**FACING OUR COLONIAL HISTORY: A CHALLENGE FOR ALL**

Sue Bradford

For launch of *Listening to the people of the land: Christianity, colonisation and the path to redemption*

**Friday 22 February 2019, 7.00pm** St Colomba Centre, Auckland.

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Kia ora koutou,

Kia ora all the friends here from some different strands of my life, and to all of you who are working in different ways and in different places for treaty justice. It’s a real honour to have been invited to be part of this event, and to help launch Susan Healy’s book tonight.

I must admit there have been some around me who have looked a little surprised when they saw my name on the pānui for this event. I have never belonged to any branch of Christianity and I’m not known as someone with a deep interest in theology or church history – but in fact, this book calls to me profoundly, and I’d like to thank Susan and all the contributors so much for the passion, research and knowledge you’ve brought to this book, and to Pax Christi, for the key role you’ve played in bringing the project to fruition.

As some of you may know, my great great great grandfather was Richard Davis, who came to Paihia as a CMS missionary-farmer in 1824, and my great great grandfather was Joseph Matthews who arrived in the north in 1832, going on to found the CMS mission station at Kaitaia with William Puckey, the great great grandfather of Adrienne Puckey, one of this book’s contributors. Kia ora Adrienne. Joseph Matthews married Richard Davis’s daughter Mary Anne in 1833, which is how I hold those mihingare genes across two lines of descent through my father’s family.

I was brought up with the stories of these ancestors, and although I grew up in Auckland we did head north for Kaitaia from time to time to hang out with the relations there. From the time I was young and first grew to some deeper awareness of my family’s and our country’s history, there were a series of questions which deeply troubled me, and which have never left me.

What strange state of mind - what hubristic theology - did it take to believe that your religion was the only one that counted, and that you should take your family and travel as far as it was possible to go across the planet to convert others to your beliefs?

To what extent were there other drivers influencing the choice to become a missionary, particularly economic factors at a time of massive change in the England of the early industrial revolution?

To what extent were those early missionaries aware of their role as a spearhead of the brutal colonisation, dispossession – and often enough the death – of the people they came to convert?

What were the good things they brought to this country? They meant well, in their own terms, and much of what they carried with them was welcomed by tangata whenua.

To what extent did Maori theology and belief systems reverse-influence my ancestors and other early missionaries? Was their hubris lessened or ameliorated at all by some acceptance that faith and perception can cross lines of understanding between worlds, and be held simultaneously, as for example in some East Asian thinking where it is fine to be Christian, communist and Buddhist all at once? The story of Thomas Kendall always fascinated me, and I welcome the newly uncovered stories told here.

Above all, I became obsessed and have never stopped being engaged with the idea of redemption. From 11 or so onwards I became conscious that in some way and some how I needed to live my life in a way that would perhaps help, even in the smallest fashion, to redeem the harm my ancestors had done as part of the spear head of colonisation and imperialism, which had had such disastrous consequences for the indigenous people of these islands. It was quite hard to do that when I was a young school student and I got into some terrible trouble at times, a path which has perhaps continued since then.

With all these questions I was asking, I was trying to interrogate my ancestors, these people who were part of me and who I really wanted to understand. It’s taken all these years before finally, here is a book that goes directly and deeply into their world and makes a very similar interrogation. Thank you Susan, and all the writers. Of course the book goes beyond those early years, looking in detail at the ways some churches have responded as they usefully began to understand the injustices they’d been part of, and considering, as Mary Betz and others do, the ways in which the Bible and Christian theology itself can offer deep and relevant clarity and hope for this time. And as always, so exciting in all books of historical and political relevance, are the chapters which consider next steps for action, where redemption may come from, grounded in so much of the work already done both by church people and by non-church affiliated Pākehā treaty educators and activists.

Susan’s book not only starts to provide answers to the questions I’ve spent a lifetime asking, but also helps point to the path ahead. Facing up to the truth of our history and acting on it is a task which all we settler descendants face, or should face. I’d really like to acknowledge here the many people in this room who have made this the primary or priority focus of their political, religious and/or educational work, whether inside the institutions or outside them. Kia ora to all the treaty educators, researchers, writers and front line Pākehā treaty activists here, whatever role you play.

I have mostly not identified as being a Pākehā treaty worker, in part because since the early 1980s, when the seeds of the treaty educators’ movement were being sown, my priorities have lain with fighting the broader cause of social and economic justice, particularly for unemployed and low paid workers, beneficiaries and their children – but of course this is integral to the same kaupapa, and they cannot be detached one from the other, ever. And a little later I took on a more front-line role in the cause of ecologicaI justice too, because the survival and nourishment of our planet is even more intrinsic to a healthy future for us all.

I appreciate the way Susan Healy and Mary Betz and others in this book draw out the way in which connections between the struggle for structural economic and social reforms – along with work for ecological justice – stand alongside the work for true justice in a treaty-honouring Aotearoa New Zealand. An understanding of the intrinsic linkages between the strands of work for social, economic, ecological and treaty-based transformation must underpin the theory and practice of the work that faces us now.

And behind all this, as treaty educator Jen-Margaret so cogently points out in her list outlining the tasks in front of us “even a cursory look at [these points] shows how much work tangata Tiriti need to do: on the one hand to relinquish power to the tino rangatiratanga sphere and on the other hand to prepare a kāwanatanga that can operate honourably and productively.”

This is the nub of it, and the nettle that is so hard to grasp. Ever since the Matike Mai report came out in 2016, on the back of 252 hui between 2012 and 2015, the challenge to Pākehā has become very clear. Māori have done an enormous amount of work looking at options and possibilities for constitutional transformation and a much healthier future for all of us – so now, what is our response?

I’ve been in quite a few discussions and workshops on this question, mainly among Pākehā left activists, since then. Moana Jackson, Veronica Tawhai and others have continued to have the patience to keep raising the challenge, although their patience must get quite strained at times.

For those of us who are unashamedly of the left and who are dedicated to working for an Aotearoa which will move beyond both capitalism and colonisation we cannot refuse the wero, yet our weakness at present makes us a pitiful force for change in the kāwanatanga sphere.

Unlike those of you who belong to churches or other institutional bodies, there is no substantive ‘we’ among this part of the left. Our politics has always had a fractured and fractious history, but there have been times when we’ve had many more bases and much more organisation than we do now. The dream of a fully honourable treaty relationship has little to no chance of being met until there are counter hegemonic forces strong enough in our part of the political spectrum to build the power inside and outside parliament sufficient to carry out the processes and make the decisions necessary to seriously talk with the friends who call us from across the table.

For those of us in the part of the political landscape I call home, it is really on our shoulders to keep trying to encourage existing organisations and nurture new ones so that step by step some collective power is developed. It is not enough to say “good on you” to everyone involved in putting together the Matike Mai report, and to once again expect Māori to bring an inclusive constitutional framework to fruition. It is a mighty political task that lies in front of us. It is so big that once understood the temptation for some is to run – and keep running. However, there are still many who do not run, and a lot of young ones are keen to learn and act, with the struggle at Ihumātao being a key focal point just at present.

While I despair sometimes about the state of the left, I know that the ‘we’ will get our act together at some point before too many more years pass, even if it is after my lifetime. I also know that every step we take to work for the building of a hopeful future which transcends our colonial and capitalist history and present is a useful one.

Susan talks beautifully about this, saying that we can start to address the truths of our past not as possums caught in the headlights, but as “people of honour”.

All the contributions to this book provide insights that are valuable for the journey we are making, whichever role each of us takes and wherever we are situated. Those of you who are part of churches have resources to draw on, that those of us on the outside can only even dream of – even if you don’t realise it sometimes.

Some of you may remember the “Building our own Future” project funded by the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa in 1993−1994, in part a coming together from many different parts of the country of people from both church and non-church backgrounds dedicated to a decolonised future, bound by a Peoples Charter which we developed collectively in a year long process. CCANZ is long gone and as far as I know has never been replaced by a similar ecumenical body, prepared to work with rōpu outside the churches as well as within. So it is perhaps not only on the radical left that more progress could be made in bringing both people and resources together for effective collective action on a common kaupapa.

Last month I was at a big gathering in Kaitaia at one of the old family farmhouses. A cousin said to me, did you know that our great great grandmother spent the last years of her life sitting on the mission house steps smoking her pipe and chatting with the other kuia?

In that snapshot of how it was back then, I suddenly and once again tasted a vision of how our future could be too. For those of us who are descendants of those settlers, by blood, or theology, or through later waves of settlement, we continue, always, to have much work to do.

Kia ora to all of you – kia kaha, kia manawanui, kia mau.