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Justice as the Measure of Spirituality

A Critique of the Spirituality Underlying the book "The New Maori Myth"

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Justice as the measure of spirituality, is the plumbline I have chosen for a theological critique of the spirituality underlying the book "The New Maori Myth" written by Michael Drake, published by Wycliffe Christian Schools in 1988. The necessity for a plumbline to test the authenticity of christian spirituality is occasioned by claims in the book that characterise Maori spirituality as evil, while the fundamentalist patriarchal perspective of the author is characterised as biblical evangelism and presented as the only true christian faith (e.g. see pg 22 of the book in appendix 1).

An assumption that I will make in this essay is that christian spirituality is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the new creation empowered by the Holy Spirit. My method in undertaking the critique will be first to establish justice as the biblical test for christian spirituality. I will then analyse the spirituality underlying Drake's book within the theological categories of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the new creation empowered by the Holy Spirit, with a critical analysis of how the underlying spirituality of the book within each category impacts on justice.

While the content of the book is of deep concern to me to the extent that I have made a complaint on behalf of the Auckland Diocesan Bicultural Committee to the Race Relations Conciliator, this essay is not specifically a theological critique of the content of the book but of its underlying spirituality. Of course I will make references to the content and analyse it from my perspective, but as the content relates to Maori spirituality I consider any

theological critique of the content of the book would more appropriately be done by a Maori (should it be considered worthy of critique). As a base to work from for my critique of the underlying spirituality, I have attached a copy of the book and papers related to my complaint to the Race Relations Conciliator as Appendix 1. In particular, I refer to the finding of the Race Relations Conciliator who held that the complaint has substance on the following grounds:

"The highly selective use of reference material has created incorrect, untrue and misleading information which is abusive and insulting and likely to bring into contempt and ridicule the Maori people of New Zealand. Of particular concern are the sweeping generalisations such as 'Maori culture was and is completely immoral', pg 9 and 'A society built on Maori values is a society built on hatred and committed to perpetual violence', pg 27."

To date Drake remains unrepentant over his book which is being marketed by the League of Rights as "essential reading" (see their information pamphlet in appendix 2). As a proposal for conciliation I have put forward on behalf of the Diocesan Bicultural Committee that Drake apologise to the Tangata Whenua (such apology to include an admission of error), and withdraw the book from publication. He has ignored the conciliation process, and the matter is now being referred to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal. Both Drake and the League of Rights presumably regard the book as "christian" despite the finding that the contents are unjust, and this raises the question, "Does the book represent authentic christian spirituality? The question is a relevant theological issue, because the views espoused in the book have their roots in various strands of the

christian tradition, such as calvinism and fundamentalism, and elements of these doctrines still pervade a common form of "evangelism in the Church today. An example of the legacy of these doctrines in modern evangelism is the "four spiritual laws" which I will examine later in this essay; these were recommended by members of the Church Army in the course on evangelism at St John's College in 198

In attempting to establish justice as the biblical test for christian spirituality, I will begin with some examples of the prophetic distillation of justice as the basic requirement or ethic of covenant with God in the First Testament:

"Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harp I will not listen.
But let JUSTICE roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing stream"

Amos 5:23-24

"God has showed you, O human, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do JUSTICE, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8

My rationale in demonstrating that justice is the basic ethic of covenant in the First Testament, is that Jesus is portrayed as the incarnation or embodiment of the essential elements of covenant, God's hesed (gracious love) and emeth (true faithfulness), in the Second Testament:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
full of grace (hesed) and truth (emeth)" John 1:14a

"By nature all men are dead in sin and totally polluted in all parts and faculties of soul and body"

This theology of total depravity is a denial of the biblical affirmation that God created all people, male and female, in God's image (Genesis 1:27). The implicit separation of God from the world which underlies this view, is actually articulated in the booklet, "Have you heard of the four spiritual laws?" published by the Campus Crusade for Christ, and popular among fundamentalist evangelicals. Law Two states:

"Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God, therefore he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life."

This so-called "spiritual law" is illustrated by a diagram showing "Holy God" and "Sinful Man" to be physically separated, with an accompanying explanation, "The Two are completely separated". To this theology of total separation from God is inconsistent with the cosmological insights of scripture; that Christ is the creative force of the universe (John 1:3); that we cannot exist apart from God as "In God we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28); and that "In Christ all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Far so far from being authentic "biblical evangelism", the theologies of total depravity and total separation of humanity and the world from God which support the underlying spirituality of Drake's book, are contrary to scripture and not christian; the origin of the concept of the separation of God from the world is actually from Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy.*1

Without a holistic creation-centred base to spirituality, which recognises that "God is involved in the whole of life, creating and

blessing",^{*2} any theology of crucifixion becomes perverted, and this is apparent in Drake's book "The New Maori Myth". An example is the fixation with guilt on page 42:

"It is only from a position of total guilt that it becomes possible to forgive others and live humbly with people who can be freely acknowledged to be better than oneself."

To return to my thesis of justice as the measure of spirituality, the doctrine of guilt underlying the spirituality of Drake's book belies authentic spirituality, because it does a violence to the self and others and does not adequately deal with the guilt at all. Instead of a theology of crucifixion which comes to terms with sin by "dying to self", or "letting go" and emptying of life-denying forces and "befriending" reality, the doctrine of guilt represses the "self" in an unwholesome way that results in sycophantism, or alternatively assumes a dominating power over others who are used as scapegoats. This is so evident in "The New Maori Myth" that it amounts to nothing less than heavy irony. For instance, on page 2. Drake states:

"(Maori had) no inheritance to pass on to the next generation. The Maori had an orientation to the future that justified a plundering of resources for present pleasure."

What could be a more fitting epitaph for the Western consumer economy which is destroying forests, soil, fisheries, and threatening to destroy the world? But the irony is laced with pathos, because Maori had a well-preserved natural inheritance which they covenanted

*2 Quote from "The Theological and Bicultural Principles and Mission Basis of the Diocese of Auckland", as agreed at the Diocesan Synod, September 1988

in the Treaty of Waitangi to share with Pakeha as partners, only to see Pakeha systematically dispossess them of their human rights resources, land, language, and spirituality.^{*3} This is clearly unjust, but "The New Maori Myth" goes further in identifying the tool of the above oppression, "British Law",^{*4} with the "Biblical principles of peace etc" (pg 16). I am not suggesting that British law is itself necessarily evil, but that Christians are supposed to worship God and not any particular ideologies such as "British Law" "permanent ownership" (also pg 16), or "democracy", which should all be subject to critique and reform. The British politician Goldwin Smith writing about the colonisation of New Zealand at the time of the Maori holocaust (1860's - 1880's), exposed the hypocrisy of the spirituality that does not take the above facts of Maori dispossession into account:

"In rapacity and atrocity we have had many equals - perhaps not a few superiors; in pious rapacity and sanctimonious atrocity we may look through history for our peers in vain."^{*5}

The pious self-righteousness which is a characteristic of the spirituality in the above quotation is a feature of the Calvinism imported into New Zealand with the missionaries, and actually alternates with its anti-thesis of guilt.^{*6} The spirituality underlying Drake's book is a classic example of this today. The point of my thesis is that an authentic spirituality is not one that swings from triumphalism to guilt, but one that has a base that affirms creation, accepts the unpalatable facts, and gives rise to

*3 The Waitangi Tribunal Reports establish these facts

*4 See a publication by the CCANZ, Legislation Betrays the Treaty

*5 Pg 15, What Really Happened at Rangiaowhia? by Tony Simpson

*6 Pg 46 The Legacy of Guilt: A Life of Thomas Kendall by Phillip Barlow

responsibility for them. The paradox of christianity is that it is through crucifixion that the power of God is supremely manifested and any christian spirituality must be open to this process so that the power of God can work to change whatever is life-denying and give birth to new life. And the incarnational base to this theology of crucifixion and resurrection is clearly portrayed in the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels:

"The basileia of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the basileia of God is in the midst of you". (Luke 17:20-21)

An example of rebirth in New Zealand today is the restructuring that is taking place to take account of the partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi (such as the redrawing of the constitution of the Anglican Church). This is the result of the birthing of awareness that the Treaty is the embodiment of covenant in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand; the "Bishop's Charge" at the Auckland Diocesan Synod in September 1989 articulated this awareness:

"The Gospel requires and enables just and deep partnerships to form and flourish between culturally different peoples, and in Aotearoa/New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi provides the basis as to how this might be."

But what of the spirituality underlying the book "The New Maori Myth"? It has made the basic error of failing to recognise that the Gospel came to New Zealand contained in nineteenth century European cultural baggage, and has yet to recognise that the Gospel has to be unpacked from its baggage before rebirth can take place. It is a violence trying squeezing twentieth century New Zealanders, Maori and Pakeha,

nineteenth century European boxes. The title of the book reveals the prejudice of the author that is displayed in the content as to the assumed superiority of the baggage, and this prejudice combined with the fundamentalist disposition of the author precludes any revelation of Christ within cosmology or social relationships in a Aotearoa/New Zealand context. The author's fundamentalism is also apparent in his exclusive identification of the "Word of God" with his own literalist interpretation of scripture (pg 4), and in the "absolute" nature of his doctrine of depravity and the "unchanging" nature of virtues such as morality (pg 9) and justice (pg 11). There is no room for the process of God's ongoing creativity and revelation or the biblical concept of the Spirit leading the faithful into all truth (John 16:12).

The underlying spirituality of the book not only precludes any revelation of Christ in cosmology or social relationships, but it also works against the culmination of the spiritual process, the new creation or transformation through justice making in the power of the Holy Spirit. Although Drake uses the language of christian peace and justice and freedom (pp 21-23), the book lacks a prophetic dimension which challenges the oppressive structures of patriarchy. I am here using patriarchy in the sense of a series of graded hierarchies supporting racism, sexism, and classism, that are designed to keep those in power in their position of domination. Within this analysis, Maori culture in Drake's book is portrayed near the bottom of the hierarchical structure as mere "myths and legends of the gods of cultures" to be despised (pg 40), well underneath Pakeha culture and the presence and activity of God who is at the top of the structure. Indeed, the dominant spirituality underlying the book could be

categorised as patriarchal; there is an underlying racist ideology that assumes that the dominant Pakeha political, social, and economic values are superior to Maori values, and is attempting to establish educational and religious institutions to make Maori conform to the dominant Pakeha values; Patriarchy is further affirmed by the non-inclusive sexist language throughout the book, which belies any claim to an adherence to the equality of women in the book; and the patriarchal base to the underlying spirituality of the book is also apparent in the individualist doctrine of salvation on page 41 which undergirds the lack of collective responsibility to address the evils of poverty and exploitation, and the threatened extinction of life on earth.

In employing justice as the measure of christian spirituality, I find the spirituality underlying the book "The New Maori Myth" inadequate, as it supports an oppressive theology of domination at odds with a biblical creation-based spirituality that comes to fruition in cosmic justice. The spirituality is more consistent with the Aristotelian ideology of patriarchy than a spirituality based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the new creation empowered by the Holy Spirit. From the perspective of justice, an appropriate comment on the underlying spirituality of the book is found in Jeremiah 8:11-12:

"They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
 saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.
 Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?
 No, they were not at all ashamed;
 they did not know how to blush."

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