



# Indigenous Relationship Ecologies

## Space, Spirituality and Sharing

A lecture prepared for Church Missionary Society UK's Pioneer Mission Training Programme, 1<sup>st</sup> Year MA Students.  
Delivered on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021 via Zoom.

Asked to present on the subject of an indigenous Christian approach to the environment for a post-graduate Anthropology class, this lecture provides something of a personal approach to the issues. Videos concerning environmental change and water care issues, featuring members of the indigenous tribe that Jay belongs to were edited and leveraged as talking points for the lecture. Links to the full-length videos are provided in this article version. Taking the time to view these powerful first-hand account videos first will ensure that the commentary and reflections make sense in context. The lecture weaves a narrative around the videos, focusing on the significance of space, spirituality and sharing from an indigenous perspective of an integrated (or wholistic) approach to environmental concerns and touches on some pertinent theological issues that arise.

**Video 1:** the first 1 minute 10 seconds of: <https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/kei-hea-nga-tuna> (the rest of the video is worth watching but other narratives are used in its stead for this lecture).

The singer in Video 1 was Suzanne Murphy, an elder in my tribal family singing a waiata (song) unique to our hapu (our family group) that laments the disappearance of the tuna. Tuna is the Maori word for eel. The disappearance of the migrating eel mirrors the disappearance of the tribes people as many of us have been scattered to the four winds, away from our tribal lands, to make our way in a globalised world. Implied by the song is a lament for the disappearance of our ways of knowing, our epistemologies, because of imposed colonial dominance from the Global North (predominantly, but not exclusively, England).

### Prelude

As I considered what I might share with a group of missions students for an anthropology course, I figured they would have had their fill of missiological and theoretical debates—at least from the global north perspective. So, I chose to share something deeply personal to me in the hope that it would generate some helpful conversation over our time together, towards a healthier perspective for them as they engage in God's mission alongside people like me—a participation in the gospel that I deeply appreciate.

#### ***A Problem with (Traditional) Anthropology***

In his book, *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission*<sup>1</sup>, Jackson Woo (an Eastern name appropriated by a white American, albeit one with years of experience in China) goes to great pains to argue that it is possible for a Westerner to read the Bible with Eastern eyes. After setting up something of a strawman, he posits that,

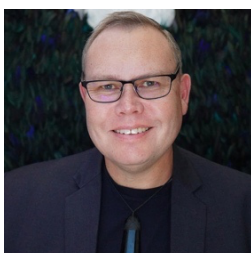
people are not born with cultural perspectives. They are learned and adjusted over a lifetime. Various

experiences and relationships shape one's view of the world.

This is a woefully inadequate, positivist, perspective of how people and cultures develop in a particular space over the course of many generations. Lacking both spiritual and genetic insight, it is a perspective found wanting throughout Woo's otherwise helpful hermeneutic. (And, don't get me started on the horrid terminology that is "honour/shame". I readily concede that indigenous people are honour-oriented people but adding "shame" to the identifier is DIShonouring to us as people. It is a misnomer based on flawed anthropology, long since dismissed yet perpetuated in missions anthropology today.)

Toward the end of his book *Soul, Self, and Society*<sup>2</sup>, Michael Rynkiewicz argues that for our post-colonial and post-modern context,

The anthropologist and the missiologist make an epistemological choice: to participate while observing, and to observe while participating in order to have the best chance of understanding the



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meaning, feeling the emotions, and discerning the values of an event.

In other words, he argues that you can no longer pretend to be a detached analyst, you must be a participant to understand people.

From the outset, I am drawing my line in the sand. I contend that you will never fully understand another people, no matter how much time you invest nor how much you participate. You can only ever approximate an understanding in degrees of superficiality and, at best, your involvement with them will hybridize you into a more mature intercultural being. To fully understand, to incarnate if you will, you would need to be born into that group, blood of blood. People are indeed born with cultural encoding. Anyone who thinks anything different is living a supremacist fantasy, considering themselves superior to those they are seeking to understand or at least presuming to understand more deeply than they do.

This is a danger deeply inherent in anthropology, which is why I recommend to Bible colleges that I'm involved with that they drop the subject altogether. Instead, I suggest they embrace and teach sociology and engage with decolonial and emancipative ethnographic and research methodologies that have since developed under that discipline. It is my opinion that missions studies desperately needs to move on.

Here is a great rule of thumb: "Nihil de nobis, sine nobis". In English that Latin translates to: nothing about us without us. This is the perspective of the indigenous, to whom traditional anthropological analysis from the outside has done great damage, and for whom such perspectives are considered reprehensible. Do not presume to speak without our participation or on our behalf. The indigenous are more than capable of speaking for ourselves, we only require the space for our voice to be heard and the willingness for others to listen and learn.

So. Having stated where I stand, let me bring you into my world and show you around a little.

## Introduction

The topic of this presentation is "Indigenous Relationship Ecologies". What I will do is intersperse some commentary around video clips of several of my tribal cousins, my whanaunga, speaking of our peoples' relationship to our tribal river, the Ruamahanga, (in which I was baptised as a new believer in Christ at the age of 16), our larger lake, Wairarapa, and the smaller inlet lake, Onoke.

And now I greet you all...

Kia tau te aroha noa ki a koutou me te rangimarie, he mea na te Atua na to mātou Matua, na te Ariki hoki, na Ihu Karaiti. (Grace and peace to you all in God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.)

E nga Rangatira i hui hui nei. Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa. (Very respected participants, I greet you all very warmly.)

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. (Three times greetings to you all.)

Kō Jay Matenga ahau, ki te iwi Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa moana, a te tonga o te ika a Maui. (I am Jay Matenga, primarily of the Māori tribe: Ngāti Kahungunu of lake Wairarapa—at the lower end of the North Island of New Zealand, among other tribal affiliations.)

Tihei mauri ora! (This is the vital life force!)

For this presentation, the vital life force is mediated to us through Colossians 1:15 & 17:

Ko ia nei te ahua o te Atua e kore nei e kitea atu, ko te whanau matamua o nga mea hanga katoa.

(He [the Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.)

No mua ano hoki ia i nga mea katoa, nana ano hoki nga mea katoa i mau ai.

(He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.)

I write as person that is indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand. I am Māori by my father's line, whose father, my paternal grandfather, had only Māori heritage. But I was raised in the home of my mother and stepfather, both of European descent. I was educated as a white person under my stepfather's surname, which I held for the first part of my life.

That I was a white person went without question due to my fair skin tone and stepfather's surname. That I am instinctively Māori has long been a source of confusion for me, and those who have suffered to work with me! But I've come to embrace my hybridity.

The narrative surrounding me discovering my indigenous roots is a complex one, the stuff of soap operas, and it is beyond the scope of this presentation. Suffice it to say, it involved African colleagues recognising that I thought more like them than my Western colleagues, and them encouraging me to track down and get to know my biological father and learn of my Māori heritage. That I did, and among many other wonderful things, I discovered that we could recount 22 generations, back to the waka (canoe) that first brought us to Aotearoa New Zealand from the Eastern Pacific islands over 700 years ago.

This is my location. This is the lens through which I see the world. Intuitively indigenous and Western educated. Yet, my visceral sense of things indigenous—my values and innate philosophies, have caused me to consistently question what I was being taught. What my teachers and most fellow students accepted as reality, I could not accept. It did not easily fit how I saw the world. I found myself consistently asking, “but why?” and “who says?”—“why does it have to be this way and who says it’s this way and not another way?” Largely because I could intuit alternatives.

I identify as an indigenous person, as a Māori; and I identify as a follower of Jesus the Christ. I am first and foremost Māori. And, as Māori, I follow Jesus. I think this is a critically important perspective. I never cease to be genetically what I am, and I bring that into my faith experience. Even more importantly—I bring my genetic and ethnic identity with me into local expressions of the covenantal community that all followers of Christ belong to, by virtue of our allegiance to Him. My genetic privilege is not something to be used to hold power over others but invested in kenotic service for others.

There is a prevailing myth among followers of Jesus from the Global North, that we should give up our ethnic or cultural identities to follow something called “the Biblical culture”. According to some, this is backed by the Apostle Paul, who said to the Galatians that there is no longer a difference between one culture or the next, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one—but what they refer to as a “Biblical culture” is more often than not their interpretation of Biblical culture. Besides, Paul was speaking of giving up power and dominance, not our genetic identities. In Christ, we cannot cease to be who we are ethnically, any more than we can cease to be our biological gender. We remain male or female (unless you put in the hard work to change it) and, more permanently, we remain Māori or English, Welsh, Irish, Scots, or whatever. What we do with the privileges attached to who we are is the point Paul impressing upon the Galatians.

No. There is no globally homogeneous ideal for followers of Christ. Our unity does not demand uniformity or conformity to another’s ideals. The New Testament speaks of unity in diversity, a unity in constant tension. Just like you cannot find a harmonic note on an instrument string without tuned tension, so you cannot have relational harmony in community without tuned tension.

Identifiable diversity in the faith is a given. At the consummation of all things there remain distinctly different nations, tribes, people, and languages. These diversities remain as gifts from God. God manifests

uniquely through every cultural expression in the world. There is neither one that dominates nor one that should not be allowed to shape the global Body of Christ.

As a Māori follower of Christ, the blessings I receive from God via my indigenous heritage and perspective, I bring into His global covenantal community as blessings to be shared—to add to our collective knowledge of God, in biblically authentic ways.

But I need to make it known that what I share here on our brief journey together are not the opinions of the organisations I work for or represent. It is, however, my contribution to a larger conversation I am having within my spheres of influence. Because it is who I am, and it is my offering to the global community of Christ followers.

As already noted, I will intersperse some commentary around video clips featuring a number of my tribal cousins, my whanaunga. These videos tell of our peoples’ relationship to our tribal river, the Ruamahanga, our larger lake, Wairarapa, and the smaller inlet lake, Onoke, along with the creatures that traditionally found their habitat there, tuna (or eels) in particular.

As the narrative develops, I will draw out some observations about the significance of space, the spiritualities revealed through our relationship with space, and conclude by drawing our attention to the importance of sharing what we develop in those spiritually-charged spaces, to enhance our relationships with other inhabitants of the space and, especially, visitors to our space or as visitors to other spaces.

## Space

When I speak of space, I refer to a locality. A habitat. An interconnected ecosystem of living beings in complex multiple ecologies, including spiritual beings. In other words, a domain. Although, I hope I never give the impression that humans are free in any way to take dominion over the domain. We are co-habitants, not masters of our space.

To introduce my space, the land and waterways of my forefathers and the region I grew up in, here is some historic perspective of how our space was disrupted by the coming of the English settlers and colonial government.

The speaker is one of the kaumatua (senior elders) of our sub-tribe, and therefore one of my whanaunga (relatives), Haami Te Whaiti. I expect you’ll get most of the meaning of the Māori words from the overall context.

**Video 2:** the first 2 minutes 55 seconds of: <https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/tuku-rangatira>.



My forebears were quite the entrepreneurs, leasing grazing land to the new settlers from England and Scotland with their herds of sheep. We basically lived on a flood plain and thrived off the land and waterways, moving as necessary with the seasons.

But the settler farmers needed dry land, so they eventually lobbied the government to reroute the Ruamahanga river and shore up its banks to avoid flooding. Furthermore, the outlet by the sea, at the mouth of lake Onoke was forced open during the season when the spit naturally closed, so flood waters could flow unhindered into the sea, protecting their farmland and stock but disrupting an important ecosystem.

The combination of flood controls and intensive farming have almost destroyed Wairarapa Moana, the large lake that sits between the river and the smaller lake at the ocean's entrance.

This industrial imposition created more certainty for the farmers as regards their pasturelands, but as we'll see in a moment this anthropocentric dominance of space had devastating effects on our natural habitats and our people.

I'm not sure if you noticed, but in Video 2 Haami spoke of ownership of the lake being questioned. Here he is forced to use the language and knowledge systems of colonial settlers, deferring to Global North constructs around land usage. Private ownership is not typical in indigenous ways of knowing. But it is endemic to Western thinkers.

Think about how much of the English language is dominated by concepts of ownership. Words like my, mine, ours, yours, his, hers, all strongly suggest ownership unless otherwise indicated by modifying context. It's not for no reason they are called "possessive" pronouns. Western thinking is dominated by possession.

For indigenous people, or for Maori anyway, pronouns have an implicit communal meaning. Tōku for instance, is transliterated into English as "my", as belonging to me. But it's actually the reverse. Tōku maunga, "my mountain", does not mean the mountain somehow belongs to me or that I have a rightful claim on it. It means that I belong to, am from, and find my rootedness in that mountain, that awa (river), that roto/moana (lake/body of water). I don't own it, I belong there.

Haami laboured the fact that the lake was not sold, but it was gifted by collective agreement of the chiefs, with the full expectation of adequate reciprocity. Ours was a sharing and gift economy. In a half-hearted bid to quiet a decade of protest concerning the lack of reciprocity, the settler government conceded to award our tribe some

land 430kms north, up on the volcanic plateau. It was arid and salty. Nevertheless, my grandfather eventually joined the migration away from the lake lands to wrestle these new lands into something more habitable and profitable for our people.

In something of a miraculous story of land reclamation, they eventually did so, but it was not without deep and long-lasting cost to our people. The settler government's poor attempt at reciprocity basically tore the heart out of our tribal community. That is the story behind the waiata or song I opened with by Suzanne Murphy: where have all our tuna, whanau and kaupapa, all our eel, family, and values, gone?

There is a great deal of lament around the loss of our habitats, our economy, and our sense of cohesion as a people. It is all part of an industrial system of fragmentation and dislocation. Our story of colonial settlement is nowhere near as grievous as it was for many other tribes and peoples, but it was destructive, nonetheless. Agreements made in good faith turned bad. The industrial economy that accompanied colonial settlement created unfettered consumption that proved devastating to the environment.

## Spirituality

Our people bought into industrialisation, thinking it was the pathway to prosperity, only to realise it was a costly, unattainable mirage. The systems were out of sync with our souls and like most indigenous people around the world, it proved a fast track to poverty. Our passions and preferences are not wired for Western pursuits and pace. And now that the world is finally realising the horrific costs of industrialisation there is a scramble for alternatives. Indigenous knowledge, rooted as it is in integral harmony, can offer solutions, but more often than not it is being extracted and appropriated once again for others' gain.

This next clip speaks of the unanticipated impacts of industrialised changes to our waterways. My whanaunga (relative), Rawiri Smith describes a traditional baby blessing ceremony at the meeting point between two waters. He mentions the "oriori," quite a long song specially crafted for a baby that sings over the infant a purpose for his or her life. It's like a lullaby that guides the child through their life, creating a deep sense of belonging and purpose for them within the tribe. Although he mentions it, don't be too quick to equate this with or appropriate it for infant baptism. There is a spiritual aspect to it that Rawiri glosses over a bit, but the point I would like you to notice is how the rerouting of the waterways in the 1960's affected a way of life that,

according to Rawiri, has a direct correlation to our peoples' sense of dislocation, depression and poverty.

**Video 3:** All 7 minutes and 35 seconds of: <https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/tohi>.

I hope you noticed the fully integrated approach to wellbeing in this clip—the spiritual, social, psychological, and economic aspects, all intimately interconnected with the environment.

You may have missed it, but Rawiri spoke of the “mana” of the waters that met in confluence. Mana is the sum of the manifest attributes of life within all things. It is the most obvious reason for honour and esteem for all things, including human beings, the source of their value. For Māori, one's mana is currency. Our character, talents, personality, and preferences, when recognised by the community is ascribed to us as mana. Mana is the manifestation of “mauri,” the life force within all things. Living beings like us have mana that is sourced in “mauri ora,” the mauri or energy that animates or gives life (ora) to all living beings. Maori have this exclamation, “tihei mauri ora!” which acknowledges this animating life force. I used it earlier, prior to reading Scripture. In this way I acknowledge the life force represented in, and mediated through, the words of our Bible.

When I mention this in most Western theological or missions contexts, I am immediately confronted with negatively charged accusations of animism. Animism has become a derogatory term in missions and theology, associated with pantheism (the worship of spiritual entities inhabiting creation). What they usually mean, by extension, is the worship of the created order. But that is an illogical leap. A relationship with something does not need to imply worship. Although, we could argue that some Westerners have a worshipful relationship with their material wealth, or pets, etc. If anyone wants to talk about syncretism, the other term that arises when I speak of indigenous spiritualities, let's start there shall we?

Worship requires a level of allegiance where the worshipper becomes subordinate to and in some ways controlled (constrained or compelled) by the object being worshipped, seeking that object to work supernaturally on the worshipper's behalf. For followers of Christ, the only acceptable worship is of God, as revealed to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who graciously works for our good.

Furthermore, animism is a construct of evolutionary thinking from the mid 19th century, which informed the emerging disciplines of anthropology and the erroneous concept of the evolution of religion. It proceeded to corrupt our theologies and it still strikes me as bizarre how readily this concept has influenced

the missiology of the “modern missionary movement”. Just consider the words of CMS Missionary William Gairdner, 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to Egypt, who said that animism refers to “the religious beliefs of more or less backward or degraded peoples all over the world.” Reading this as an indigenous person, this horrific explanation speaks for itself. For the sake of the gospel worldwide, the concepts behind animism need to be cancelled. Witchcraft and idolatry remain biblically and morally reprehensible for followers of Jesus but interpreting the knowledge and relationships of indigenous people through the corrupted lens of “animism” does our spirituality and understanding of the Creator a grave injustice.

Relating to material reality with the assumption that there is a spiritual dimension (aliveness) to that reality is entirely compatible with Scripture. Jesus was not being poetic when he said the very stones would cry out if the people didn't. The wind and waves obeyed Jesus because they recognised and responded to His authority. He clearly had a relationship with the created order, and as the Colossians passage I read earlier indicates, He still does. Furthermore, made as we are in the image of God, so do we.

On the contrary, as the late Owen Barfield contended, it is divorcing material reality from its spiritual source that is aberrant. It is the industrial person that becomes the ultimate idolater when the Creator is removed from creation and creation is reduced to its materialistic utilitarian value. Objectifying creation in this way opens it up to abuse... and we are now reaping the consequences of that abuse.

In contrast, let's see how our indigenous spirituality is seen from Riki Ellison, a brother from another mother (a Māori from a different tribe). He speaks very quickly so you might miss it. He starts off referring to indigenous values, establishing the need to recognise the rights of the water and look after its health as you would a person. In fact, in Aotearoa New Zealand we are increasingly awarding legal rights of personhood to living environments, like the Whanganui River and the Urewera Forest. This is as much a spiritual recognition as it is a conservationist one.

Along the way, Riki mentions the “wairua”, spirit, of a place; “te mana o te wai”, the mana of the water; and “Papatuanuku”, the earth mother with “Ranginui”, the sky father, as mythical personifications of the land/earth and sky/climate.

**Video 4:** All 2 minutes and 13 seconds of: <https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/te-mana-o-te-wai>.

You might have noticed all the presenters thus far have mentioned a concern for future generations. This is a



core heart motivator or passion for Māori, as it is a deep concern for indigenous peoples worldwide. Rather than accumulating for ourselves, our focus is on investing in and sharing with those who will follow us. My childhood was spent with my cousins exploring, swimming, and camping out along the riverbanks that surrounded our town of Martinborough in my tribal lands of the South Wairarapa; some of which are now mostly bone dry due to viticulture, dairy farming and intensive olive groves draining the water table.

This next clip recalls a moving spiritual experience reinforcing this concept of preserving the ability for future generations to experience life in the well looked after natural habitats around us. Let's consider Sam Ludden's life changing encounter.

**Video 5:** 4 minutes and 22 seconds from 9 minutes 44 seconds into this 20 minute video:

<https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/whakapapa-korero>.

Sam describes something of a transcendent experience he had that future generations may not be able to experience due to the degradation of our waterways and related habitats.

What are we to make of these sorts of relationships with the water and its inhabitants from a theological perspective? Where does Jesus fit in this narrative? Is this compatible with an authentic biblical perspective? Can the spiritual awareness of indigenous peoples become part of their gospel and a blessing to the nations?

These are the sorts of questions that arise from anyone with a missional concern. For me, as a leader in the global missions community, the answer is a resounding yes! It not only can, but it is a necessary perspective that will enable global Christianity to grow beyond the toxic limitations of Global North epicurean hermeneutics, otherwise known as the industrial Evangelical orthodox consensus (with a hat tip to N. T. Wright for pointing out such limitations).

But let us be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I am the Director of the Global Witness department of the World Evangelical Alliance after all. The consensus needs a tune up but not a complete replacement. For me, as an indigenous person, a life allegiant to Christ is good news indeed. The Lord has liberated me from the whims of spiritual forces and destructive relationships. I can choose differently, act differently, freed by the Holy Spirit. My life in Christ calls me to a higher purpose, to a sense of responsibility for all of God's creation while remaining submissive to Christ as Lord, following the lead of the Spirit of God, and maintaining mutually submissive relationships with those who form the covenantal communities I participate in.

Living with a constant awareness of the spirit realm around us is not an imagined state of being for indigenous people, it is our lived reality. It is built into our intuition. As you can see from these video clips, it emerges in our daily lives as passions and preferences, values and customs, that guide all our relationships in life—the whole of life.

These issues are beyond the scope of this presentation. I need to now bring this paper to a close by looking at the issues of mutuality and reciprocity—of the concept of sharing.

## Sharing

The ultimate purpose for this presentation is to help catalyse a new perspective of missions with you. A perspective that shifts us away from an impositional superiority and towards invitational service. From dominance and extraction to deference and reciprocity. From an industrial epistemé (ecology of knowing or knowledge domain), to an indigenous epistemé.

That is not to suggest it is possible to leave one behind and adopt another, but rather to meet in the middle, in the 'ecotone' of two domains. Because in that shared space, where we counterpoint our voices, it hybridizes us all in the process over time. For Christians, with the Holy Spirit involved in the transforming process, as Paul indicates in Romans 12, we conform to the image of a global Christ in this space.

Again, a discussion of theologies and epistemologies is beyond the scope of this presentation, but I conclude with a final word from my close cousin, Mahia Mikaera, who laments the state of our lake now, after it was shared with the government and returned ruined.

**Video 6:** 2 minutes and 37 seconds from 17 minutes 20 seconds into this 20 minute video (same as Video 5): <https://www.lakestoriesnz.org/whakapapa-korero>.

Mahia mentioned an obligation to be guardians of our habitats. This sense runs deep in the psyche of Māori. The word we use for guardianship is "kaitiakitanga", from the root "tiaki", which means to look after, nurture, care, protect, conserve, safeguard or save. Translators of the Māori Bible quite rightly interpreted Genesis 2:15, where the man was placed in the garden to tend and watch over it, as "hei tiaki". It is also what God does to our hearts and minds as we live in Christ Jesus, keeping us in perfect peace (Philippians 4:7, from Isaiah 26:3).

Sidenote: with thanks to the work of Ruth Valerio, I now try to avoid using the term "stewardship" to represent our divine charge to tend creation. Ruth rightly argues that stewardship implies a relationship above or superior to living creation, separate from it

rather than seeing ourselves as a part of creation. Stewardship should be a term reserved for managing inanimate materials. See Ruth's rationale for this in a blog post here:

<https://ruthvalerio.net/bibletheology/why-we-are-not-stewards-of-the-environment/>.

Guardianship is an important role that only indigenous or local people can play. Visitors can participate, but the task lies with the locals. Guardianship carries an authority that is granted through successive generations of dwelling in and becoming a part of a space and its spirituality. That authority carries a responsibility for the care and wellbeing of that which we are charged to nurture. This is as much an important leadership perspective as it is a creation care perspective.

I developed this idea further in a presentation I prepared for SIL Asia Pacific earlier this year called *Centring The Local*, which is available in the articles section of my website <https://jaymatenga.com>. In concert with the likes of Lamin Sanneh, Andrew Walls, Todd Johnson, Gina Zurlo and others, I agree that the global church grows indigenously. Missionary activity may act as a catalyst but churches that endure are those indigenously rooted in their locales and/or connected with their history as a people.

Missionaries may not be able to incarnate into another culture, but the gospel can. With this in mind, I argue that the indigenous people must become the guardians of the gospel in their domains, resulting in the emergence of indigenous theologies. In effect, this is a form of local self-determination. But it cannot be a siloed one, it must remain Biblically authentic and in conversation with Scripture, global Church history and the contemporary Church worldwide.

This is where an indigenous sharing perspective can inform our missiology for the future of missions beyond

## Conclusion

We have come a long way. You cannot hope to ever understand the world of another people fully, but you can share in it. Hopefully what I have presented here nurtures within you a deeper dimension of humility and sensitivity as you prepare to enter alien spaces, the lived realities of people not like yourselves.

In addition, I hope that the glimpses I gave you into my space will help you appreciate the need for a spiritual approach to creation care, that sees us intimately interconnected as part of the created order, not separate from or superior to it. The scope of this presentation did not allow me to develop a biblically based theology of creation and explain how the concepts of life-force fit with that, but it remains a critical piece of the puzzle not yet well developed in environmental theologies.

Finally, I hope that me sharing a more personal perspective will encourage you to share with others, receive from them, grow together in the counterpointed conversations, and increase your understanding of what it means to participate in God's mission with mutuality. Therein lies the pathway to Christ-centred transformation and maturity as disciples.

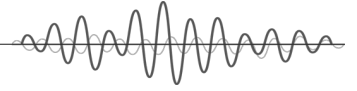
Now, go into all the world, be mutually fruitful and multiply. Amen.

industrial colonialism. Embedded in Māori culture exists concepts like "manaakitanga", which literally means to lift up or elevate the dignity or honour of another person. Manaakitanga manifests as hospitality and generosity—of welfare for others and sharing, not just for the tribe but also for the visitor. This is motivated by the principles of "awhi" and "aroha". Awhi means to surround or embrace, and it has protective, nurturing implications. Aroha is our Māori word for loving kindness and grace. It is the deep affection we desire to see in all our relationships.

Other indigenous cultures have similar concepts, for example in Southern Africa it's the concept of Ubuntu, for the Cherokee Native American it's Gadugi. They represent a deep commitment to safeguarding the community through cooperative responsibility and sharing.

Mutuality is another way of speaking of the shared life. It is an expression of love, trust, and commitment. It is a shared life, but not technically a generous life. Bijoy Koshy, the International Director of Interserve and a dear Indian friend and colleague, has questioned whether generosity is a biblical concept. He argues that for us to be generous we first need to own something. It needs to be our possession before we can give it away. Generosity, therefore, is predicated on the concept of ownership.

However, if the Bible says that all we have is God's, then we really own nothing. We are, at best, guardians of what God has given us: responsible for its welfare and the welfare of others. Therefore, we cannot be generous because it is not ours. We can only share what God has provided us with. That may sound like semantics, toying with definitions of English words. But words describe reality and I believe what Bijoy was articulating is a biblically affirmed indigenous perspective.



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<sup>1</sup> Woo, Jackson. *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission*. IVP Academic, Downers Grove IL, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Rynkiewich, Michael. *Soul, Self and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World*. Cascade Books (Wipf & Stock), Eugene OR, 2012.