeding generations of the wronged.

Quite straightforwardly, for example, the illegal confiscation of land from Maori in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has benefited succeeding generations of Pakeha and disadvantaged succeeding generations of Maori. We Pakeha New Zealanders cannot extract ourselves from that reality by claiming that it was not us who confiscated the land. Again, we may reflect, the excessive reaction to the training camps at Ruatoki may be, in part, an effort by Pakeha to suppress the uncomfortable reminder that injustices remain current, and an effort too, to quell any suggestion that there might be scores to settle yet. The setting up of the police roadblock in the Ruatoki valley precisely along the line where land confiscation began was a bitter reminder, whether intentional or not, of wounds inflicted that have not yet been healed.

A second feature of the reality of forgiveness, again in evidence at Calvary, is the opening of a future that had been precluded hitherto by events of the past. Precluded especially by past offence is the peaceful coexistence of perpetrator and victim. Peace is precluded, that is, if the relationship between the two parties is now determined by the desire to settle scores. Forgiveness is the

giving up of that ‘just’ claim, precisely for the sake of peace. The claim is ‘just’ on a model of justice represented in the image of balanced scales; the model of justice with which human society generally operates. Yet such a model is called into question by the biblical understanding of the justice of God. The ‘balanced scales’ model of justice presumes that justice is done when the scores have been settled, but the biblical model is directed towards the establishment of right relationship. Love and mercy are key instruments of justice in biblical thought, alongside the truth-telling that sometimes includes the expression of outrage and wrath at atrocities committed in the past. It is these instruments of truth-telling, love and mercy that hold promise for the restoration of right relationships and for the construction of a future in which the past is truthfully remembered but is no longer determinative of the possibilities that now lie open. Forgiveness, we have noted, ‘breaks the power of the remembered past’ and opens the way to a future in which the past is not held against us.

Forgiveness involves, thirdly, the recognition that the past is irreversible; things cannot be made as they were. The slain followers of Rua cannot be brought back to life and the trauma inflicted on children at Ruatoki cannot be undone, at least not within the constraints of our historical existence. The one who forgives, therefore, accepts, as we have noted above, the burden of bearing those scars for the sake of reconciliation and peace. Christianly understood, however, such acts of forgiveness constitute an anticipation of that day when, as the Christian Scriptures put it, every tear will be wiped from our eyes and suffering and death will be no more (Rev. 21:4). Those who forgive according to the command of Jesus Christ to love your enemies and forgive those who transgress against you have consented to the present being determined, no longer by the wounds of the past, but by a new future gifted to us by God and inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. An end to suffering, the restoration to life of those who have been slain, and the healing of all wounds is part of the Christian hope. Plainly enough, that hope has not been realized yet, so forgiveness involves, in the meantime, the consent to live with wounds neither avenged nor yet healed.

The Christian language used here may not on every occasion be the language of public theology, but these are the theological grounds for Christian advocacy of the practice of forgiveness in public life.²¹

²⁰ Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, p. 212.
²¹ By ‘public theology’ I mean here the content of Christian faith expressed in the public square.
The Plea of the Offender

It may seem arrogant for me as a Pakeha New Zealander and beneficiary of injustices committed by Pakeha in the past, to set out what is required of Maori should they choose to forgive; but I have approached the matter this way so as to make clear what we Pakeha are asking for should an apology be issued for the raid on Ruatoki and for the wounds of history that the raid brought freshly to mind. Apologies have been issued for some of the injustices of New Zealand’s history and significant gestures of reparation have and are continuing to be made. The past is irreversible, however, and so, whatever gestures of reparation may be made, peace and reconciliation will continue to depend on Maori being willing to bear the wounds of New Zealand’s history without seeking revenge. Apology entails truth-telling; in this respect it entails an acknowledgement that the price of reconciliation is a price paid, for the most part, by those offended against.

The process of public truth-telling about New Zealand’s colonial history began in the 1950s, but it did not begin seriously to disturb Pakeha consciousness until the establishment of the ‘Waitangi Tribunal’ in 1975. The Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body set up to hear Maori claims about past injustices and to make recommendations to government about how gestures of reparation might be made. While much remains to be done, over the thirty years of its existence the Tribunal has contributed significantly to a ‘radical reinterpretation’ of New Zealand history. Too just one example of such revision, the ‘Maori Wars’, noted above as prejudicially named, were increasingly recognized to be a ‘justifiable reaction [by Maori] to Pakeha fraud and aggression’. In 1982 the Chairwoman of the Church and Society Commission of the National Council of Churches explained that:

These wars are now more properly referred to as the ‘land wars’ as the term ‘Maori Wars’ suggests that the struggles over possession of the land were somehow the fault of the Maori people. The truth is that the Pakeha settlers, determined to force Maori to give up their land, provoked them into taking up arms in defence of what was rightfully theirs and then proclaimed them to be in rebellion against the Crown.

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23) Sharp, Justice and the Māori, p. 4.  
As might have been anticipated, the truth-telling facilitated by the Waitangi Tribunal and by others has not met with universal approval. Not all Pakeha New Zealanders are willing to face the truth of colonial aggression and injustice. One troubling lesson to be learned from the 2007 raids on Ruatoki is that while the Crown and the New Zealand police may claim to have heard and to have assented to the ‘radical reinterpretation’ of that history, that hearing and assent has not, in this case at least, saved them from a perpetuation of past offences. It must be frankly admitted, however, that despite good intentions, and serious efforts made by some to face truth and offer apology, all Pakeha participate to some degree in the perpetuation of offence. In face of this perpetuation, the overwhelmingly pervasive response of Maori has been gracious tolerance, forgiveness and acceptance. It is perhaps not well known, given the widespread showcasing of Maori culture through the haka performed by the New Zealand rugby team, that the haka has its place in an elaborate protocol of encounter with strangers and visitors that is directed in the end to an extraordinarily warm and generous practice of hospitality (*manaakitanga*). The hospitality offered to Pakeha is a further instance of Maori willingness to bear the cost of past (and present) offence for the sake of reconciliation and peace. The gestures of hospitality call forth, without fanfare, Pakeha acknowledgement of what these gestures cost; as discussed above, they are an expression of the Maori commitment to strive for the establishment of right relationship without all scores having been settled.

The biblical injunction is apposite here: ‘From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be expected’ (Lk. 12:48). Maori hospitality with its implicit gift of forgiveness, will, over time, we may hope, issue, first, in a strengthened resolve among Pakeha to engage in truth-telling and ‘truth-hearing’ both about the past and about the present bearing of costs, and secondly, in a renewed commitment to strive with Maori towards right relationship in the future. A deeply moving story of how one colonial landowner has engaged in this process of reconciliation in a setting similar in some respects to the New Zealand situation is told by Camilla Cowley, a farmer in the Australian outback. Cowley tells of her encounters with the indigenous Australians, who were once the owners of the property she now owns:

Learning the truth of the past brought with it a feeling of guilt that I had gone so far in my life completely unaware of what had happened in my area and oblivious to the repercussions still being felt today. I was unaware of the hurt still being visited upon the descendents of people whose history was changed forever with the advent of the white explorers... There were so many stories. In listening, my
guilt overwhelmed me as I regretted, so late in the day, not knowing, not caring and not trying to do something sooner. One of the greatest gifts I have been given by the traditional owners has been their forgiveness of my ignorance and their assurance that all that matters is that I am now trying to walk with them.25

Cowley’s story reveals the central features of what is involved in offering apology for wounds inflicted in the past; those features are the telling of truth and the hearing of truth, the acknowledgement that successive generations of those offended against continue to bear the cost, a humble and humbling acceptance of what forgiveness entails and a willingness to walk a new road in the company of those who have borne the burden of past injustice. These are the gestures and the commitments now required in the wake of the ‘War on Terror’ at Ruatoki.