

Beyond Polarisation: Biculturalism And The Gospel  
By Stephen May

I am well aware that I put my head into the lion's jaws in tackling this topic! Few issues in our country today generate so many powerful feelings. Immediately we become sensitive to the use of words, for example. To write 'New Zealand', or 'Aotearoa', or 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' instead of 'our country' in the sentence above would instantly suggest something, rightly or wrongly, about my attitude to the question. (I shall vary my usage, to keep you guessing!) Then there is the matter of who is addressing the question. Here too automatic judgements can be made in advance of hearing what is actually said. Is the speaker white, black, male, female, whatever? In this respect, as an Englishman and one newly arrived into the bargain, I might perhaps be expected to speak with considerable caution. The matter is also heavily laden with emotion. Soon after I arrived in this country (some five years ago now) I attended a service where a copy of the Treaty of Waitangi was laid on the altar. To some who were there this was a powerful act of confession - both of the guilt of Pakeha with respect to Maori, and also of a serious commitment to the cause of righting injustice. To others at the service it was an act of blasphemy.

Despite the difficulties I am increasingly convinced that the matter needs to be talked about. No-one, from any viewpoint, should allow themselves to be intimidated into silence, for any reason. Part of the way in which oppression works is to deny speech. Victims are those who are repressed into speechlessness, repressed into the silence of collaboration. Political correctness is not enough. On both sides of an issue we may have to fight - in all sorts of ways - to let people with whom we do not agree have the freedom to speak. Otherwise dissent goes underground: it becomes bitter and resentful, and unable to change. Things need to be spoken so they can come into the open; only then can people change their minds. A mindset that will not countenance the honest expression of opinion because it is unacceptable becomes counter-productive.

As for being a relatively new New Zealander, that need not be altogether a disadvantage. Somebody from 'outside' has a different perspective, and knowledge of other situations. This can of course lead to over-rapid judgements based on ignorance: the first necessity is to be silent and listen. Yet New Zealand does not exist by itself. There is a big world out there, and thinking and experience which may shed helpful light on our local concerns. However, we do need to take a view from as wide a perspective as possible, while still taking seriously the particularity of the situation in Aotearoa. As theologians Alan Lewis and John de Gruchy have remarked, theology is only real in a particular situation; yet that does not mean that it is restricted to that situation. It is universal in its very concreteness. Indigenous theology does not have to be parochial theology.

So (as I put my head into the lion's jaws) what do I see from outside? My tourist guide books described New Zealand as a model of racial harmony. Whilst it certainly is that compared to many other places in the world, most Kiwis of all races have laughed hollowly when I have reported this description. As I sat down to write this lecture in 1990, I had very much in my mind the series then being screened on television called 'Eyes on the Prize'. This independently-made programme charted the fortunes of the American Civil Rights Movement. It was deeply moving, often disturbing,

certainly thought-provoking. After one particularly horrifying programme, which had catalogued the long list of oppression, prejudice, injustice and self-deception practised by whites (often self-proclaimed Christian whites) in the Southern United States, my wife turned to me and said, 'But what if that is happening here?' It is comparatively easy to watch tales of what is happening or has happened far away: disquieting to think that one may as complacently and as ignorantly be colluding or participating in something similar on one's own back doorstep.

The question is a real one for us here in Aotearoa-New Zealand. I do not need to catalogue for you the history of the last 150 years and more during which the native people of this land have been marginalised in their own country, and reduced almost to the brink of extinction before staging one of the most remarkable cultural and ethnic revivals of modern times. The present situation, quite ignoring issues such as land claims, reveals a people who in their own country are still demoralised, being a huge percentage of the unemployed and the prison population, and with appalling health care and education figures. What, in the light of these circumstances, does biculturalism mean? What is the status of the Treaty of Waitangi? What are the obligations of pakeha to Maori (and to other cultural groups), and vice versa? Is polarisation over these questions inevitable? Are we to be forever locked into the anger and guilt that the history generates? Or is there a way through all of this to something new?

We cannot hope to even attempt to answer these questions in the scope of a paper of this kind. I want to argue strongly though that it is important to raise them, and in what follows offer some perspectives and observations upon the process of working them through.

### **Biculturalism and the Trinity.**

What is the theological basis of biculturalism, or, if you do not like that particular expression, the theological basis for relationship between Maori and Pakeha (and the many other cultural groups in this country)? I believe that it exists, not primarily in any U.N. Declaration of Human Rights or Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. God has created a humanity that mirrors God's own pluriformity - that is, his existence as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We see in creation a delight in otherness that reflects the very being of God. God is not essentially alone but rejoices in his being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - not three changing facets of the one God, but the very way in which God is the one God. The self-giving love that is between the members of the Trinity is what defines the being of God.

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In the same way God gives us one another. We are not born all alike, but different in many ways - in gender, race, culture and a host of other possibilities. These differences are not to be smoothed out. God delights in diversity. Our difference is the occasion of both pain and joy: pain because we are called out of ourselves, out of what we know and are used to, to encounter the other, an other that often calls our being into question. Hence Sartre's 'Hell is other people'. And joy, because this very being called out of ourselves (ek-stasis) is the occasion for our truly becoming ourselves. 'Real

Life is Meeting', to quote a chapter title from C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*.

God is, of course, the great Other in relation to whom we find ourselves, but the world is full of otherness: otherness in male and female, otherness in humanity and all the varieties of flora and fauna, otherness in culture and race. All this is affirmed and recreated in Jesus Christ, who is born and raised after the creaturely, bodily flesh; who is a male; and who is a Jew. Far from limiting his activity, it is this particular concrete existence of the incarnate Christ which affirms creation in all its variety. It is the particularity of God's revelation in Christ which ensures its universal scope.

Ecstasis, encounter, is a nuisance and a pain to us. As sinful people we would much rather be surrounded by those of our own ilk, thinking the same thoughts, doing the same things. Or would we? Difference is what makes life worth living: discovering new things, new perspectives, new outlooks. In friendship, in marriage, in all sorts of encounters, we are faced with the challenge of otherness. We are presented with the reality of another human being, a 'Thou', not an 'It'; someone who does things differently, thinks differently and so forth. A 'bit of a nuisance' at times, indeed - but also joy, and glory. The world is full of otherness, and we refuse it at our peril, falling into darkness and self-annihilation.

Biculturalism therefore challenges us directly. Pakeha such as myself are offered the opportunity to encounter a different culture. In many ways, it is more convenient, and certainly easier, not to do so. Lazily, we might prefer it if Maori were to be assimilated into the majority culture, being swallowed up in the process as 'brown pakeha', if they survived at all. That would be a tragedy for pakeha as much as for Maori. I see in this country a unique opportunity to further our understanding of the fullness of humanity.

#### **A Spiritual Gospel: Bad News for the Maori?**

I have been at pains to stress the continuity between creation and redemption, summed up as it is in the person of Jesus Christ. Christians have been all too prone to take passages such as Galatians 3:28 as a warrant for assimilationism or monoculturalism. The unity which is spoken of there: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' is not one which abolishes differences. It is patently obvious that male and female have not ceased to be different! Inconsistently, however, this verse is often interpreted as requiring some sort of unisex monoculturalism. But what God does in Christ Jesus is to set our variety and distinctiveness on a firm foundation again. Passages such as these have been used in the past to assert the unity of peoples in Jesus Christ, but in such a way that the link with creation is broken. However, the diversity of creation is not destroyed in redemption. What is abolished is not the differences themselves, but the barriers between various groups. We should avoid making a distinction between creation with its differences and redemption with its unity. Redemption is a re-creation of the original order - a unity and diversity that mirrors the trinity of God.

In the past, one solution was to emphasise a 'spiritual unity' (of redemption) in Christ. Thus in the Southern United States before the Civil War it was possible for slave owners and slaves to pray together at the beginning of the day (so expressing their spiritual

unity in Christ), but when work began the slaves would go to work in the fields and their masters and mistresses would use the whip (so fulfilling, as they understood it, the 'orders of creation'). Such a tearing apart of creation and redemption has had appalling consequences. This is the theological basis for apartheid. Is it any wonder that oppressed peoples, presented with such a spiritualised notion of redemption, should reject it? This is the 'redemption' of which Dietrich Bonhoeffer was speaking when he repudiated it as the content of Christian faith. Redemption from the world is of no use, only the redemption of the world. what Christianity celebrates is not redemption from creation, but the redemption of creation. A Christian message that tears apart creation and redemption, that speaks of Christ's redemption as merely one from this world, is certainly not good news for the poor and oppressed - salvation is only an otherworldly future, a cloud cuckoo-land that enables people to cope a little better with present suffering and injustice. Liberation Theology has quite understandably described this kind of gospel as a theology of the rich for the rich, for the status quo is left unchallenged, and the orders of creation are used as theological justification. What I am repudiating here is any view of 'orders of creation' that exist independently of Christ, of revelation. Creation is not to be known by human reason alone in an understanding into which the Christian revelation must then be fitted as a second word. In the Southern United States in the 1960s ministers who invited blacks into their 'whites-only' churches for services or even to receive communion might well lose their jobs. However the gospel takes precedence over any prior scheme, including ethnicity. This is the significance of the revolution of God enacted through Christ. @FEATURE TEXT = The Maori have a saying that the missionaries taught them to pray and they looked up to heaven; when they looked back at earth, behold their land had gone!

I would want to argue then that in Jesus Christ the distinctiveness and unity of peoples are both affirmed. If we are truly, not just spiritually, one in Christ Jesus, we are given a powerful incentive to live out that reality in practise. We need to work out concretely in New Zealand what that means. How do we affirm both our unity and variety? In marriage, reconciliation between a husband and wife does not mean that they cease to be male and female. On the contrary, reconciliation frees them to be their own true selves all the more. Similarly, reconciliation between God and humanity in Christ does not mean that God ceases to be God, or that humanity ceases to be humanity. Rather humanity is enabled to be humanity precisely because of that reconciliation. The very same is true of the much more mutual process of reconciliation between people or between peoples. There is deep need for such reconciliation, in New Zealand and across the world. The Maori have a saying that the missionaries taught them to pray and they looked up to heaven; when they looked back at earth, behold their land had gone! What an indictment! During the 1950s black West Indians were encouraged to immigrate to Britain, often to do the jobs the native whites were unwilling to do. Come Sunday these immigrants were very often gently taken aside by clergy and advised to find another church. It is not surprising that in that situation black-led churches catering to blacks alone sprang up. David HOLETON tells about how some bishops in India during the British Raj instructed their clergy to omit the Magnificat during Evensong - just in case any of the natives took the words about upsetting the strong and raising up the weak seriously!

The spiritualised, individualised Gospel, a politics-free Gospel, is therefore not good news for Maori. Is it good news for pakeha? It

might be good news for those preferring to dwell in illusion, perhaps. It is certainly not a basis for real life under God, participating in his Kingdom and will for the world, and sharing in his character. To put it bluntly, a Gospel without justice is no Gospel at all. Some protest against the phrase, 'God's bias for the poor and oppressed' on the grounds that he is equally on the side of all. It is true that God is for all - but his 'Yes!' to us includes a 'No!' to sin, and a requirement of repentance.

Moreover, orthodox Christianity believes that in Christ God made humanity's lost cause his own. God's royal reign consists precisely in acting to free the enslaved, to protect the weak, to defend the poor. This is the way in which he is King. It is as the people of this King that we are called to live redeemed lives. That means both recognition (and celebration!) of our variety, and simultaneously a commitment to work for reconciliation and the breaking down of the barriers between us - barriers that the Gospel declares have already been fundamentally destroyed on the Cross.

### **False paths**

There are a number of tempting false trails that we can follow in our concern for genuine biculturalism. I will mention just two of these. I need to say as I do that I understand the emotional appeal behind these approaches. However we need to think out the theological implications in depth, lest we opt for easy solutions that rebound on us in the end.

(1) Firstly, biculturalism. Biculturalism as a strategy, a working out of the gospel of Christ in a specific context. It is not in itself a gospel. 'Christians are called to follow Christ, and for the rest be wholly uncommitted' to quote Herbert Butterfield. Such a statement could be misinterpreted in a quietist fashion. I suggest however that what Butterfield is really advocating is (among other things) a profound suspicion of ideology. Ideology is not the same as Christianity - something we all need reminding of. Perceptions of injustice are themselves human and unfortunately sometimes tend to develop their own ideological character. As such they can become as self-righteous, power-protecting, and even demonic as the evils against which they originally protested (cf. communism). Biculturalism starts from an appreciation of difference. It is therefore not something which we can impose as a mindless orthodoxy. Advocates of biculturalism must by the logic of their case accept and indeed welcome difference of opinion. Appreciation of difference is at the very heart of biculturalism. If we cannot accept the right of others to disagree with us, then we undermine the ground upon which we stand. Paul Temm reports that the findings of a recent Roman Catholic Commission on the Rights and Duties of Indigenous Peoples included the idea that indigenous peoples must allow their own members to choose whether to belong or not. The two things hang together: respect and freedom.

(2) Secondly, biculturalism does not mean a sanctification of culture. A genuine biculturalism must be rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and that means submitting to judgement. Christ is the Divine 'Yes!' to humanity, but as Karl Barth said long ago, it is 'Yes!' precisely by being also 'No!' That is, the world is loved by God, but it is judged by God also. Everything comes under the Cross. God loves us by changing us.

Biculturalism should not be seen as the uncritical endorsing of a whole culture. No culture is divine; it is a human work.

In the past, as we all know, there was a too-easy identification of a particular (Western, British) culture with the Gospel. Samuel Marsden came bearing Christianity in the one hand and English civilisation in the other. Given that historical precedent it is entirely understandable that other, non-English cultures should want to be endorsed as well. I think however that that is a mistake: it is to desire the right to make the same error.

All cultures (Maori, pakeha, whatever) must be measured by the gospel. It is of course easier to see the weaknesses and flaws in the culture of another than in our own. Pakeha for example have been very quick to ignorantly condemn Maori spiritual beliefs as demonic whilst themselves uncritically assuming the total blessedness of their own culture. In response to this it should be said that it is probably up to Maori to assess their own culture. The ideas as to the pagan nature of Maori culture which circulate in Pakeha circles are often caricatures. But let us have no misunderstanding. Pakeha culture too is deeply pagan, as we see all too well every day in our papers, and it is becoming increasingly so. Jesus said very little about devotion to ancestors, after all, but a great deal about devotion to Mammon. That for him is the great antagonist to God.

At the same time, biculturalism should not be seen as the uncritical endorsing of a whole culture. No culture is divine; it is a human work. As such it is judged and remade, even as we are remade in Christ. Honouring of the Treaty of Waitangi does not mean giving equal space to Maori creation myths and to the story of the Bible, as I once heard a teacher of theology say it did! There needs to be a sifting. Lionel Stewart perceptively notes that in every culture there are things acceptable to God (and hence to Christians); there are other things that are indifferent; and there are things that are repugnant.

It is true that Westerners have been wont to docetically rewrite in their own image the story of God's involvement with his people. They are being challenged quite rightly for that. The task - and it is not an easy one - is for Maori (and Polynesian) Christians to also engage in the dialogue between their own culture and the Gospel. For all its faults, Western thought at its best has often done this. Western thought has touched the Gospel, providing thought-forms for it, sometimes corrupting or bending it - but it has been touched and moulded by the Gospel also. This history is itself an inheritance to learn from.

Maori and Polynesian Christians however would do well neither to adopt Western attitudes and interpretations wholesale (as Westerners have historically tried to make them do), nor - equally importantly - to uncritically baptise their whole culture. What is required from us all is a critical engagement with our own culture. Maori have the right to this as much as anyone else - and it is just possible that they know more about their own culture than Pakehas do! The process has indeed been at work already. It took time, but when Christianity came to Aotearoa, Maori began to stop doing things they had been doing before - inter-tribal wars and cannibalism among them. There is no cry to rediscover this part of Maori past, nor should there be. The figure of the Maori Christ at the lakeside church at Rotorua calls us on. Jesus is for all: in our own languages, in our own cultures - but cultures about which we should think very hard.

It is perhaps as well to remember that the Southerners in the USA in the 1960s (Eyes on the Prize; Mississippi Burning) argued that they were acting to 'preserve their way of life', i.e. their culture. However it was a way of life that included 'keeping the nigger in his place'. There as in South Africa it has been quite rightly seen that there are times when the Gospel demands a radical challenge to certain cultural assumptions.

### **The Treaty**

Let us now consider for a moment the Treaty of Waitangi itself; and here I want to offer something in the way of a warning. There is something very important in the Treaty - and also the danger of falsely absolutizing an historical document which in fact derives its authority from somewhere else.

The Treaty is often described as a covenant, and this is certainly true. The weight given to that sort of description varies however. In the Methodist Covenant Service it is sometimes adduced alongside the covenants of Creation and Redemption! There lies a danger. The Treaty is a human work, not a divine one. To put too much weight put on it is both potentially dangerous, and damaging to true biculturalism. It is a matter of differentiating between that which is relative and that which is absolute. The Treaty of Waitangi belongs to the realm of the relative, not that of the absolute. It is a historical document, arrived at historically, for reasons which are a part of our history. As I have argued above, true biculturalism does not mean the uncritical baptism of either our cultures or our history, but the equal submitting of them to the Word of God. The authority which the Treaty of Waitangi possesses is not inherent in itself, but comes from the intuitive or explicit recognition that in this or that aspect it is congruent with the Word of God.

Do we want to argue that the white settlers of Australia were entitled to wipe the aborigines out because they had not made a treaty with them like the Treaty of Waitangi?

The discussion about the Treaty shows quite clearly that it is being appealed to not merely because it was solemnly agreed between tangata whenua on the one hand, and manuhiri or tangata tiriti or tauiwi, on the other, but because it is seen to enshrine important things, the force of which is still recognised. The example of the Australian aborigines illuminates this. Do we want to argue that the white settlers of Australia were entitled to wipe the aborigines out because they had not made a treaty with them like the Treaty of Waitangi? Surely not. What is significant is not just that a treaty was made, but that it was a particular sort of treaty. It would not be appealed to if it were considered an unjust treaty. In other words, pakeha obligations to Maori do not ultimately rest on the Treaty but on Jesus Christ. Those obligations would exist even if there were no Treaty.

There is much more that needs to be said about the Treaty. At the very least it is a basic principle that Christians should keep their promises! No good is done however by trying to elevate it to near-divine status and treating it as a hermeneutical key by which to judge other things. I realise that such a statement would be regarded as close to sacrilege by some in Aotearoa-New Zealand today. One of the reasons for this is because the Treaty is often seen as the main way of safeguarding Maori rights - and given the history of pakeha treatment of Maori this is hardly surprising! I am not however trying

to diminish the Treaty, or minimise its importance. I am trying to show that its importance is not inherent, but derives from the fact that it enshrines certain Gospel imperatives. That is, there is a sense in which it could be described as an expression in an historically particular situation of certain aspects of the Gospel. Such an understanding illuminates rather than diminishes the Treaty's importance - and points us beyond the limitations of a particular historical form to the real source of justice and moral behaviour.

### **Justice or forgiveness?**

Now we come to the most important issue: the relationship between justice and forgiveness, between guilt and repentance. Justice is a key word in the biculturalism debate in Aoteroa today. What is the basis for just behaviour?

I have already spoken of the way in which a separation between creation and redemption has served to make the Gospel look irrelevant to Maori interests, and perhaps even destructive of them. In these circumstances, is it surprising that a quest for justice should seek support wherever it may be found? Sammy Davis Jnr became a Jew, he said, because Christians preached love and forgiveness and grace, but what he wanted was justice. The God of the Old Testament, so he had heard, was concerned about that. In the United States many blacks like Muhammed Ali and Malcolm X became Muslims for similar reasons. In Aotearoa New Zealand many Maori have become members of groups like Ringatu, where there is a strong emphasis on the Old Testament, on prophecy, and on the deliverance of oppressed peoples. It is perhaps surprising that so many have remained orthodox Christians under the circumstances.

I suspect that this is the kind of motivation behind comments like that of Tipene O'Regan, who in an Appendix to the 1986 Te Kaupapa Tikanga Rua Report of the Bicultural Commission of the Anglican Church on the Treaty of Waitangi, says of Selwyn, Marsden and others 'I don't want to forgive them - or their ilk. The memory keeps me warm, keeps the fires burning.' Forgiveness here is seen as letting people off the hook, letting them get away scot-free with their misdeeds. Forgiveness is accepting the status quo. It is seen as being destructive of justice.

This is where our understanding of the relationship between creation and redemption, repentance and forgiveness, becomes again important. A desire for justice is often associated with a particular vision of that relationship which is tied up with the whole Western 'order of salvation'. One is seen as moving from the sphere of creation to the sphere of redemption. But what is lost in the process? We could represent the ideas diagrammatically like this:

Creation	Redemption
Law	Gospel (Grace)
Justice	Forgiveness (Justification)
The World	The Elect
All different	All one in Christ
Body	Soul
State	Church

If one sees the two sides of the diagram as chronologically successive, they also tend to become mutually exclusive. All sorts of implications follow. If forgiveness is seen as destructive of



justice, then those seeking justice will not speak much of grace! Justice will then become hard, unforgiving, condemnatory. People hearing this message will wonder, what happened to the Gospel message of forgiveness? The emphasis will be to make people aware of injustices committed. Guilt will become central. The approach is similar to that of some kinds of evangelism: the necessary instilling of a sense of sin before the pronouncement of forgiveness - based perhaps on signs of confession, contrition and the making of satisfaction (to use the medieval terminology). In social terms the equation can read: you have sinned, realise it! Be very sorry about what you have done, then maybe you will be forgiven. On the other hand, people wishing to be faithful to the Gospel of forgiveness, to a good news which says Atonement has already been made, may following this model, be led to the kind of passivity in the face of injustice which Sammy Davis Jnr was reacting away from. The theological underpinning for this point of view is found in Luther. It is worth looking at his views in some detail because of his influence, especially in evangelical circles.

To be forgiven is to be in Christ;  
to be in Christ is to be changed into  
a justice-making person.

For Luther, God speaks two different words - Law and Grace. The movement is both historically and logically: Law, Sin, Death and Gospel. The gospel is good news because it speaks of deliverance from the curse of the Law. We progress from fear to love. (This movement of course represents the historical Luther's own journey in apprehending God.) Law is necessary - to enable us to see the point of grace - yet by itself it brings death. The transition according to Luther is from doing (under the Law) to doing nothing and merely receiving (under grace).

When this kind of theology is tied up with a spiritualised, individualised approach to the content of grace, the result can be an acceptance of the worldly status quo. We are forgiven - we do not have to do anything! Hooray! There are unfortunate consequences, however. The two sides are held apart, affecting our understanding of half of reality. Luther made this split quite explicit with his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms: the kingdom of the Church, which is the preserve of grace; and the State, which is the preserve of law and of justice. Luther's own anti-semitism, and his condoning of the slaughter of the peasants are not inconsistent with this understanding. Such a gap means however that those who believe in the gospel are inclined to do nothing about social injustice. Accordingly, those searching for justice are more inclined to side with liberals who may be moralistic and guilt-ridden, but at least care about evil. Or they abandon Christianity altogether. Is there another approach that acknowledges both forgiveness and justice? Yes there is - and it is not a new one. Not all blacks became Muslims. Not all Christianity was escapist and spiritualised. A huge impetus to the Civil Rights Movement in America, for example, was Christian. Professor McClain, now a theology teacher but in the 1960s a close ally of Martin Luther King, has spoken movingly of how the Gospel worked in America to change a terrible situation. Note: the Gospel, not the condemning word of a Graceless Law.

Karl Barth is one major figure who challenges Luther's understanding about the relationship between Law and Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Arguing from St. Paul's presentation of the issues in Galatians, he deliberately and consciously reverses the standard Western (and

Lutheran) order, 'Law and Gospel'. Paul, Barth argues, speaks instead of 'Gospel and Law'. What are the implications of this? Law, in Barth's understanding, is 'the form of grace', the way in which we perceive God's loving will for us. Creation is not separated from redemption, but is restored in it. We do not move from a sense of guilt to an awareness of forgiveness, but from the experience of grace to the necessity of repentance. God acts to redeem us, and it is as we are driven to an awareness of what he has done for us that we are led to repent and be baptised. In other words, repentance is enabled and commanded as a response to forgiveness.

Turning to the Bible we see this illustrated in the conclusion of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:

'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (v.36-38)

In a similar way Zacchaeus's repentance and promise to repay fourfold to all whom he has robbed is in response to Jesus' initiative in meeting him. (We see no such comparable generosity by anyone to the findings of the Waitangi Tribunal!) Even in such a 'repentance before forgiveness' proof text as the parable of the Prodigal Son we can recognize that the son's true repentance (rather than mere awareness of his dilemma and an attempt to bargain his way back into a better position) is not recorded, but probably would follow in a somewhat stunned way the overflowing generosity of his Father's love that brushes aside his prepared speech and overwhelms him with rings, clothing, food, and so forth. Note too that this parable (sometimes more accurately called the parable of the waiting Father) is incomplete without mention of the other son: the 'good' son, who would not forgive his father for forgiving his brother! In these examples we see the difference between a sorrow unto death (we hear that even Judas 'repented') and a sorrow unto repentance - and life.

If we have to earn forgiveness by our contrition, satisfaction and confession - the pattern of the Medieval Church against which Luther rightly rebelled - then it is on us that all depends in the end. If on the other hand forgiveness is the gift of God, then we are called to respond in gratitude by the transformation of our lives (Romans 8).

Forgiveness, so far from being opposed to justice, is its basis.

In Christ, forgiveness is not just a word, but the making of reconciliation, of justice. It takes place in the incarnate Word, a person. In him grace is given to us unconditionally. However, as such, it also makes unconditional demands upon us. This is because to be forgiven is to live in the new humanity of Christ, to be conformed to his nature rather than schematised to the pattern of the world (Romans 12: 1,2). This is the answer to Tipene O'Regan's comment. Once we understand forgiveness to be not a mere word of God (cheap grace, in effect) but as in fact the Person of God's own Son, we cannot see it as being contrary to justice. It is the way in which justice is enacted. To be forgiven is to be in Christ; to be in Christ is to be changed into a justice-making person. Through the experience of forgiveness we are enabled to respond to injustice in a way that is impossible from the other direction, from a consciousness

of guilt. Forgiveness, so far from being opposed to justice, is its basis.

### **Beyond guilt**

A key factor in the whole biculturalism debate in New Zealand today is the question of guilt: guilt which we lay on each other, guilt which we lay upon ourselves. Both historical realities and powerful feelings are involved, and both need to be dealt with. From the pakeha point of view a number of questions arise, especially about collective responsibility. Am I, as a white man, responsible for all the acts whites have committed against blacks (to name just one ethnic group) through the centuries or millennia? Or is there a statute of limitations applying here? Am I as a male responsible for all the tyrannising, oppression and sexual violence practised on women through the centuries, or millennia? Am I as an Englishman responsible - to whatever extent - for all the oppression committed by the English upon their colonies in India, in Australia (against the Aborigines, let alone the convicts!), in Northern (and Southern) Ireland, in Aotearoa New Zealand? What are the limits of responsibility, if any? Indeed, related as we all are in the human family (as modern genetics accepts) are we all not responsible in one way or another for everything the human family has done - the Holocaust, the Crusades, Pol Pot, My Lai, Kuwait? Or am I simply responsible for what I do, here and now in the situation in which I find myself? These questions are not intended as a way of minimising the issue, but of demonstrating the extent of the problem. Do we want to set up a new form of limited atonement: forgiveness for our individual sins, but not for corporate ones?

Another aspect of the matter is the demand that the guilty respond out of their own resources. Guilt can be a crushing, dehumanising burden. Guilt can be ambiguous too. I remember a Church History lecturer who had worked in South Africa pointing out that blacks in that county lost the vote - which up to that point had been based on a property qualification - because of British guilt over the way in which they had treated the Afrikaners during the Boer Wars. Similarly, the reluctance of the West to intervene when Hitler marched into the Rhineland was at least partially because of their guilt over what was increasingly seen as the punitive Versailles settlement. Guilt is not a simple matter.

How then should we think about guilt in the context of the gospel? Bonhoeffer usefully differentiates between guilt and shame. The former is concerned with self-justification and operates through a diseased and uneasy perception; the latter is a response to grace and both helpful and healthy. Guilt works for self-justification, to make us feel better about ourselves; shame works for justice, because it directs us beyond ourselves. It can do so because it is forgiven. Here too forgiveness and justice do not work against one another. Forgiveness enables justice. It also commands it, for to be forgiven is to become like Christ.

Jungel writes at one point that (for Barth) God is 'a cheerful word'. In God, and through his forgiveness of our sins, we can face up to what we have done, and what we are responsible for. We do so in shame, but not weighed down by guilt. Barth understands that the only way to know sin is to know it as forgiven. The key is what God has done for us. It is only grace that can really address the problem of guilt.

Where are we left then in New Zealand? Pakeha, including myself, need to stop feeling guilty about the past, or indeed about the present. But this does not mean that we are not responsible. Knowing ourselves forgiven in Christ for all we have done (or not done) we should act in participation with the risen Christ in the power of God's Holy Spirit to bring about justice in this country. We need to listen to words expressed and words felt, not diminishing them or making them insignificant, but as aspects that need healing. We cannot bring healing - only God can. But let us share in God's revolution and, justified and freed in Christ, make justice!

Endnote:

1. I am indebted in this discussion to an excellent article by Eberhard Jüngel entitled 'Gospel and Law' in his book *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*.

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