

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH  
JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE  
1991

**LOVING THE DISTANCES BETWEEN:  
RACISM, CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY**

**David James**  
**and**  
**Jillian Wychel**

## **The James Backhouse Lectures**

This is one of a series of lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in 1964.

This lecture was delivered in Perth on 5 January 1991 during the Yearly Meeting.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

The two men had access to individual people with authority in the young colonies, and with influence in the British Parliament and social reform movement. In painstaking reports and personal letters to such people, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines, and on the rum trade. James Backhouse was a botanist and naturalist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends and following the deep concern for the convicts and the Aborigines that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

Joan Courtney  
Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting

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## ABOUT THIS LECTURE

Cultural discrimination by one people against another whose culture they despise is an age-old phenomenon; but racism against indigenous peoples (or First Nations) is more recent, a product of empire and exploitation which arose only a generation or two before Quakerism.

In asserting the spiritual equality of all, Friends came to challenge the social inequalities of slavery and the injustices of colonisation, but they were also influenced by their social settings and cultures. In this lecture David James and Jillian Wychel explore the nature and power of culture and of racism, with examples from Aotearoa/New Zealand and from other "colonies of settlement". They also raise questions about what the colonisers might have learnt from indigenous spirituality, the kind of spirituality that may serve us now, and how we may learn to celebrate both the unity of the deepest human experience and the rich cultural variety which counterpoints it

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Jillian Wychel** is a member of Whanganui/Taranaki Monthly Meeting and is currently its Assistant Clerk. She was born in England, and first became interested in Quakerism through the influence of her secondary school headmistress, Geraldine Cadbury. Jillian travelled to New Zealand in 1956 at the age of eighteen to train as a nurse, an intended interlude before an English university course in social work. Twenty-eight years, one marriage, several careers and three children later, she made it back to England for a year's study at Woodbrooke which confirmed her feeling for the world-wide family of Friends.

Jillian has been a nurse, primary teacher, community worker and community educator, and currently works with David James in a freelance training and consultancy partnership based in their Victorian villa in Whanganui. She is a founder member of the Quaker Women's Group and the Friends' Mediation Action Group in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and is a confirmed participant in family camps, Summer Gatherings, and any other places where Friends let their hair down.

**David James** is also a member of Whanganui/Taranaki Monthly Meeting, where he is the Clerk. His accent, even after thirty years in Aotearoa/New Zealand, still marks his English and particularly Wiltshire childhood, and his grounding in traditional British folksong and social history. He has worked in adult community education throughout his career, perching at different times in a university extension department, the National Council of Adult Education and a provincial Polytechnic. This was before he took flight from institutions, moving from Northland to Whanganui to be closer to Friends Settlement, and with Jillian setting up the Rowan Partnership.

David and Jillian met as attenders at the 1978 Friends Summer Gathering, lived and worked together in the North from the end of 1980, went to Woodbrooke together in 1984-85, and celebrated their partnership with, a Quaker wedding in 1988 just before moving to Whanganui. They prefer to work in the areas of organisation and tema development, conflict resolution, mediation and social justice, mainly with public bodies and voluntary organisations.

## **LOVING THE DISTANCES BETWEEN: RACISM, CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY**

The title for this lecture comes from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who wrote a passage which was spoken at our wedding:

Once the realisation is accepted that even between the closest human beings, considerable distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole and against a wide sky.<sup>1</sup>

Rilke was writing of individuals, but we believe the passage applies equally to whole peoples. It's about these relationships between peoples and cultures that we are speaking tonight, and especially about the relationships between peoples who share the same country.

Our theme is the form, of racism or white supremacy experienced by the indigenous peoples - the "first nations" - of countries such as Australia and New Zealand which have been "colonies of settlement". We don't deny the importance of other kinds of racism, but for us the relationship with indigenous peoples is primary, and raises issues of shared power, resource ownership, and the legitimacy of governments, which are not part of other areas of racism.

We also want to make connections between this type of racism and other forms of oppression based on class and gender, and to explore some of its links with culture and spirituality. We shall look at some Friends' traditions in these matters, and at the possibilities of liberation, for ourselves and for the oppressed.

The theme seems appropriate to a James Backhouse Lecture, since James Backhouse was a very active member of the Aborigines Protection Society - "aborigines" being a general term in the nineteenth century for indigenous peoples. The Society was established in 1836, and we shall have more to say about it later.

We shall, however, be saying almost nothing about specifically Australian issues. We know so little about them that it would be presumptuous. Instead we shall talk of what we know from our own setting, with which you can make your own comparisons; and about some general patterns that seem to cover many such colonising situations.

## **Aotearoa/New Zealand: The colonial outcome**

Once James Cook had found his way to New Zealand and had reported back, a process began which is common to most colonies of settlement. It involved the interactions of five separate colonising interest groups, carrying over into a new land the alliances and the conflicts they had already developed over the previous centuries.

These interactions were reshaped to some extent by the new circumstances, and especially in the early years by the presence of an indigenous people, but colonial society and its contradictions started out as a branch of the long and still unfinished history/herstory of the common people of Britain and their masters, a story in which Quakers have been visible and active participants for the past three centuries.

The five colonising interest groups consisted of: (1) traders for the produce of the land and seas of Aotearoa, including the whalers and sealers; (2) small settlers looking for a toehold, for a degree of security and comfort for themselves and their children; (3) missionaries drawn by the urge to civilise and Christianise the "heathen"; (4) government, drawn by the need to protect trade, counter the influence of other colonising nations, and to control some of the activities of its own nationals in a frontier situation; and (5) capitalist enterprise, initially in the shape of the New Zealand Company, seeking the freedom of the frontier to secure a better return on capital than it could in Britain, even at the risk of provoking war with Maori tribes.

Manoeuvring among the pressures of the other players, the British government prepared to negotiate with the tribal chiefs of Aotearoa to cede sovereignty to Queen Victoria, and sent William Hobson to govern the new colony as a branch office of New South Wales.

The result was the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840, hailed once again in 1990 as 'the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand. At the very least, it guaranteed

Maori royal protection; the ownership of their lands, forests, fisheries and other treasured possessions; and the same rights as the people of England who settled among them. It also created a framework for the Crown to buy land from Maori for resale to Pakeha (non-Maori) settlers, but only where Maori owners were willing and where there was mutual agreement on the price for the transaction. What it did not grant to the Crown, at least not in the Maori version which almost all chiefs signed, was sovereignty, but the Crown assumed it anyway.

So far this may look quite different from the Australian experience, and Pakeha New Zealanders are frequently rather smug about that. Looking a little further forward than 1840, though, it may begin to seem more comparable. By 1860, 60% of the land area of the country was in the hands of Government or settlers; by 1890, 90%; and the Maori, who are 14% of the population, now hold 3% of the land in traditional title, with much even of that 3% being used on long and iniquitous leases by non-Maori interests.

On average Maori show up as disadvantaged by all the usual statistical measures of health, employment, income, education and imprisonment. The result is social dependency. Their experience has been that, for almost a hundred and fifty years, "Maori attempts to direct and shape the Maori future in ways reflecting Maori values and institutions were resisted either militarily, legislatively or by ignoring them".<sup>2</sup>

Why did it happen? At one level, the answer is in the particulars of New Zealand history. Settlers wanted the land, they wanted ever more of it as new land uses developed, and they acquired it by whatever means they could. But there are also factors which are common to all the British colonies of settlement, from Ireland in the 1560s onward's, to North America, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. Some of these factors are political and economic, some are social. We propose to explore them and the kind of spirituality that is linked with them.

## **Some or our own experience**

We should say something about how these themes arose for us. We both came initially from England, and we've both spent our working lives so far in Aotearoa/New Zealand, about thirty years for each of us - one-fifth of the whole period since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

For about ten years, until three years ago, we were living in Tai Tokerau (or Northland), the region at the northern tip of the North Island. It's mythologically the tail of the great fish that the culture hero Maui hauled to the surface of the ocean. It's the coastline where the ancestors of the Maori first made landfall on their voyages of settlement from Eastern Polynesia, and Maori spirits, travel up it after death on their journey back to the ancestral Hawaiki.

It's also where the European traders and missionaries initially settled and impacted, on Maori society, and where the Treaty of Waitangi was first signed between Maori chiefs and Queen Victoria's new governor. There too, older patterns of living were first disrupted by the systematic exploitation of the land for its giant kauri trees, the flax, the gold, the kauri gum burl in the swamps. The North first saw Maori under pressure from Pakeha settlers, and it hosted the first war between Maori and Pakeha, as Hone Heke and Kawiti resisted Pakeha encroachment only four years after the Treaty. Much recent protest has also focussed on the North, because of Waitangi and the annual celebrations of the Treaty signing there.

In the North we were involved in community education with both Maori and Pakeha, and along with other concerns developed our awareness of the need to address the wrongs of the past hundred and fifty years and to repair some of the foundations of our society.

Eventually we moved into freelance work in community education and training; joined Project Waitangi, a national organisation aiming to educate Pakeha about the Treaty; and out of that combination, along with other kinds of work, began to accept invitations to run workshops with organisations throughout the country which are grappling with issues of what many New Zealanders call bicultural development.

We are one resource among many others for this work. To some extent the demand is there because the Labour Government which took office in 1984 did so with a policy commitment to honour the Treaty, though its practice has been ambivalent. Unfortunately, even that has been ahead of the bulk of public opinion, and the future for official encouragement is uncertain.

When we moved to Wanganui we did so to be close to Friends Settlement, which doubles as a small Quaker community and as a centre for Quaker and other gatherings and educational events. The roaming nature of our work brought us within reach of another community in the nearby region of Taranaki whose



history tells much about what has happened in Aotearoa/New Zealand and about the roots of racism and oppression. This is the village of Parihaka, developed in the 1860s and 1870s by the prophets Te Whiti o Rongomai and his uncle Tohu Kakahi.

## **Parihaka and the Diggers**

The Bible, and especially the Old Testament, fired the imagination of Maori in the nineteenth century, and a variety of prophetic movements called on it. Like early Friends, Te Whiti and Tohu spoke (in Maori) a language that relied on the Bible for much of its imagery, and they drew from it a message of peace and trust in God to ensure justice. Despite their refusal to take up arms, they were far from passive, and spoke truth to power in the face of persecution and imprisonment. Their cause was Maori cultural and economic integrity based on the tribal land that the Government was confiscating to distribute to settlers, and they chose with wit and inventiveness the way of large scale non-violent resistance, prefiguring the later methods of Gandhi.<sup>3</sup>

We shall mention Te Whiti and Tohu several times, for they illustrate tantalising thematic links between the experiences of Maori under colonisation and those of early Friends in England. Both groups saw themselves as “peoples” with a right to a degree of independence from the dominant culture. Maori and early Friends have suffered for this - dominant cultures do not take kindly to such assertions - and both have been sustained by experiences and knowings which they could not deny but which were unrecognisable to the dominant culture. This is much more marked in present times for Maori, many of whom are also visibly different and therefore subject to racial discrimination. Friends are in, more respects assimilated into the mainstream culture, but those of us who value our traditions and history may be in a good position to empathise with marginalised groups and peoples.

For us there is an especially interesting link between Parihaka and the seventeenth-century Diggers in England. The Diggers also created a non-violent communal movement to hold and use the remaining common lands against the encroachments of early capitalism. They were promptly suppressed, two years after. George Fox began the ministry that led to the Quaker movement, and some of the Diggers (or True Levellers as they also called themselves) became Friends, possibly including, their leader Gerrard Winstanley.<sup>4</sup>

## The nature of culture

We have already mentioned culture several times, and had better clarify what we mean by it. We see culture, as do sociologists such as Peter Berger, as everything that human beings create and share together, both material and non-material, in ongoing groups of any size. Society itself and social organisations are themselves cultural artefacts. So are the ways in which societies go about producing and distributing goods and services, and meeting the needs of their members. So are the values, beliefs and meanings that they share, and the language that makes this possible.

Culture is at once tough and fragile. Much of it appears to stay unchanged for generations, and many who are part of a culture may dislike parts of it and spend their lifetimes without much success in trying to change it. Yet culture lives only in the human mind, and we all learn it afresh in each generation. This socialisation into our culture is no passive process. We eagerly reach out for it, we copy and practice its parts, to satisfy our "human craving for meaning that appears to have the force of instinct".<sup>5</sup> Listen to a young child's questions for evidence of this: "What are they doing?", "Who are they?", "Why's she wearing that?", "What's that for?", and so on. .

Just as Tinkerbell in "Peter Pan" cannot survive unless all the children in the audience affirm her reality, so it is with a language, or a religious belief, or in the slightly longer run an economic system. Parts of every culture keep falling off because not enough people remember them and talk about them to others. A Maori witness in the Land Court once said: "The atua (god) of whom I speak is dead." Told that gods don't die, he responded: "You are mistaken; gods do die unless there are tohunga (spiritual experts) to keep them alive."<sup>6</sup>

The importance of culture for our theme is enormous. It shapes social institutions, including religious systems. Through the power of language it conditions our thoughts and insights. It makes human life possible, but it also constrains and coerces us. It makes new or alternative cultural responses into potential threats to our well-being and our view of the world, and it gives an "us and them" quality to our reactions to other peoples unless we feel secure.

To examine culture critically raises uncomfortable issues. Quakers are committed, in a sense, to trying to by-pass culture and to give obedience to direct

spiritual experience untainted by human institutions. We are inclined to emphasise our individual responsibility and our independence - yet we are part of the Society of Friends, which uses its own traditional processes and language to maintain its integrity as a sub-culture and to share its insights.

The issues are further sharpened when we begin to ask the awkward questions about whether cultures operate for the benefit of all their members or for some rather than others, and about how the power to shape Culture is distributed.

## **Religion and cultural legitimation**

Because of its fragility, the world view which a culture represents is constantly under threat. A culture is a glade of meaning in the forest of sense impressions, and the forest always threatens to encroach on it again. Dreams and mystical experiences haunt the surrounding undergrowth, mocking commonsense and suggesting other realities. Death, injustice, suffering and disaster challenge the culture to explain how they arise.

Faced with these challenges, cultures produce a spirituality which explains the material world in terms of the unseen forces that shape it. The usual pattern is that these forces are embodied in a god (or gods) who created the universe and is still actively interested in its doings. Religious systems are then established to regulate the relationships between humanity, the gods and the rest of creation.

Religions deal with some of the major challenges to culture. They explain non-commonsense events such as dreams and visions, and in one way or another they make sense of pain and suffering. They also steady the institutions of a culture by giving them supernatural as well as human authority. The head of the family, or the monarch, or the priests, are seen to have more direct communication with the gods than those with lesser authority; and indeed a god often looks and behaves extraordinarily like these human power figures. Since they have more influence than others in shaping the religious culture, this is perhaps not surprising.

The kind of social stability that best preserves a culture is one that allows no questioning of its key values. These should if possible be taken for granted, not so much as values but as self-evident truth. Religion reinforces this process, making any alternative truth not only deviant but actually evil. As long as a

society has a single religion which legitimises the rest of the social structure, then it may be regarded as a social duty not only to burn heretics and witches but also to wage war on infidels or to convert them. When a nation has the "power and the incentive, the scene is thus set for colonisation, evangelisation and cultural genocide, and the accompaniment may well be the great mission hymns such as:

. . . In vain with lavish kindness  
    The gifts of God are strown,  
The heathen in his blindness  
    Bows down to wood and stone.

Can we, whose souls are lighted  
    With wisdom from on high,  
Can we to men benighted  
    The lamp of life deny?  
Salvation! Oh, salvation!  
    The joyful sound proclaim,  
Till each remotest nation  
    Has learn'd Messiah's name.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge of co-existing with a different cultural perspective, especially the challenge of an indigenous culture in a colonial society, can thus be dealt with by destruction and assimilation, by marginalising, or by ignoring it. These are the attempted solutions of the past.

The only alternative that we can see is to set out consciously to make space for other cultures and to share decision-making power with them. Liberation for the oppressor and the oppressed, and entry into the dialogue and dance between cultures, has to be both spiritual and social. It is a dance because changing circumstances, and the dynamic nature of culture itself, will keep both parties in a constantly changing relationship in which first one and then the other will take the lead. This is the enterprise of bicultural development on which some in Aotearoa/New Zealand have embarked.

The acknowledgement of cultural difference may be used either to affirm or to deny the rights of others. It depends on whether or not those who hold power are willing to share it with those of the other culture. In South Africa, for example, cultural differences have long been not only acknowledged but

exaggerated in order to exclude non-whites from power. In 1954, for example, theologians of the South African Dutch Reformed Church said:

We know God the Creator in Scripture as Hammabdil, as the Maker of Separations. To create a cosmos God separated things: light from darkness, waters above the firmament, dry land from the sea. From the very beginning it was the intention of the Lord that mankind should live in separate nations. In his awful self-conceit man wished to frustrate this intention... Therefore attempts at unification, the equalitarian idea, and a revival of the Babylonian spirit.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, to treat all people simply as individuals is to blind oneself to the power of culture and its part in the domination of one group over another. The spiritual unity of humankind at the deepest level is cheapened and trivialised if we insist on ignoring the rich variety at other levels that calls for recognition and celebration.

To ignore differences can also be a way of making invisible any alternatives to the dominant culture. One of the paradigms of dominance runs like this: "Life is easier if we minimise differences; my way of seeing the world is, the normal way; others will be better off if they see things my way too." As Ann Wilson Schaeff puts it for women:

There is another stopper I like to call the "Great Humanistic Leveller". This is most frequently and adeptly used by men in the helping professions. As soon as we start opening up to them they take on an expression of deep concern and sincerity. Then they say something like. "Let's not talk about women's liberation. Let's talk about human liberation instead. There are already too many things that divide us. . . Let's focus on the ways in which we're alike!". . .

Unfortunately though, the only persons who can really afford the luxury of these sentiments are white men. They do not need to explore differences because they run the system. When we are deprived of the freedom of exploring what it means to grow up female in a White Male System we are robbed of our experiences and our souls. Our differences give us our identity.<sup>9</sup>

## **Stereotyping**

One of the traditional tools for dealing with the challenge of different cultures, different experiences and different worldviews is the use of stereotypes. A stereotype is an idea about a group of people based on simplified, distorted or incomplete knowledge of them. Some degree of this is inevitable in all our dealings with others, since we can never know them completely, but it becomes a problem when the stereotypes are taken for reality rather than as a rough guess.

When actual experience which could correct or amplify the stereotype is instead tailored and distorted to fit in with it, we are in the grip of a process that has far more to do with our own needs than with reality. We have created for ourselves a prejudice.

One of the peculiarities of a stereotype is that there may be two or more mutually incompatible stereotypes of the same group in circulation at the same time. They can't be used by the same person simultaneously, but one may replace another with amazing speed as circumstances change. One, dating back to classical nostalgia for a lost Golden Age, is the "noble savage", the unspoiled child of nature. This mythical being was mainly favoured by classically-educated critics of every society from Ancient Greece onwards.

Decision-makers and others dealing with indigenous peoples were more likely to swing between the "treacherous savage" stereotype and the "loyal, childlike native". The loyal native has only to resist assimilation and exploitation to the mildest degree to be seen as capable of any amount of savagery.

One of the comforts of a stereotype applied to members of another culture or gender or class is that it allows us to recognise the existence of a different culture without having to question the absoluteness of the values of our own. This allows us to evade the uncomfortable discovery that culture isn't an objective reality, but a way of making sense of what passes for reality, and that different cultures each have their own way of doing that.

We often use a classic perceptual puzzle to illustrate this point by analogy.<sup>10</sup>



Those who haven't met this picture before will probably see a portrait either of an old woman or a young one. With help most people can be enabled to see both of the portraits within it. Unless this is done, one's first impression is assumed to be the only one available, and this corresponds to a monocultural view of the world. At that stage it's easy to say that the picture "is" the person one sees in it, and that any alternative view is an aberration.

Once it's clear that both women are interpretations of the same set of black marks on a white background, we have to shift our standpoint. Not only must we take into account a different and equally valid view, but we must also acknowledge that both are simply ways of seeing rather than truths in themselves.

When we make the same discovery in a real situation about whatever culture we were reared in, there is a real and painful loss of innocence.

Stereotypes are one tool among others in every culture's kit to protect its members from this realisation.

Adam Curle gives an example of this from his own experience, describing the culture shock he felt on returning to England from a period among the Lapp people:

Although I had fancied myself as flexible, liberal, and objective, I had possessed a deep identification with the habits of my own culture. This caused my initial resistance to the Lapp way of life. In fact I had soon come to accept it, feeling that it worked and was perfectly valid in its own context. But this meant that the values of my own society were not absolute but relative; that I had an identity not simply as an Englishman, but as a member of a wider community of people . . . And so, in a peculiar way, I became a stranger [in England], because I had accepted the way of life of another land. <sup>11</sup>

## **Heathen savages, loyal natives and the rest**

In a colony there are especially strong pressures not to honour alternative views of reality. Belief in the rightness of one's own culture provides the justification for the colonising activity, and in the early stages the colonisers are a minority, with all the problems of maintaining their values and belief system which that poses. Those who try for a bicultural vision face the taunts of their fellows for "going native", and must also deal with a powerful set of stereotypes and labels for the indigenous people.

The stereotype of the "treacherous savage" was used to discredit even such an unlikely figure as Te Whiti o Rongomai, and was widespread in the New Zealand of the settlement period, as it was in other colonies. It has a long history before that time, and reaches back indeed to the way that mediaeval Europe classified the world. There were Christians and heathens. Some of the heathen, as in India and China, were civilised, that is, they had a recognisable national or imperial political system and a settled agriculture. The rest of the world consisted of "heathen savages".

Nomadic tribal societies were automatically assumed to be savage, without either religion or culture. This had no essential connection with their skin colour



or other racial characteristics. In fact, whatever their race they could be converted and civilised, and this was a duty whenever possible. The main debate was about whether they should be Christianised, by force or by persuasion only.

This became a major issue at the time when European powers began to colonise the rest of the world. For England the period of colonisation began with the reconquest of Ireland in the late sixteenth century. The comparative historian George Fredrickson sees this as a dress rehearsal, by a group of West Country landed gentry with capitalist ambitions, for what they would later do in Virginia, and it is significant that racial difference was not part of the Irish scenario.<sup>12</sup>

The Irish were easy enough for English Protestants to classify as heathen; even in the nineteenth century, a Protestant missionary noted that Roman Catholics and heathen were "pretty much synonymous in New Zealand".<sup>13</sup> Also the Irish still had elements of seasonal movement in their agriculture, and lived in a semi-tribal system, so could be conveniently regarded as "savage". England's entrepreneurs could therefore justify on culturally approved grounds the large-scale expropriation of land, coercion and discriminatory laws which laid the foundations of modern Irish history.

Emphasis on skin colour came later. Even when the colonisation experiment moved to America, Native Americans were often thought to be born white and to become brown because of the climate. The essential feature that made it permissible to dominate them was their "heathen savage" culture.

Some promoters of colonisation saw the Native Americans as potential trading partners, and to these the First Nations appeared as gentle and tractable peoples. Those who wanted substantial settlement from England, however, needed land. Their stereotype Indian was the dangerous savage. One of them had great difficulty in reconciling what he knew on authority about them with what he actually experienced. He wrote that they were "naturally given to trechery, howbeit we could not finde it in our travell up the river, but rather a most kind and loving people".<sup>14</sup>

## **Racism**

What then seems to have happened is that in the colonial situation, where exploitation had been justified in terms of the "heathen savage" status both of the indigenous peoples and of imported slave labourers, a problem arose for

capitalism when the exploited groups began to become civilised and to convert to Christianity. At that point they could hardly continue to be treated as before unless a new theory could be found to justify it, and it was at that stage, especially in the southern colonies of America, that racism proper emerged. In other words, the qualities of the heathen savage were usefully found to be inheritable, and by 1682 Virginia had decreed that "heathen descent" was a sufficient criterion for lifelong servitude.<sup>15</sup>

In such plantation societies, and in South Africa, the oppression of people of colour also drew together all whites, both the poor and the powerful. This hadn't previously been so in America, where plantation labour was originally done by poor indentured workers from Britain and where class divisions were clear-cut. When slaves began to be brought in, poor whites and slaves worked alongside each other for a period, and seem often to have been aware of their common interests and to have intermarried. Once the field labour had been reserved exclusively for slaves, the poor whites became an intermediate group which came to identify itself more with the planters than with the despised blacks.

In economic colonies such as India, too, the British poor aligned themselves with their masters and emphasised their difference from the indigenous majority. So the stage was set for theories of racial superiority to be brought into the South Pacific when it was in its turn colonised, and for the First Nations in this region to be categorised as another variety of "nigger" - a term that was often used by Pakeha of all ranks, though less openly by those in power.

The tragedy for Aotearoa/New Zealand was that Maori, who were prepared to share the resources they owned and to be allies in a creative adventure, found themselves engaged with a Treaty partner whose religion and culture made such a partnership utterly inconceivable. In the long run, missionaries and Governors found it natural, with a few heroic exceptions, to side with their own people and to make the Maori the "other" and the antagonist.

## **Varieties of racism**

It may be helpful to clarify the various aspects of racism as we know it in relation to indigenous peoples. There is a fair degree of consensus about this.<sup>16</sup>

Personal racism, or racial discrimination, is the combination in an individual of negative attitudes and stereotypes with the power to discriminate

personally against the members of another ethnic group. At this level, intentions matter.

Cultural racism is less personal, a prevailing ideology that sees other ethnic groups as inferior. Those who are culturally racist may or may not actively discriminate against others; in some situations, as we shall see with mission activity in the nineteenth century, they may indeed see themselves and be seen by others as the champions and defenders of a people they do not in the end consider their equals.

The culturally racist ideology measures other groups by its own values and finds them lacking, since it assumes that its own values and angle of vision are the only possible ones. It explains apparent inferiority by the supposedly typical defects of the members of the other group. For example, Maori are thought to fail in schools because they are lazy, less intelligent or have parents who don't care. If the "inferior" group is valued at all, it's for what is seen as exotic and colourful about its culture, or for the exceptional members who can be treated as honorary whites and co-opted into the dominant culture.

Finally there is institutional or structural racism. The dominant group enforces its own values and practices on others by setting up the structures and rules of society to which all are subject. For example, a dominant culture which values competition sets up a competitive education system. It believes that it is mirroring the reality of a tough world. Students from a more co-operative and group-oriented culture drop out from the system early, but which culture has the "correct" view of reality? Co-operation and interdependence are, we suggest, more a part of everyday experience than competition, though they may be less dramatic and therefore less valued.

With institutional racism we are well away from being concerned with intentions; it is identified and measured by its outcomes. Simply, wherever the members of one culture are on average doing worse than the members of a dominant culture, in areas such as health, education, income, employment and rates of imprisonment, there we have measurable institutional racism. In the same way we can measure the degree of other structural forms of oppression, such as sexism.

## Pressures to maintain racism

At their least sinister, group stereotypes are part of the apparatus of ready-made reactions which help us deal with a complex society - automatic responses that leave us free energy for a few significant issues and relationships. We may have crafted them ourselves in the past, or may have taken them over unexamined from others. If there is no more to them than this, we can review or abandon a stereotype when we truly attend to it

If we are not open to such a review, it may be because of the attitudes that are current in a large or small group that is important to us. We are perhaps under pressure from this group to maintain the racist stereotypes as an unspoken condition of our membership of it part, of our subscription fee. Such a group is often defending a position of privilege in some way, and to change the stereotype would threaten the balance of power. There is usually an ideology that explains why the underdogs are underprivileged - it's God's will, or there is something inferior about them which prevents them from succeeding. In colonial situations, this cultural racism, or racist ideology, may become a keystone of the whole social structure.

The position is intensified in times of economic or political insecurity, when stereotyped groups may become scapegoats for tensions they did not create. Aotearoa/New Zealand has seen plenty of such times over the past 150 years, and is currently going through another of them. When Maori try to hold on to or reclaim their economic resources, they are seen as a threat. In 1845 Alfred Domett, on behalf of the New Zealand Company, petitioned the English Parliament to recall a Governor who had actually tried to protect Maori interests as was required of him by the Treaty of Waitangi. Domett described Governor Fitzroy's native legislation as:

this monstrous, this mistaken, policy of rewarding outrage by concession, which in its operation has called into activity the passions of treacherous, avaricious, and cruel savages.<sup>17</sup>

This is manipulative writing for a particular audience, but the same kind of mud was continually poured into the eye of the ordinary settler through the newspapers of the day, owned and edited by the same emerging upper class that was to dominate New Zealand politics for the first fifty years. No wonder that settlers began to hold "a feeling of the most rancorous enmity" towards Maori.<sup>18</sup>

## Projecting the shadow

There's a further factor in some negative stereotyping. When it is passionately held and expressed, then some projection may be going on. In other words, the stereotypes are reflecting unacceptable parts of ourselves that we have repressed into unconsciousness, in obedience to what we thought we were being told by significant adults during childhood, whether rightly, or not. For example, we may have learned to repress anger, or greed, or the desire to dominate others. They have become part of what the great psychologist Carl Jung termed each person's "shadow".

These repressed impulses don't lose their energy by becoming unconscious. Since we can't afford to recognise them in ourselves, we displace them instead onto others. He or she is violent, selfish, power-crazed or manipulative. They are treacherous, avaricious and cruel. We have had to give up these impulses in order to conform and belong in our society, and may become wonderfully self-righteous in our attitudes to those we see as not conforming. If they belong to a vulnerable group, already apt to be scapegoated, there is little limit to the way they may be treated.

Te Whiti was branded in the press as a fanatic and a "wily, cautious savage" whose pacifism was a sham, who would have committed murder but for fear of the consequences - a remarkably clear case of the way people's own repressed urges are projected on to others. A newspaper editor of the time exulted in the prospect of "a war of extermination... The time has come in our minds when New Zealand must strike for freedom", and this means the death-blow to the Maori race". This, let us remember, was all in response to a wholly non-violent movement of protest.<sup>19</sup>

An additional layer is added when belief in the Devil is a strong force in a culture. As Karen Armstrong puts it, "As the repressions of Christianity spread through society to the common people, the Devil became the arch-projection for all the 'evil' that they could not accept in themselves".<sup>20</sup> This made it easy to link women and indigenous peoples with the Devil, licensing witch-burnings and racist violence.

For the individual, these are the roots of racism. To become centred individuals, in touch with the Christ within us, we are challenged to recognise and integrate our shadow as well as the other aspects of our unconscious. Only in that way, Carl Jung maintains, can we know ourselves well enough not to be

helplessly dominated at critical moments by our shadows. Then, too, we can withdraw the projections of the shadow on to others and "see them whole and against a wide sky".

## **The Aotearoa/New Zealand experience**

By the time of the colonisation of Aotearoa, missionaries and governors came not as crusaders to subjugate, but speaking of goodwill and service. They came, however, with total confidence in their superiority over other societies. Most cultures are ethnocentric to some degree. In Britain's case this was amplified by being the world's major, military and economic power, with so many colonies that the Colonial Office had difficulty in keeping a tally of them. Settlers had "an inherent attitude that Divine Providence had created the races of mankind ...in an immutable order of precedence with Anglo-Saxons firmly entrenched at the head of it " <sup>21</sup>

So, seeing Maori as an obstacle to their need for land, settlers simply assumed that their wishes had greater priority than those of the Maori owners. And even the missionaries and governors, who initially sought to limit settler demands and to protect Maori interests, were unable to see Maori as their equals, whatever the Treaty might say about equal rights.

The missionaries sought to protect the Maori as a parent might protect a small child. In the long run this made them the allies of the settlers, who shared a different stereotype which nonetheless sprang from the same cultural racism; and from quite an early stage, most Europeans believed that Maori would die out, though they differed as to whether this was a good thing or not. This expectation was based on the prevailing theory of Social Darwinism, that the survival of the fittest applied to human races, and that Europeans were self-evidently the fittest.

Governor George Grey himself provides an example of much of what we've said about these attitudes. Arriving in 1845, he quickly decided to master the Maori language and mythology as ways to understand Maori concerns and the oratory in which they were expressed; he later published important material in Maori and translations into English of parts of it. This may suggest someone anxious to understand, someone who would be sympathetic to the Maori aspirations he was appointed to defend. In fact, he was simply collecting information that enabled him better to manipulate situations. He was conscious

his advantages over Europeans who didn't have the use of the Maori language, but remained contemptuous of the Maori values and beliefs he was learning:

It must further be borne in mind that the native races who believed in these traditions or superstitions are in no way, deficient in intellect. and in no respect incapable of receiving the truths of Christianity; on the contrary, they readily embrace its doctrines and submit to its rules; in our schools they stand a fair comparison with Europeans, and, when instructed in Christian truths, blush at their own former ignorance and superstitions, and look back with shame and loathing upon their previous state of wickedness and credulity.<sup>22</sup>

The Christian God worshipped by scholars and gentlemen such as George Grey was just as much a jealous God as in the Old Testament. It wasn't however necessary to root out Maori beliefs and systems, only to marginalise them - for example by studying them until recently in the anthropology departments of our universities rather than in theology or religious studies departments.

## **Social structures**

Earlier, we mentioned some awkward questions about how the power to shape and influence a culture is spread among its members, and who benefits most from the process. While cultures and social structures are continually shaped and reshaped by social groups, not all groups, we suggest, have equal power to do this.

Indeed, there is a whole set of inequalities built into our culture. Each discriminates against one sort of person in favour of another. Each maintains limiting myths about the characteristics and abilities of those who are discriminated against, and so prevents them from being treated as full adult members of society. In this way, the power to define the world and its ways rests with those who survive all the successive rounds of discrimination, but the apparent differences between the other groups discourage them from combining together. We saw an example of this in the division between blacks and poor whites in the southern United States.

All the forms of discrimination involve dualisms of one kind or another, seeing a world divided into mutually exclusive and opposing groups. For our present purposes the most salient divisions are racism, sexism and classism. These

are the dualisms which, added together, exclude from power much the greater part of the population. Who in fact are the minority who escape these dualisms and who define "normality"?. Why, the white male power-holders who constitute what Anne Wilson Schaef designates the White Male System.<sup>23</sup>

Another of these dualisms, of the same kind as black/white or male/female, but even more far-reaching, is human/non-human. This can hook most of us into the oppression of the rest of creation. It rests on the belief that we are separate and independent of the rest of the life and environment of Gaia - a belief we are rapidly reviewing as our environmental behaviour threatens our own continued existence. It rests also on a belief that we are superior to other species of living creatures. Elizabeth Dodson Gray points out that the comparison is stacked, that we have always selected something that humans do particularly well and then asserted that it is the crucial evidence of our superiority.<sup>24</sup> It is the same unconscious trick that enables the White Male System to set the examinations which other groups are bound to fail.

In pointing out these oppressions, we are not attacking the individual members of the White Male System. They are no more villainous than the members of any other group, and they too are shaped by the social structures they inhabit and find it difficult to escape the mind-sets and the actual constraints which the structures impose.

However, they do have more power than others, and the system works to their benefit. We may also need to keep in mind that the real core of the White Male System, estimated at one hundred men for New Zealand in 1980, comprises a very small group in each society who know one another, who meet continually, and who are therefore able to organise in a way that no other group can.<sup>25</sup>

There are several reasons why the oppressed majority doesn't combine its strengths to change the system. As we have suggested, women, the working class and indigenous peoples each have some apparent interests that divide them against each other and ally them with the White Male System. In our country, only young unemployed Maori women have virtually no interests in common with the System.

Some of the things that divide the groups against one another are competition for resources such as jobs, and housing; some are the myths that encourage them to see themselves as superior in some respect to the others. So the "heathen savage" myth, transformed into the myth of the unknown Maori rapist,



encourages Pakeha women to distrust Maori men; sexist myths encourage Maori men to identify in that respect with Pakeha men; and so the list continues.

A second reason why the dominant class maintains its position is that it is extremely difficult for alternative structures to be seriously considered. Things are assumed to be immutably the way they are. Other possibilities are censored when they can be, as was done for centuries in England until censorship broke down in the 1640s and for the first time the voices of the common people, including the Diggers and other forbears of Quakerism, could be plainly heard in the horde of pamphlets that emerged.

When censorship is impracticable, the Babel effect will usually cancel out the possibilities of real change. The people are many and diverse, the dominant group is small and homogeneous, and a media flood of contradictory pieces of information without adequate background information keeps the people confused.

Another way to limit change is to co-opt new ideas by picking up the theme words and redefining them into something that is innocuous enough to put into a major party platform (e.g. "green" ideology) or to trivialise into ridicule (e.g. "Women's Libbers").

But perhaps the most damaging of the mechanisms for preventing change is "internalised oppression", which through the culture and its vehicles - education, advertising, the media and the way things are done - persuades women, Maori and others that they are indeed inferior beings who must rely on others to guide them and smile upon them. The penalty for bucking the system is to be excluded from it, and when, the alternatives are unknown that is a terrifying prospect. It makes many even of the oppressed the vehement champions of the, White Male System, and the foes of others who share their oppression but would struggle against it.

Demaris Wehr writes of internalised oppression in women as "the self-hater" which appears as an "inner voice" or an image, or comes through in dreams. She says: "Most women in patriarchy . . . experience the unrecognised self-hater as depression, low self-esteem, too much dependency on others for approval, and a great fear of overstepping the place patriarchy has prescribed for them. " <sup>26</sup> The same mechanism among Maori children sees many going through stage of denying their Maoriness, and even trying, to scrub away their brown skins, in the attempt to be acceptable.

Where does religion come into the picture of social structures? Not too well, unfortunately. Traditional Christianity (for which we cannot of course hold Jesus of Nazareth responsible) has allied itself with the dominant group since it became an official religion. As Rosemary Radford Ruether puts it:

The Church has allowed itself to become the cultural guardian of these symbols of domination and subjugation. This role is an apostasy to the mission of the Church as the representative of liberated humanity. Instead the Church becomes the sacraliser and last stronghold of the "old order" presiding over the final sanctuary where these alienations are perpetuated.<sup>27</sup>

In its performance as part of the social order the institutional Church has sanctified the shift by which the spiritually elect became a self-perpetuating economic elite. In the Puritan movement and after, worldly success was taken to be a sign of God's approval. The result was that the poor who from Biblical times had had an especially close relationship with God, came instead to be viewed as deserving their poverty. It was their own fault that they didn't prosper an attitude still powerful in society among those who say "There are jobs for all those who really want them".<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the institutional Church has only recently begun to question racism and sexism. It did sponsor charity work, but that skirted around the issues of the sources of oppression. As Helder Camara put it, "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint: when I ask why they are poor, they call me a Communist"<sup>29</sup> When the position of an indigenous people is intolerable, it is safer to give handouts under controlled conditions than to challenge the system, and the Church has been a handy agency for the purpose.

## **The role of the missionaries**

The first missionaries in Aotearoa were not ordained clergy but tradesmen and their families, under the Church Missionary Society policy of "Civilise first; then Christianise". They were welcomed as the bringers of new technologies, including the reading and writing which fascinated Maori.

Missionaries came to play a role in peacemaking between tribes, but Maori were unimpressed by the strife between Christian denominations:

If we forsook the faith of our fathers, which creed should we select and adopt? For they all spoke of "Truths", yet condemned the Truths of the

other! And the end was that we sat on our heels and doubted the preaching of either!<sup>30</sup>

By setting aside special times and places for worship, and by implication making other times and places profane, missionary enterprise began to secularise the previously sacred universe which Maori had inhabited. Quakers, with our refusal to hallow particular times and places, will understand the paradox.

There was much in the new religion, especially in the New Testament, that had no immediate appeal for Maori. Fall, redemption, resurrection and judgement meant nothing to a people who all went to the same afterlife with no differences of destination. If the fire and brimstone on which evangelical clergy relied to maintain godly order had no great terrors for Maori, the missionaries nevertheless undermined the main supports of order in Maori society, and treated their traditional beliefs with as much contempt as Governor Grey.

At the same time, the early missionaries were totally dependent on their Maori patrons for protection. They despised the seaport morals of the few Pakeha settlers, but the single men among them were as dependent on Maori women for female companionship as were the whalers. The Rev. John Butler's journal for 1821 claims that all the single men among the mission had "committed fornication among the heathen".<sup>31</sup>

It was especially difficult because the missionaries represented a particularly narrow and restrictive form of Christianity with which they hoped to create an ideal new society among their converts. They set themselves as well as the Maori impossible standards, and created the conditions for hypocrisy, guilt and projection in themselves and for disillusionment among their converts.

When respected long-term missionaries such as Henry Williams could describe Maori as "governed by the Prince of Darkness in all their movements", and complained that shaking hands with them put him in contact "with the filthy creatures in every place", it can be seen that only limited dialogue was possible.<sup>32</sup> The scene was set for an ultimate rejection of mission religion, and for the development of new religious movements led by Maori prophets, combining some of the new knowledge with older traditions.

The missionaries came to be criticised as hireling priests, answerable more to the Government than to God. They had bought large areas of Maori land.

Richard Taylor claimed 50,000 acres, Henry Williams 22,000. Sir Apirana Ngata's translation of a Ngapuhi song goes:

It was in the year '14 that Christianity landed at Oihi and reached the Maori people. It was there that Marsden stood up, and his message was this: God is in heaven, look therefore to the sky. But the Maori people turned and gazed below to the land, the soil of Aotearoa. They beheld it decoyed away with the iron spade, the iron axe, the flaming red blanket and the iron jew's harp. Thy goods, O Governor! Alas, the land has gone adrift on the great ocean of Kiwa.<sup>33</sup>

The missionaries accompanied British troops in their campaigns against Maori, and it was assumed that their hymns and prayers were to ensure victory over the Maori people. Oddest of all, missionaries automatically described Europeans as "Christians", and continued to go on referring to Maori as "heathen" even when they had become converts. They obviously saw "heathen" as a racial description rather than an individual one, just as in the American South.

## **Tangata whenua - the people of Mother Earth**

If we look at what we can know of Maori culture as the missionaries and traders first encountered it, and if we also know something of English history, there are some striking similarities to pre-Christian, pre-Conquest England. Indeed, there are similarities to many other tribal cultures as well. This is more than just a curiosity. We are looking at peoples who have in many respects recapitulated in a century and a half our own history of the last thousand years or so.

If we believe in social evolution as necessarily a progressive force, this may persuade us that Maori were a "primitive" culture which needed bringing up to date. That was certainly the missionary view, and there's no question - that Maori eagerly accepted new technology. Presumably the experience of felling a large tree with a stone tool is a powerful inducement to welcome iron axes. However, there are losses as well as gains in opening up to a wider world, especially a world of international empires and the flowering of capitalism.

One of the first effects in all colonies of settlement was that land came to be seen not as Papatuanuku, ancestress and nourisher of all life, but as a commodity

and a factor of production. For the most part, once they had yielded the land the colonisers wanted, indigenous peoples were simply marginalised in their own countries, bereft both of resources and of cultural support. Grenfell Price describes the first stage of the process:

During an opening period of pioneer invasion on moving frontiers the whites decimated the natives with their diseases; occupied their lands by seizure or by pseudo-purchase; slaughtered those who resisted; intensified tribal warfare by supplying white weapons; ridiculed and disrupted native religions, society and culture, and generally reduced the unhappy peoples to a state of dependency under which they neither desired to live, nor to have children undergo similar conditions.<sup>34</sup>

We are looking here at the difference between a patriarchal spirituality (based on Fall, Judgement and Redemption) with its accompanying patriarchal capitalist economy on the one hand, and a Creation-centred spirituality and a communal economy on the other. We know which has historically produced the greatest range and volume of goods, but is that the best measure we have?

Primitive means complex. . . No people today is newly born. No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket and the transistor radio, and the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artefactual situations) and it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.<sup>35</sup>

If you find it hard to agree that communally produced art is a valid measure of a culture (not the only one, but valid) consider the ultimate outcomes of the two kinds of production. One has enabled "civilised" nations to lay each other waste on a vast scale, both deliberately in war and accidentally in the pursuit of profit, and now threatens the continued survival of human life on earth along with many other forms of life. The other has gone into cultural continuity and the affirmation of the meaning of human life.

We're not engaged here in putting down our own culture, but we do suggest approaching it without too many ethnocentric assumptions. Looking empathetically at other cultures may suggest ways out of some of our dilemmas.

Ranginui Walker names two types of culture, one "indigenous" and the other "metropolitan", and says that:

the distinguishing feature of indigenous cultures is the relationship between the people, the earth, and its resources... Indigenous people think of themselves as an integral part of the natural order. Apart from the demarcation of tribal territories they think of themselves as belonging to the earth rather than as its owners.<sup>36</sup>

Each indigenous culture expresses this relationship in its creation myths, and each emphasises particular aspects of a common core of spirituality. Maori mythology, looked at from outside as we must, but without Governor Grey's preconceptions, seems to offer a particularly rich view. All of life descends through the gods from Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatuanuku, the earth mother. The tearing apart of these first parents by Tane, god<sup>37</sup> of the forests, was the first disruption to the natural order, a tragic necessity for growth and development, achieved at the cost of unleashing storms and the uncertainty of survival and security that they symbolise.

Another episode of the same myth explains the human ability to dominate natural resources. It endorses that ability but at the same time emphasises that other living things, though we use them, are also our cousins. When a tree was felled, for example, Tane had to be appeased with a prayer for the death of his child, and Tane was also the progenitor of the human race as well as of the tree.

The official Judaeo-Christian tradition is utterly different As Lynn White notes,

To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly two millenia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.<sup>38</sup>

The transcendental Christian God created nature as something separate from God. Humanity, though also created and not begotten, was "in the image of God" and was given dominion over the rest of creation, which has no spiritual content nor any kinship to human beings. God is transcendent and mysterious, our father or mother only in a mystical sense.

There was, however, also an "indigenous" European tradition of popular religion, a blend of the radical Christianity of the dispossessed and the old peasant

religion of Mother Earth, who keeps turning up in disguise even within Christianity, for example as St. Bridget and as an aspect of Mary.

St. Francis was able to see our kinship with the rest of creation. And Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger leader, could write about nature as follows:

And indeed if you would know spiritual things, it is to know how the spirit or power of wisdom and life ... dwells within and governs both the several bodies of the stars and planets in the heavens above, and the several bodies of the earth below, as grass, plants, fishes, beasts, birds and mankind."<sup>39</sup>

Not that this European creation-centred spirituality was a single unified movement. The evidence for it is spread over the centuries and over the whole of Christendom, and it was promptly suppressed whenever it became a coherent threat. Rather it comes from what are perhaps archetypal images, constantly put down by official religion but always re-emerging, as now again in the work of feminist theologians and of others such as Matthew Fox.

What then can we learn from these creation mythologies which belong to indigenous cultures, including that of Britain? Why, in any case, are myths important?

A myth is an idea, a metaphor, to reflect in outward and visible signs of written and spoken words an inward and spiritual grace. But the moment it is taken as literally true it may become a graven image, and professed belief in it may become an unrecognised form of idolatry... A myth must be kept fluid and flexible, not frozen arid fixed, so that it can evolve as the perception of religious truth evolves.<sup>40</sup>

The creation-centred myths are certainly more resistant than Christianity to the leaching away of any sense of the sacred in human life. Peter Berger suggests that the relationship in Christianity between God and humanity is peculiar and perilous. There is a great gap between the creator and the created, and the sacred is on the other side with God. The gulf was filled with saints and angels in Catholicism, but Calvinist Protestantism reemphasised and dramatised the space between. God became immensely distant, and the only channel to God was the god/man Jesus. If the belief in the traditional Jesus Christ goes, as it has for the bulk of society, then the universe becomes indeed "disenchanted" and totally secular.<sup>41</sup>

In recovering a sacred universe, humanity needs all the allies we can find - physicists, mystics and prophets. It helps us that there are also indigenous religions, including some of the tangata whenua (the people of the land) of Aotearoa, who have maintained such a world view. For them, for instance, health includes body and mind, but also wairua (spirit) and whanaungatanga, the web of relationships with one's living extended family and with one's ancestry, which leads right back to the creation mythology, and consequent relatedness with all things.

Another lead in the redevelopment of spirituality can come from some Maori leaders and prophets who in the last century and this looked for ways to blend together Maori values and traditions with elements of the new religion and culture. Te Whiti in particular often sounds like an early Friend or a Digger.

The European missionary who in 1846 first came to Te Whiti's village was startled when he greeted the young man with "I come in peace, bringing God's word," to be answered "We know that word and greet you, in God's peace". The European "then discovered that Te Whiti already knew whole passages of scripture by heart, having learned them orally from other Maori who had been in touch with the missions.

When Te Whiti spoke in 1881 as the mature leader of the Parihaka community, it would be hard to tell his translated words apart from those of James Nayler or Gerrard Winstanley:

Do not think I am fighting against men, but rather against the devil and all wickedness. Let us not use carnal weapons. Listen. Do not let us seek that which is lost - not look back to what is left ... There is to be nothing about fighting today, but the glorification of God, and peace on the land. Many generations have wished to see this day; but we, a blind; small, and a despised people, have been chosen and glorified this day... The canoe by which we are to be saved is forbearance... It will save us all. The land we spoke of is the old land; but if we choose a new land we shall be saved ... Put both your hands and your feet on the new land, and stand in the ark of patience.<sup>42</sup>

Some Maori prophets placed a great deal of emphasis on the story of Exodus, and identified with the experience of the Jews escaping from bondage. Exodus raises some problems, right down to the present day. On the one hand it is the charter for oppressed peoples, who can feel a special link with God and a certainty that they will come into the promised land of freedom. On the other



hand, Exodus is the high point of the history of the transcendent and militant Yahweh, saying in effect to the chosen people: "Oh, by the way, there are some indigenous people around in the Promised Land already, but since I've given it to you it's all right to clobber them and take over." Exodus has been used to justify the actions of many a colonising power, including for example the Boers in South Africa. Clearly it is to be treated with some caution.

It was in the same spirit that "Lord Durham ... suggested that [colonisation] was a law of God, who had chosen Englishmen especially for the task Those lands, declared Durham, were 'the rightful patrimony of the English people, which God and Nature have set aside in the New World for those whose lot has assigned them but insufficient portions in the Old.'" <sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that Lord Durham was the Governor of the New Zealand Company.

This is the misuse of religious imagery to offer an illusory freedom to one group at the expense of the oppression of another, and more generally to legitimise social structures, including racism, in the ultimate interest of the dominant group in society. It may be challenged by the oppressed groups taking up the same weapon of the Bible, as Te Whiti 0 Rongomai and others did, as early Friends did, and as liberation theologians in the Third World still do.

Yet something else is needed for liberation - a coming together of insights into the structures of oppression and a spiritual renewal from the mystical creation-centred traditions. Neither structural analyses of society nor mysticism in themselves need the Bible to legitimise them, and the Bible can then in turn be liberated to be one among many other sources of inspiration.

We have in ex-colonial societies the special privilege of living alongside peoples with alternative myth systems which will in some circumstances be more illuminating than our own. Awareness of this will encourage us to compare, to re-interpret, and to look beyond the surface of our own myths for their meanings. We shall be less likely to assume that either set of stories, like the old or the young woman in our earlier illustration represents literal reality, when both are actually pointers to underlying truths.

At the present time of ecological crisis, it's especially valuable to be able to draw on creation-centred traditions close at hand and evolved to fit the lands where we live. Metropolitan Europe is inclined to see Australia and New Zealand as frontier societies in a somewhat condescending sense; perhaps we are frontier

societies in the other sense of being the settings where major discoveries can arise from the long-deferred true partnership between indigenous and settler cultures.

## Friends and racism

In writing of the institutional Church, we haven't yet specified where Friends have fitted into the picture. Peter Berger points out that although most religion has legitimised the structures of social power, there is an alternative possibility. This is to be found in mystical religion, which casts doubt on the reality of "common sense" and reveals all institutions, including religious ones, as human constructions.<sup>44</sup> George Fox and other early Friends would have had little difficulty with this line of thought.

Although they were profoundly critical of human institutions, however, their main emphasis was not on social reform but on the need to pull down human authority and pride, and to substitute for it the leading of the Spirit. Convinced that they were the first fruits of a millennial change that would radically reshape the whole world, they spent little time on the specific injustices that would be swept away as Christ assumed rule over all. George Fox's criticism of the Leveller movement for political and social equality, another of the streams which, like the Diggers, ran into Quakerism, was that it relied on social engineering rather than on the Spirit. In George Fox's terminology, "You would have unity and fellowship, before life was raised up in you".

In fact George Fox could regard hierarchical social relationships with equanimity, for example between the head of a household and the other members, provided that the patriarch was led by the Spirit. And he had no difficulty in seeing slaves as part of a family, even plantation slaves in the Barbados. It is an attitude that is summed up by John Whitehead, quoted by Hugh Barbour:

By God's Ordinance, some have a Superiority given them, for the Punishment of evil-doers, and a Praise to them that do well . . . the Husband over the Wife . . . the Parents over the Children, the King over his Subjects . . . [But the] Honour due from Inferiors . . . consists not in vain Ceremonies . . . such as uncovering the Head, and bowing the Knee . . . neither in vain Complements . . . but in . . . speedy Obedience to all just commands . . . We design to level nothing but Sin . . . And therefore we cannot Call any Man ... "my Lord," because God is the Lord.<sup>45</sup>

When King Charles returned in 1660, the vision of the Rule of the Saints faded. The transformation of society was not an immediate prospect, whether it came from the operation of the Spirit or from human struggle. The leaders of the next Quaker generation were the rising merchants of meetings such as Gracechurch Street in the City of London. During the quietist period, despite individual Friends who spent themselves and their wealth on major social causes, the prevailing Quaker attitude was to avoid involvement in secular organisations or, in inter-denominational activity, for fear of "contamination by the world".

It was a time, however, that allowed John Woolman in America to travel among the Indians without attempting to convert them to Quakerism, and without any sense of cultural or spiritual superiority:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded, from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren in the best sense of the expression.<sup>46</sup>

There is a timeless beauty in this. John Woolman is not making a simplistic assumption that because we share the same spirit the differences between cultures are therefore irrelevant. It is because, of the cultural differences that his Indian journeys were worth making, so that "haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth among them".<sup>47</sup>

This, taken in isolation, is what would now be described as a multicultural stance, one which goes beyond a superficial assertion of unity but does not take into account issues of oppression and differences of power. It doesn't do John Woolman full justice, however, for he is also well-known for his radical though gently phrased critiques of slavery and economic oppression, and of their ill effects on the oppressor as on the oppressed.

By the time the eighteenth century had passed, and Friends "went to America to do good, and did well", the temper of the times had altered, and Friends like other churches had been affected by the Evangelical Movement. Friends who sought justice for indigenous peoples in America or in Australia did so in the name of justice and philanthropy, not of solidarity with the dispossessed.

This is not to discount what was done and said. Able now to organise and to co-operate with non-Quakers, Friends were to play a vital role in the anti-slavery movement and its successor, the Aborigines Protection Society. Some were able to make the conceptual leap to associate these other oppressions with that of women. As a close-knit group with wealth and the energy of conviction and with fewer distractions than most, Friends played a greater part in these movements than their numbers would suggest.

All the same, in dealing with indigenous rights they were, now that they were more open to the world, inevitably the children of their society and time. "Advice to Emigrants", a section in a former edition of a London Yearly Meeting Book of Discipline, includes a passage written in 1840, at the height of Quaker involvement in the Aborigines Protection Society, when there were current concerns about South Africa, Australia and New Zealand:

We would entreat [settlers] ... to reflect upon the responsibility which attaches to them when they are the neighbours of uncivilised and heathen tribes. It is an awful but indisputable fact, that most settlements of this description besides dispossessing the natives of their land without equivalent have hitherto been productive of incalculable injury to the moral and physical condition of the native races. . . Earnestly, therefore, do we desire that all those under our name, who may emigrate to such settlements, may . . . exhibit the practical character of that religion which breathes "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men". As this is their aim, they will not only exert themselves to check the evils . . . inflicted by the whites upon their feebler neighbours, but will be solicitous to . . . diffuse amongst them the blessings of civilisation and Christianity; which will prove the best means of preventing their extermination, and of raising them to the full enjoyment of their rights.<sup>48</sup>

This is very much in the style of the Aborigines Protection Society; along with the recognition of the evils of colonisation and the responsibilities of settlers to avoid oppression, it perpetuates the dualism of the "uncivilised and heathen" opposed to "civilisation and Christianity", and assumes that the effective enjoyment of rights depends on assimilation.

Indeed, it even takes the debate backwards; it had been apparent for a long time that no amount of assimilation would secure equal rights for indigenous peoples in Australia, any more than it had saved the Cherokee Indians in Georgia. The Cherokee had adopted a republican form of government and were literate agriculturalists. Despite that they were rounded up in 1838 and forcibly marched

to Oklahoma, with such brutality that four thousand of the fifteen thousand of them died on the journey. These were the realities of power for which most Friends, like other churches of their time, had no adequate analysis.

Meanwhile, although these later Friends were unable to be fully open to other cultural perspectives, they were capable of great clarity about the wrongs they encountered. Prominent among the Quaker members of the Aborigines Protection Society was of course James Backhouse. Writing from Australia in 1834, he noted that:

Aborigines have had wholesale robbery of territory committed upon them by the Government, and the settlers have become the receivers of stolen property, and have borne the curse of it in the wrath of the Aborigines, who, sooner or later, have become exasperated at being driven off their rightful possessions.<sup>49</sup>

This is a note we hear less strongly from Friends who were, actually living as settlers in Australia and New Zealand in the early period, though it isn't entirely absent. The impression we have about New Zealand Friends, at least, is that after the first few years, when Maori were still in the majority, Friends were little aware of what was happening in Maori life. This they shared with most other Pakeha. Maori were decreasing in number, both relatively and absolutely, under the impact of imported disease and despair. Moreover, they lived mainly in rural areas, and Pakeha lived increasingly in towns.

Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand are now beginning to sense a corporate concern about honouring the Treaty and about bicultural issues. Some have been involved as individuals for a long time, both personally and professionally, but it wasn't until Yearly Meeting 1989 that we were able to come to unity enough to make a public statement about the issues.<sup>50</sup> Even then we were clear that this was in the first case ministry to ourselves, and that we were not ready to tell others how to "get it right" when we were ourselves looking for the light.

The Aotearoa/New Zealand Yearly Meeting statement bases itself explicitly on "our longstanding commitment to social equality and peaceable co-operation". It continues: "We accept that honouring the Treaty will have implications for our personal and collective lives. We cannot yet know in detail what this will mean for the Religious Society of Friends, but we acknowledge that it will certainly involve equitable sharing of resources and giving up by Pakeha of exclusive decision-making in the institutions of society."

Like Friends elsewhere, we in Aotearoa/New Zealand are no longer mainly from the skilled working class, like early Friends, nor part of the dominant class like the dynasties of English Friends in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In our working lives we are predominantly from the lower professional groups - the teachers, social workers, administrators, technologists, health workers - the "auxiliary class" who staff the institutions of society and enable them to function.

The relevance of this is that members of the auxiliary class are constantly forced to make choices. The public services which many of us work in are supposedly there to serve all, and often, as with education, they have goals related to greater social equality - precisely what makes them attractive to Friends. On the other hand we can see that in their histories, although they may have increased the access of the poorest to services, they have not been successful in promoting general equality. Power and wealth are still highly concentrated, the gap between rich and poor increases, and those who don't belong to the White Male System are still disempowered.<sup>51</sup>

Most New Zealand education, for example, is racist according to the definition of institutional racism given earlier. The role models for success are Pakeha, the culture of the school is Pakeha (and competitive rather than co-operative), the decisions about policy and funding are made locally and nationally by Pakeha. Maori children who succeed do so by assimilating to some extent, which creates future conflicts for them in relating to their own people. Attempts to counteract these influences meet with fierce Pakeha resistance, beginning with parents who fear that their children will be disadvantaged if Maori children receive "special treatment".

And behind all this is the sense that the education system works for those it is meant to work for. It produces the sense of justified privilege which helps to maintain the dominant class; it produces others with the credentials that make them recruits to the auxiliary class, able and willing to keep the systems running; and it teaches the rest that they are failures who should not expect too much.

There is no easy answer for the Quaker teacher caught in this dilemma, nor for the Quaker social worker or health professional. To focus exclusively on service to individuals is insufficient, and yet the opportunities for change are painfully slow and limited, and it is difficult to be totally clear about what changes are needed.

One way out of that dilemma at least is to listen to Maori voices instead of trying to work it out on one's own. Working things out oneself is the prerogative of the powerful, and even when it is well-meaning, it is an oppression of those who haven't had a say.

## **Ways forward in society**

Anyone of the oppressive dualisms we have named, based on race, species, gender or social class, can take us to the heart of our present condition. The oppression of indigenous peoples in societies like yours and ours pose all the major questions: the nature and uses of power; the distribution of resources; and the path towards more peaceful relationships. These are issues which can help us to understand more deeply what it means to be fully human.

It has been suggested by Ashley Montagu that to deal with racism requires:

- (a) public education backed by legislation, to demonstrate to those who simply conform to racist norms in society that 'such behaviour is no longer acceptable;
- (b) personal integration, so that we become more, self-aware and can avoid projecting our own shadows on to others;
- (c) social and economic security, which will avoid the forms of tension that encourage scapegoating;
- (d) alternative outlets for the frustrations and aggressions that accumulate in individuals and need release.<sup>52</sup>

These are substantial undertakings. Some of them presuppose a political will which isn't always present, particularly when the racism is directed against indigenous people (or people of colour in general). In these cases there are issues not only of racist assumptions, but also of history and our responsibility for putting right some of the effects of history.

A useful model for dealing with all manner of oppression is one of:

$$\text{CRITIQUE} + \text{COMPENSATION} + \text{CONSTRUCTION} = \\ \text{TRANSFORMATION}$$

This is a variation on the process of repentance and reparation.<sup>53</sup> It doesn't suppose that we are personally guilty for the past, but it does assert that we are implicated in its results and benefit from them. Therefore we need first to be clear about what has happened and why, to undertake a "critique". We have as it were to turn the histories upside down and examine them from the underside. A story from Africa will make the point:

A small boy is going to the mission school. When he comes home, his father asks, "Son, what did you learnt at school today?" "How the great white hunter kills the lion," the boy replies with puzzlement. "What troubles you about that story?" asks the father. "Well," the boy answers, "they tell us how brave and strong the lion is. It seems to me that every now and then the lion would kill the white hunter! After all, the lion is King of the jungle." The father shook his head sadly, "Son, until the lions learn to write books that is always the way the story will end."<sup>54</sup>

Then there is a need to compensate those who now and in the past have been disadvantaged and deprived of resources and opportunities, to ensure equity. This is the stage we are at in Aotearoa/New Zealand with the Waitangi Tribunal. It is carefully reviewing past actions that have affected Maori and recommending to Government, if resources were wrongly taken in the past, which of them should be returned. If the original resource can't now be restored without creating a new injustice to the present possessor, the Tribunal is recommending what other compensation the original Maori owners should receive instead.<sup>55</sup>

This stage of "compensation" is also the place for affirmative action policies in areas such as employment and promotion, which means that, other things being equal, we or our children may well miss out on opportunities in favour of someone from a group that has been disadvantaged in the past. At the individual level this is certainly unfair, but in terms of history and social justice it's a necessity.

At the third stage, that of "construction", we are asked to take a more difficult leap. Here we need to work on structural changes in society that will admit other cultures beside our own into the driving seat. We need changes based on a series of partnerships, primarily with the indigenous people of our country and flowing on from that to other immigrant cultures. This requires us to address the issues of power. Otherwise partnership, biculturalism and multiculturalism become sentimental traps with which the disempowered are all too familiar.



The rhetoric of "partnership" is widespread in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but a relationship which has denied Maori their rights and the opportunity of self-determination is not a true partnership, and is bound to create conflict and confrontation until power and resources are shared equitably.

It is beyond that point, when the critique and the compensation are dealt with, that we can begin to experience real partnership with its wholeness and interconnection. For those who are open to them, there are glimpses and occasional illuminations of what is possible. Most of our society is still frozen in its fear that naming differences will tear the social fabric apart, and is as yet unable to celebrate those differences.

We envision a relationship between White people and People of Colour marked by mutuality rather than oppression . . . Mutuality presumes relationships of equality, a balancing of gifts and vulnerabilities. The differences themselves become gifts rather than obstacles or barriers.<sup>56</sup>

This isn't the kind of work we can wait for national governments to initiate, subject as they are to, so many different pressures. At the moment, it seems to us that real movement on power-sharing is coming first from some voluntary organisations, special purpose local bodies such as Area Health Boards, and some special corners within government departments.

Small-scale transformation is a slow business, but we believe it is more real than immediately pressing for the government to make sweeping changes. Government must deal with most of the "compensation" issues, and will need to move as fast as possible on them; but "construction" and "transformation" cannot be diffused from the top down. They have to be worked out by those directly affected, drawing on the increasing range of others' experiences to find what is right in their own situation. When a body of experience and practice has developed, it will be time for government to take its direction from that.

Meanwhile, despite shortcomings, some resources are being shared and Maori are being given their shares collectively to use in their own ways. There is some affirmative action over selections and appointments. Interviews are increasingly being held in ways that are appropriate for Maori, with whanau (extended family) and support groups attending and speaking for their chosen applicants. In some institutions kaumatua (elders) are appointed by their people to ensure that cultural advice is available to Pakeha staff and decision-makers when

needed; or a Maori group to link the organisation with the surrounding Maori community. Such a group may have a degree of power in key decisions and appointments; for example, a job applicant may have to satisfy the different requirements both of the institution itself and of its Maori partners, with either group able to exercise a veto.

These changes need ultimately to go beyond achieving equality and into a shared responsibility for the continual redefinition of society. For this we need an evolving theology that will adequately celebrate both unity and diversity. It will help us in a journey where there are few if any maps as yet, except ironically from the experience of peoples like Maori themselves in the first forty years of European contact, when they experimented freely with new concepts, technology and forms of social organisation which blended their culture and another.

## **An evolving theology**

Adam Curle describes a peaceful relationship as one in which "through the structure of the relationship, the individuals or groups involved have a greater opportunity, and indeed are actively helped, to become what they really are".<sup>57</sup>

Mennonite theologian David Schroeder has given us some insights about this process of becoming more fully human.<sup>58</sup> He suggests, like other theologians, that creation is not a once-only past state but constantly ongoing, and that it has a number of elements which he deduces from the Biblical myth of creation. We want to add to his account of these elements what each of them might mean for our societies' relationship with their, indigenous peoples.

First, as humans we are called to become persons responsible for our own decisions and actions, and to regard others in the same way. This means, in relation to indigenous peoples, avoiding labels and stereotypes; and accepting their right to make their own choices for themselves.

Second, we are called, as our mythical ancestors were in the Garden, to engage in meaningful work, whether it is paid or unpaid. We can be enslaved either by lack of work or by work that has no meaning for us. When indigenous people, are marginalised into being a reserve labour force only, or can find only work that has no cultural value to them, we deny them the opportunity to be fully human.

Next, we are called to be co-creators with God, finding further creative possibilities in what already exists. One way of doing this is to "name the world" for ourselves and our children, using language to relate ourselves to the world and its inhabitants, to identify things and ideas so that they can be shared, wondered at and worked with. In doing this we maintain and take part in shaping culture, and in redeeming institutions that have become rigid. When our language excludes indigenous people and we ignore their language, then we prevent them from taking a full part in this co-creation.

Then, we are called to community, to relate and to take care of the needs of others in our lives. Capitalism has reduced that circle of compassion to the nuclear family, which can hardly bear the load of each member's needs. When George Fox's generation talked of "family" they meant something totally different: all those who made up a household were the family kin, servants, apprentices and all. It was easy to extend that model into the early Meetings of Friends, and for the Meeting to support children when parents were in prison or following a leading. Indigenous peoples still understand that structure, but our present culture makes few allowances for it.

Finally, we are called to respond to the blessing of creation, and to take our place and our share in it as equals. Indigenous spirituality is creation-centred, and despite the ravages of colonisation enough of it remains to inspire us - not to adopt it falsely as our own, but to look for the manifestations of the same spirit in our own traditions. Historically, missions have taught indigenous peoples a Fall-Redemption theology which has loaded them, along with women and the poor, not only with the standard burden of original sin but has also asserted that they are more fallen and ignorant than others.

We are saying with many others that European culture, under the influence of this Fall-Redemption theology and its later progeny of capitalism, has as we see it taken a major wrong turning over a number of centuries. It has had the impetus to become the dominant culture of the world, and the result is that it now threatens all other cultures and the very survival of the world itself.

There are alternative traditions and seeds of other possibilities within it, including the Society of Friends at its best, and these need nurturing as we look for a way forward. Racism against indigenous peoples is one of the signals of the wrong turning. Current developments in theology are redirecting our attention to a holistic cosmology which harmonises scientific, ecological and theological viewpoints. These are some, of the starting points for a liberating theology, one

that views all things as interdependent and for a spirituality which once again sees the entire universe as sacred.

What we are personally struggling to find is the balance between assertion and humility that will allow us to follow the injunction to both Pakeha and Maori to "listen to one another; to be sincere with one another, and above all to love one another in the strength of God".<sup>59</sup> It's easy to do that with Maori colleagues with a similar professional background; but the challenge is deeper than that, to listen and learn from all Maori - from detribalised and unemployed young people from the cities, from working-class women, from those whose thought processes operate in Maori ways and whose expression is sometimes culturally difficult for us to follow.

We have emphasised the importance of small-scale and local activity. This applies not only to dealing with racism, but to other forms of oppression too. Looking at the scene in Britain, Stephen Yeo notes how all the large-scale political philosophies, including social democracy, have led to increased power for the centralised state. In contrast he says:

In community politics, feminism, . . . rank-and-file "unofficial" movements at the points of production and elsewhere, there are signs of collective attempts at self-government all over again. It is in this space that Christian prophets will have to move.<sup>60</sup>

The mention of prophecy makes it clear that for us this constant analysis of social change and its meaning, and constant experimentation, is not divorced from spirituality. This is not a privatised religion, concerned with individual salvation somewhere else, nor the polite diffidence of a small sect trying to survive in the religious marketplace.

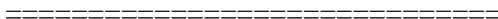
It is the prophetic tradition which requires us to ask questions such as: Are we perpetuating dependency or facilitating self-determination? Who benefits most from this action or programme, who is making the decisions, and who is bearing the cost? Is this action moving us towards a just society, and is the process itself an empowering one?

The spirituality that is real to us finds its inner strength in the mystical experience of connectedness with each other and with the whole of creation. This is the deep, still and vibrant centre that transcends time. From that dynamic place

it is possible to turn outwards and work in one's own available and chosen action spaces to help make manifest the harmony that is already known.

We love and learn from those who are in touch with that central place more consistently than we ourselves are, and we honour those like John Yungblut who remind us that this radical mysticism is the mainstream of the Quaker tradition.

It is also a place where we can meet those of other denominations, other cultures and other faiths who share the same experience and commitment. At the very centre we are indeed one, but as we turn outwards for action our differences of tradition and experience distinguish us and enable us to partner each other in the dialogue and the dance. The harmony is possible only because of the differences, the distances between.



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