

*The 'idyllic' South Pacific - The mythology exposed.
What public role (if any) for the churches in the search for
God's
peace and justice in paradise?.*

This is a very humbling moment. Thank you Rex, Greg, Jonathon for your very kind invitation for me to be here and for your care of me along the way.

This has been an astonishing conference, both in its original visioning and in its evocation of a spirit of profoundly imaginative *faith filled* hope.

Let me first enjoin my voice to those of speakers before me in acknowledging with deep appreciation and aroha, all of the organisers of this gathering. Let me also pay my heartfelt tribute to all of the speakers whose contributions to the program have provided us all with such an incredibly rich array of perspectives, of practical experience, of spiritual insight and intellectual challenge. Right now I am both proud and terrified about having anything at all to say!

Seriously though isn't this gathering extraordinary? Isn't it cause for huge celebration? Just look at how many consider that speaking of the things of God in order to create and sustain communities of peace and justice is a necessarily good thing to do. Just look at how many have sacrificed time with family in order to be here with this family of God. Just think what a difference we can and must make as we return after this gathering to our places of being and doing, renewed and restored for the journey ahead . . .

It is good to be here in Sydney. It is not a city where I feel especially confident nor understood as an Anglican but it is certainly a city where I feel very safe as a Maori woman, after all I think at last count there are something like 60,000+ Maori living here - the vast majority of whom are no doubt my Tai Tokerau relatives!

And so it is, because of these strong and unbreakable whanau or family links and of course notwithstanding all of the passionately asserted traditional rivalries between our respective nations, I do still very sincerely regard Australia as being very much an important offshore island of Aotearoa New Zealand!

Seriously though, we are undeniably *geographic* neighbours, and we are also as a result of *demographic* developments (*primarily the historic ease of migratory movement between our lands*) inextricably connected by the new kinship ties formed through significant interrelating and intermarriage between our peoples. Those kinship ties now extend significantly to include many of those blessed to live in or to come from what we so uncritically and variously describe as Oceania, the South Pacific, Pasesika, the Pacific Islands. I say uncritically because the jury is most definitely out on what is either the most accurate or helpful descriptor of all those island communities who alongside Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are also contained within the tidal embrace of greatest of the world's oceans, the Pacific, an ocean which has an area exceeding that of all dry land on the planet.

For the purposes of this presentation I will restrict my comments to those islands with which I am most familiar and those with which our respective nations have the most significant relationships.

Notwithstanding the fraught definitional territory into which I am straying, let me quickly confirm that I am using the word indigenous here to mean, *'those more likely according to indigenous oral tradition to have originated from and lived within specific Pacific Island communities'*. I am referring primarily to 12 island based indigenous communities mostly Polynesian with the exception of the Melanesian peoples from Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the Solomons. All of these are communities of indigenous peoples that I understand either Australia and or Aotearoa New Zealand have established mission, trade, aid, defense, free association or other political agreement with. These island nations include:

Papua New Guinea 5.6 million
Fiji 905,949
Solomon Islands 552,438
New Caledonia 219,246
Vanuatu 208,869
Western Samoa 176,908
Tonga 114,689
Kiribati 105,432
Cook Islands 21,388
Tuvalu 11,810
Niue 2,160
Tokelau 1,392

The total population of these islands is approximately 8.5 million people and so when you add in Australia's approximately 21 million, plus Aotearoa NZ's 4.1 million, then in terms of population alone, statistically speaking there may therefore be, some 33 - 50 million people (*if you add in Hawaii plus Rapanui*), living within a sea space of some 165 million square kilometres and that according to my consistently lousy maths and my even lousier eco-theology, that means a lot of ocean space for not so many people!

What I so love about the entire Pacific, especially throughout Polynesia, is the extraordinary range of ethnic and cultural diversity that exists, languages, art, dance, cuisine, tradition and the indescribably beautiful environment. What I love even more, is the extraordinary beauty of so many of the people, their incredible tenacity, beauty, hospitality, creative talent *and* then there is their predominantly, frustratingly, uncritical faithfulness to so many of the Christian missions which have with varying degrees of success *affected* and *afflicted* Pacific peoples over many many years! The latest and most damningly influential religious menace in the South Pacific is I believe the insidious, crass, racist, sexist, homophobic tele-evangelist!

In a sense it has been the all pervasive historically established influence of the Christian churches in virtually all the islands of the Pacific which is at once part of their enduring charm and yet is also I believe increasingly part of the enduring problem in preventing Pacific peoples develop the necessary analysis let alone strategies to be able to respond more appropriately to the very real social, political and economic problems now so readily apparent throughout the region. *I will return to this as yet surprisingly even-tempered critique of the historic role and influence of the Christian churches in the South Pacific a little later in this paper!*

Over the past two years I have been privileged to attend and to speak at two memorable conferences both to do with the role of religious communities in the South Pacific and it was the experience and outcome of these two gatherings that made me think about what contribution I wanted to make here. Both conferences highlighted the troubling disconnect between the current social, political and economic realities confronting Pacific Island societies and the conservative and all-powerful grip of so called 'traditional' Christian 'teachings'? These 'teachings' are now so deeply embedded within those societies that there is little critical distinction made between what is asserted as cultural tradition and what is or may indeed be authentically 'Christian'. We as contemporary teachers of theology have much to redeem for the often appalling legacy of our forebears. Both conferences pointed to the gains made by Maori in secular and theological education, in overcoming the colonial legacy, both wondered about Australia's position on such matters and both pondered on the collaborative possibilities which may yet be developed between us all as sisters and brothers in the region regardless of who has made the best progress to date.

And so before I get to humbly suggesting what we might collectively consider contributing toward the redemptive neighbourhood project, let me foreground a little something of how I understand the current geo-political reality which has become more and more concerning in recent years especially as your federal government has moved firmly to prioritise your regional position as a key ally of U.S. and British interests. Your national 'gaze' therefore is toward the west and not the east, which is where all your best neighbours live and love and also long for God's justice. Do you think it possible for that gaze to be reoriented? Is it what you would wish to have happen?

I have over the last few months asked every Australian person I have met or know, for an opinion about your relationships with, understanding of, commitment to the South Pacific is. It hasn't been a very encouraging response and this for all kinds of reasons ranging from indifference to ignorance. The same is true for too many Pakeha New Zealanders - it is a sad and troubling response.

'We', (and I include myself ambiguously here because I am as much part of 'them' in the Pacific as I am of 'us' in the generalized manner I am using demographic terminology) are more than happy to be impervious and imperious tourists in all the places of Pacific paradise and yet we continue to show a distinct lack of interest, nor now deservedly deep concern, about what is so clearly emerging as more than the minor rumblings

of political discontent throughout the region. As citizens in common in the region we cannot I believe continue to ignore the powder kegs in our midst. As Christians in common we cannot continue to avert our eyes every time there is a coup, another devastating tribal battle, more allegations of serious corruption, shocking claims of high level drug and or arms trafficking through our region and so on it goes. What does our indifference, our ignorance indeed our averted gaze, say about our sense of being *as neighbours* with one another let alone about being God's people for peace with justice in this *our* part of the global '*vineyard*'? It is a bit of an unfortunate analogy really but somehow aquarium doesn't really work either!

Anyway the challenge I believe is to ask of ourselves do we share in both the delights and the responsibilities of right relationship with each other as Christian sisters and brothers in our region, let alone with those of the other great faiths who also now comprise a sizeable population group alongside us? Do we as sisters and brothers in Christ share a *common dream* for ours to be a region characterized by peace and God's justice in what is arguably still the most precious and as yet undefiled (*at least by war*) part of God's world? To what extent do New Zealanders and Australians, again as *arguably* the more privileged (*at the very least in economic terms*) in the regional family have a prior responsibility to assist those clearly less fortunate.

Now I know there is a risk in what I am suggesting. A risk that some will immediately leap to accusations of political interference, imposition, neo-colonialism, imperialism and so on. Well actually I am not thinking and neither am I talking of any of those things. We are theologians here not party politicians or worse, economists. As theologians we pride ourselves on having both the capacity and the will to influence the public square, to name the issues of pressing human concern and to challenge the citizenry to not only take notice but to act in concert against those things which diminish the quality of life for any of God's people. Yes the message may well be political but there is a significantly different framework of reference at stake. One is driven by singular self-interest and the unbridled pursuit and retention of power for it's own sake and the other is to do with being driven by an unapologetic determination to ensure collective wellbeing is able to be achieved and sustained for all and not just for some, by ensuring a more equitable and modest redistribution of power and resources - something here about being Christlike!

Then of course there is also history, our shared geo-political histories where undeniably close relationships have been forged over the centuries of our co-inhabiting the region but even if we were to take say just our shared missionary histories well surely even just that dimension alone obligates us to notice more acutely and to act more intentionally in terms of just what is happening or not or ought to be for each other in the neighbourhood.

Now before I go on I want also to notice and to name what I am sure a number of you might also be thinking. What on earth is a Maori woman doing speaking of the Pacific when there are any number of unspeakably tragic issues going on within her own community. For that matter the current rage over what the Howard

government is doing with its direct interventions into Aboriginal communities might also be seen as of higher or more pressing priority.

We do this don't we? We have become so entrapped by our own uncritical *single identity politics* that we become so instinctively reactionary whenever anyone who is not '*of our tribe*' dares to notice something about us, which we don't care or wish to notice about ourselves and so we react not by considering the veracity of the observation but by discrediting the humanity of the observer!

I would hope that somehow this conference will have been sufficiently appraised by someone from within the Aboriginal community of the current situation regarding the current legislative interventions and that we will together have been challenged to respond. I agree that Maori also need to be seriously responsive to the myriad issues affecting our people wherever in the Pacific we are, including right here in Redfern and Bondi and Brisbane.

It is not however a matter of us establishing '*competing*' priorities and neither is it a matter of us moving foolishly toward *racialising* so called solutions. No-one ethnic group has the franchise on either suffering or solution and more importantly neither does anyone ethnic group have the right to ascribe either total blame for human suffering nor to attribute primary responsibility for its alleviation. No *one* is responsible – we all are. It is an ultimate irony that human suffering is something *for which we are each humanly responsible for creating, for sustaining and for eliminating.*

And so to those who would dare to suggest that problems *in the village* are for the villagers only to work out I do beg to differ! Those who articulate this closed border mentality usually have far more to hide and very little to give to the development of flourishing and peace filled globalised societies.

I will never concede to is the oft-made claim that it is not OK for '*outsiders*' to initiate neighbourhood discussions over what we observe and what we know to be going on that isn't right. We all know the Burke saying about evil only being able to prosper when good people stand by and do nothing. I do truly believe that we are all equally responsible for one another and so no one is exempt from acting precipitately in the face of any and all human suffering.

There is also another reason why I am raising these particular issues of collective neighbourhood responsibility at this time and that I am raising it within the context of a gathering of self-proclaimed progressive Christians. You see as an indigenous woman I worry always about the potential loss of ancestry and of what I describe as '*necessary memory*' for any reason. At times I have seen the populist definition of progressive Christianity used to delimit, discredit or even to eliminate select aspects of human history. I have been troubled by the subtle but suggestive claims of some progressives that '*progress*' is from here and now forward. Let what was in the past remain there. What matters is moving ahead into '*progressive*' imagining and acting, into new ways of being unconstrained by the drudgery, conservatism and injustice of

the past. While there is so much I agree with about the historical revisionist project, let me quickly add that mine is not an uncritical plea for caution.

I am appealing however as an indigenous woman who is not a *cultural purist* (*I am not asking for absolutely everything which I might arbitrarily determine to be cultural and traditional to be preserved and protected*) and neither am I a tribal 'terrorist' (*I am not an indigenous man exploiting my 'chiefly' status to unduly protect and preserve my grip on power at all costs!*) and there is in fact much which is all too commonly asserted in the guise of these two phenomenon which I find profoundly disturbing.

At this time all I am asking is for us to be careful my friends, for there are memories and teachings too precious yet to ever be erased, diminished, overlooked, forgotten. As an indigenous woman I know only too well how it feels to have taonga or precious ways of knowing and of being, rendered arbitrarily by those with the power to do so, as irrelevant, redundant, of no further use.

Remember that at the heart of indigeneity, as with Christianity, is *right relationality* – *right* with the land and *right* with one another. The things therefore which we are obligated to protect and to promote are those things which are *life-giving* for relationships between and among all of humanity and those things which are *life-giving* for relationships between and among all of God's magnificent creation.

And so as one with ancestral links back to those islands and those people from whom I am originally descended, Rarotonga, Raiatea, Rapanui, Hawaii, it is this whakapapa or genealogical connection, which at once compels and obligates me to speak and to act. At the same time, *for all who have in response to the historic welcome and invitation of the ancestors of all these South Pacific places, made this region our place of belonging, then it is that now also historically established ancestral connection, which surely somewhat similarly compels and obligates you to speak and to act.*

It is this collective or joint regional responsibility as God's people together in the South Pacific, which is at the heart of my plea for us all to reconsider our inextricable regional connectedness and therefore our relational responsibilities with and for one another. We need after all to work out our collective salvation together!

So notwithstanding the extant and very serious issues affecting Australian Aboriginal communities and New Zealand Maori and Pacific Island communities, I want us to now undertake a necessarily selective survey of our wider Oceanic region just to gain some kind of perspective on what it is that I believe we collectively *as church* ought to be noticing, ought to be inconsolable about and ought therefore to be speaking of, raging against and acting with great urgency, to alleviate.

Let's start closest to Australia's northeastern shores – *Papua New Guinea* – where there has been virtually a permanent official government warning in place for international travelers for way too long. PNG where HIV/AIDS is endemic, where sexual violence against women and children is at devastating levels, where infant mortality is at an all time high level and similarly political instability. PNG where the Christian churches are well represented and often amazingly well attended –

Christian churches where the status of women is still relegated to that of being passive recipients of male church leadership largesse at best, sexist bullying at worst. PNG where cultural tradition is used as the great silencer of women who dare to challenge – even by the Church . . . Oh I know all of these things are extremely complex, deeply nuanced through the subtle interactions of culture, economics, politics, spirituality, through localized social values and norms – I know that nothing of the ways in which human societies are organized and interact is simple and *I also know that every women's life matters to God and I also know that too many women and children are suffering and dying needlessly . . .*

The Solomon Island's – now you all know about Ramsi – about why the need for such an intervention force because of the extreme levels of violence in a nation of just over half a million citizens. Many of us have recently raised our voices in absolute outrage at Sogavare's actions in respect of his friend Julian Moti. Again we have in the Solomon Island's a country 'blessed' with substantial presence of Christian churches many very active in promoting human rights and many church leaders unafraid of naming corruption and injustice but still the suffering among women and children is utterly disproportionate. Sexual and domestic violence is endemic and utterly under-reported. *And still the unjustly, unacceptably, theologically indefensible, diminished status of women remains seriously under addressed by the churches.*

Fiji – the coup capital of our region, is now alarmingly unstable and poverty levels have risen so predictably to unprecedented levels. Fiji, where prostitution is now a lucrative source of income for too many young women and a guaranteed source of sexual infection – Fiji now boasts of disastrous and increasing levels of HIV & AIDS infections. Here in this incredibly beautiful part of Pacific paradise, Christian churches, especially Methodists, dominate the landscape. Women in positions of leadership in a small number of mainstream Protestant Christian churches are politely tolerated. Women and children in Fijian society continue to suffer too often in silence the inevitable consequences of impoverishment and loss of democratic freedoms under a military led regime - those of increased domestic and sexual violence. While many of the churches have valiantly and sincerely mounted anti-violence campaigns, it is the more potent visible and tangible symbolism and messages implicit in their own heavily and uncontested patriarchally oppressive systems, structures and attitudes which ensures women and children will remain powerless and dependent and thus continuously over-represented in the statistics of suffering.

Beautiful Western Samoa on the tourist view surface appears relatively stable and settled but from many Samoan men and women with whom I am privileged to enjoy close professional and personal relationships come very disturbing stories suggestive of a less than pristine experience for those most vulnerable in any society. What is of shocking importance are the findings of the 2005 WHO multi-country report on Women's Health and Sexual Violence. This document deserving of priority consideration by all Christian churches, shows that 60% of the Samoan women interviewed reported experience of physical violence by an intimate partner, 10% reported being beaten in pregnancy, an extraordinary 65% of women over the age of

15 years reported physical violence from a non-partner, ie. parent, sibling etc, 55% felt unable to report violence at all, the reasons given by 86% of the Samoan women for non-reporting included considering the violence 'normal' or 'not serious'. In a small island nation literally awash with Churches one would think that this unconscionable level of human suffering would incite unstoppable national outrage and subsequent demand for action.

This only leaves Tonga in its currently divided state over whether to stay oppressively monarchical or to struggle into some form of 21st century democracy. Even in this staunchly often matriarchally structured society you can place a large ditto under the Samoan statistics without any difficulty at all. As Tongan women and girls suffer domestic and sexual violence, the churches offer at best short term reactionary responses, or at worst, continue to condemn those women who 'ask for it' by endeavouring to step outside of culturally or ecclesially prescribed roles or worse, both at the same time!

Statistically speaking, (even as I singularly detest the word and the imagery of 'statistics') – I want you to close your eyes for a moment and picture your mother, your grandmother, your daughter, your wife, your lover, your granddaughter, the situation for too many of these beautiful, talented, loving, articulate, prophetic women in our region is singularly appalling – while I have chosen to focus on sexual and domestic violence it follows on that education, health, employment and economic wellbeing are all affected and the end result is either a diminished quality of life and or premature death either for women or for the children and grandchildren blessed into our care.

One of the questions I was recently asked to address at a gathering entitled Future Proofing the Pacific was, "what role should religious organizations(in the South Pacific) take in supporting traditional values while imparting skills and attitudes that will support 21st century globalization . . ."

As a typically *progressive* type question, it neatly failed to ask the *prior question*, of the *historic* role played by religious organizations in both indigenous and settler societies in our region. The predominance of oppressive conservative religious views and attitudes readily apparent throughout those politically unstable societies now most at risk and thus more likely to condone violence against women, are those same societies overly well endowed with churches and missions many of which were either established alongside or by missionaries and or church leaders with historic links with either Australia or New Zealand or our colonial master forebears – surely this *legacy* alone also obliges us all in our time, to be part of the redemptive generation!

So, how to transform the churches to which we each belong, (*regardless of denominational 'differences'*) to be by definition, the harbingers of the very best of religious teachings and practices? How to ensure our worshipping communities become and remain as exemplars of God's justice, to be sites of prophetic wisdom, compassionate pastoral practise, of teaching and practising ethical thinking and

doing, to be the *'institutions'* looked to, to set the Christlike moral compass for all the citizens of our incredibly blessed portion of the beloved community?

The first challenge is for us to create and to fully participate in the necessary forums for public dialogue such as these where we might begin the process of first acknowledging the priorities for action and then strategizing how best to enable our churches into becoming truly, believably, effectively and dynamically the institutions we so desperately yearn for them to become for our time and radically changed circumstances.

It is I believe the challenge for us to be courageous enough to engage in the transformative work at the heart of the Gospel imperative. Have we the will, let alone the moral courage to confront, critique and to correct those theologically indefensible practices we see all too often in our church contexts, in our regional societal contexts. The question for progressives is of course, do we persist with the *transformative* project or do we simply step aside from established religious organizations and churches and ostensibly begin afresh? The difficulty in fact the impossibility of *beginning afresh* in the South Pacific context where cultural and religious tradition are so enmeshed as to be rendered incarnate in the people, makes that proposition highly unlikely and therefore inappropriate.

The second challenge is for us to recognize just who and where *'we'* are, to recognize therefore both the peculiarities and particularities of our context which are especially unique and are thus deserving of protection and perpetuation on behalf of the whole global community. This is to revisit the idea of *'life-giving, life affirming, life sustaining relationality'*.

The third challenge in our region is for us to collectively get over what I regard and what I experience as one of the greatest constraints to radical action especially from among well meaning liberal academics, theologians, public thinkers, those progressive Pakeha or white Australians – *cultural cringe*. Oh the great dread of being seen as racist – what a dilemma, what fear, what inhibition, what damn paralysis this prospect now evokes! The upshot is that no self-respecting white liberal progressive will dare to proffer a word of criticism about indigenous or any other ethnically based culturally prescribed tradition.

Cultural traditions are not static, immutable, unchanging, untouchable mysterious – they are instead those things dreamed of and then developed by both exceptional and fallible human beings over time to assist with the establishment and implementation of ways of being and of inter-relating with all of God's creation in order that all may flourish and have life in it's fullness. It is from this understanding that I have always believed cultural traditions ought to be life giving, not life diminishing or destroying. Those that are in the latter category are those I suggest we do as Jesus showed us - we either modify or dispense with them. Cultural traditions are precious but no tradition ought to be regarded as sacrosanct.

For the *cultural purists* who would argue that since the dawning of the first day on earth, all of their unique cultural traditions have existed unchanged, immutable, I would say quit the romanticism and the insult inherent in your disbelief that our ancestors were without agency and savvy. They were not slow in recognizing the need at times for adaptation, they were not averse to co-opting introduced practices, they were not afraid of rejecting sometimes deeply embedded '*traditional*' behaviours and understandings. None of this was done without careful intellectual thought nor was it undertaken uncritically or without profound spiritual insight.

And so while I know without doubt of the huge injustices done and still being done to indigenous and native peoples in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and while I know without doubt of the huge and often devastatingly negative impact of colonization upon many crucial aspects of indigenous cultural tradition, I also know we are not now and never were peoples without huge spiritual, intellectual and moral capacity – while we may lack political and economic power this does not and did not ever prevent us from endeavouring always to find ways of recovering those aspects of our cultural tradition *necessary to our future flourishing*, those aspects of our cultural tradition which enable us to continue living our lives with decency and dignity in spite of the injustice, in spite of the hardship.

There is no reason why necessary cultural recovery programs cannot and should not continue, equally there is no reason, except for epidemic levels of '*cultural cringe*', why almost *all* cultural recovery cannot be undertaken in a more intentionally collaborative environment between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Isn't the theology of relationality after all something to do with being '*at one*' with one another? Isn't the spirit of love after all something to do with entering into one another's sufferings and joys? Doesn't the discourse of theology over which we claim to have something of a literary franchise contain relatively unambiguous words like common ground, common dreams, communion, compassion, mutuality, reconciliation, grace and peace?

I know the fear held by white liberals is that either you will be accused of being a racist imperialist who can't step aside from being dominant or else it is a fear of being rejected and or excluded by indigenous people – for some of you this fear is vindicated because you have already been told where to go! Now I do not for a moment want to try and lessen the agony of being told *where to go* but I would simply caution you to remember our blessed mentor and Saviour and to recall what he said and did when he was told time and again, *where to go*.

The danger is that by acting with inappropriate impassivity or by fleeing the bully liberal whites have created the necessary space for opportunistic cultural and or political ideologues to occupy the high intellectual ground and occupy it they have done, with relatively unfettered freedom and at times outrageously uncontestable cultural claims. It often happens in the struggle for autonomy, inclusion, legitimacy or resourcing that too little attention is paid to the unmasking of the broad and complex range of ideological interests always at stake within any political movement seeking for redemptive action and the restorative means to redress injustice.

One good example of this can be seen in the way in which the *'solution'* to justified grievance about spectacular and sustained educational failure among indigenous peoples has been popularly reframed, (certainly within secular education) as a *'cultural recovery'* project. *Re-claim, re-store, re-cover, re-search and re-visit the tradition.* Cultural recovery has thus become the largely uncritiqued contemporary populist catch-cry among indigenous educators and supported by white liberals. The problem is, it is being asserted without any effort to critically discern just exactly what is able, let alone needing and or deserving to be recovered, let alone interrogating in whose interests the entire project is ultimately focused.

From where I sit what I see emerging among indigenous educators is an increasingly unhelpful tension between two groups who I describe as either *'purists'* or *'realists'*.

The first group, the *'purists'*, tends to exhibit reactionary and ethnocentric tendencies in terms of cultural recovery. They are deeply and often irreconcilably aggrieved about historic injustice and as a consequence, have developed a very unhelpful and usually uncritical oppositional discourse on their understanding *and* practice of relationship with non-indigenous people. *'Purists'* are essentially *separatists* who are single-mindedly focussed on the preservation, protection and promotion of indigenous interests as they alone determine these to be.

Problematic about the positioning of the *'purist'* group, is their refusal to recognise or accept that it is indeed often an uncontested ideological position rather than an authoritative and universally agreed cultural position that they are upholding. These often self-appointed guardians of cultural tradition, language and custom, tend to resort to the language of authenticity, to the practice of the exclusion, specifically, of those who are not indigenous, and selectively, of women and young people and certainly of gay men and lesbian women, who may or may not be indigenous themselves. There is a tendency to uncritically romanticise vitally important theories of origins; stories of adaptation; concepts of spirituality and understandings of relationships, leadership and social organisation.

By contrast, cultural *'realists'* are *integrationists*. For example, in places like Australia and New Zealand they are personally and politically reconciled to the place of indigenous peoples as unique minority groups in larger pluralistic societies. *'Realists'* assert the unquestioned importance of protecting and nurturing cultural taonga (treasures) such as language, custom, all art forms and all forms of cultural tradition, but they see this responsibility as having to be shared among all citizens and this is why policies of mainstreaming appeal to realists.

'Realists' do not share the same intense concern as *'purists'* over historical grievances and they do not assert nonsensical rigidity in terms of ascribing to either self or others, a fixed, selective or limited racial identity, nor do they attempt to delimit cultural boundaries in terms of restricting participation, access to information, or indeed access to the entire store of cultural taonga or treasures.

While there is an irrefutable sense of noble action, underpinned by passion, devotion and commitment witnessed among those whom I have categorised as either '*cultural purists*' or '*cultural realists*' nevertheless, I actually have a far greater sense of urgency to unmask the many ways in which cultural issues are being manipulated to serve the self-interests of the economic elites at a time of severely accelerating inequalities across the Earth. It is this, more sinister reality, which troubles me greatly when I think as a theologian about the real causes and the real implications of political instability across the entire Pacific region.

Neither '*purists*' nor '*realists*' whilst well meaning and committed in quite different ways to the improvement of indigenous people, have managed to identify nor to produce solutions to the day to day problems which continue to beset indigenous peoples and especially to negatively affect the life chances of indigenous women and girls.

For those of you asking yourselves, is she launching a major critique of indigenous activism well the answer is yes of course and why, well because I believe we are making some avoidable mistakes in our efforts toward our own liberation and mostly because wouldn't it be so tragic if the previously oppressed are left to become the new oppressors, only this time of ourselves. I cannot allow that to happen.

We indigenous peoples are sometimes so preoccupied with protecting our uniqueness, with upholding our uncontested '*traditions*'; with maintaining our religious conservatism that sometimes at our peril I believe we are failing to see beyond the immediate horizon of our no longer pristine paradise.

We are failing to see that the world is already and unstoppably a globalised entity, that whether we like it or not we are all being drawn ever more into cross boundary activities and relationships. On this latter point however as I identified much earlier, it is not only indigenous peoples who have difficulty perceiving the benefits of cross boundary activities and relationships.

That is why forums such as this are of such critical importance – there needs to be the intentional creation of sacred public space where *all* people may have an opportunity to restate and debate contemporary '*race matters*'.

I believe it ought to be possible for *all* people to be bold and defiant in our criticism of any form of xenophobia, as honest and candid about the need for civil responsibility and social accountability for each one of us, and as charitable and compassionate toward any political and or theological perspective from which we can gain insight and wisdom to empower not only ourselves but especially those most vulnerable around and among us.

It is out of this far more democratic milieu that I now predict the emergence of a third group of cultural proponents. I imagine them/us to be cultural '*prophets*', or those whose visionary tendencies are focussed more on the common humanity; on

what it means to be able to become and to remain fully, decently, lovingly, justly human in a complex and diverse world.

I imagine cultural '*prophets*' being capable of transcending racial and every other single identity particularity with all their prescriptive limitations, in favor of celebrating an open ended cultural spectrum within which the almost endless options of life-giving and life-sustaining cultural expression represented within the breadth of human diversity may be entitled to their own sense of legitimacy and of fulfilment.

Cultural '*prophets*' would assign the highest priority to exposing the hidden injustices established and maintained by exploitative economic ideologies and they would challenge and expose the myriad factors which threaten the future social, political, spiritual and economic wellbeing of all citizens but particularly those most vulnerable, such as indigenous minorities, specifically women and girls.

Cultural '*prophets*' would insist that the voices of women as those equally created precious human beings in the image and likeness of God ought never be suppressed or silenced, or denied in any public sphere and neither should they be limited to what is essentially a ritualized, predictable and purely performative role.

And so my friends it is not as many including myself sometimes speculate, an entirely gloomy prospect. But there is I believe most definitely an urgency needed among us as we begin to strategise. We need to ensure the very best of our hearts and minds are engaged in the processes of negotiation, protection, compromise and contribution. These are also times of potential enrichment beyond imagining as we open ourselves to the possibilities that other traditions and cultural perspectives and religious movements inevitably present.

I believe the future of the world we wish our grandchildren to flourish within depends on our collective will and wisdom to cooperate, to preserve only the very best of who we are and on our spirit of generosity and our humility to be willing to receive the '*best*' gifts, freely given, by those who have been equally blessed with gifts quite different to those of our own.

Let me conclude with a personal story. As the thirteen month old grandmother of one indescribably beautiful infant child I am making it my responsibility to understand the complex and dynamic nature of this globalised world into which I am now responsible *in small part* for nurturing and sheltering this precious and as yet vulnerable little one. I want her to know deeply and richly that she is a child of our God of love and of justice and so I will teach her that it is into a religious and spiritual realm she has been baptized as one equally precious, equally blessed, equally responsible to become fully whom God created her to be. I want her to know deeply the richness of the cultural heritages she has been blessed with from her Maori mother and her Fijian father and all the ancestors before them. Within the socio-political realm of Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider South Pacific/Oceania context I want her to be free to flourish, to be educated and ultimately to make her

contribution as a child of many lands and as a citizen of the world. I want her to know deeply and respectfully the beauty of religious movements other than Christianity. I want her to know the many ways in which cultural traditions other than her own can also be life-giving, hospitable, compassionate and just.

And so it is that as one with academic leadership responsibility for those preparing for the precious work of mission and ministry I plead with you all to consider my call which is essentially made on behalf of all women of the South Pacific to create safe and loving pathways within our religious and cultural communities; pathways which enable us to double our efforts to take our rightful places at every table of decision making and of political influence; pathways which enable us to double our incalculably valuable contributions to the greater good of our fabulously envied South Pacific societies; pathways which exemplify the fullness of the glory of God's infinitely perfect human creation, as men and women together in all things - *acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God.*

Dr Jenny Plane Te Paa
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