How Diverse Is Contemporary Theological Education? Identity Politics and Theological Education

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I am always glad to visit Canada because in so many ways we as nationals of vastly different countries—Canada and New Zealand—actually share so much in common in terms of the kinds of national societies we each yearn to establish and maintain. Our societies are founded on the principles of liberal democracy. They are open societies where pluralism by any definition is to be celebrated. They are redemptive societies committed to reconciling and healing the devastating enduring outcomes of the colonial experience, especially as this has had an impact on indigenous peoples. They are also societies that must address tribalism and globalization. And the Anglican Church must be part of that discussion. But I confess that, even after much traveling in God's universe, I am not particularly confident in addressing the complex and ever-contradictory issue of globalization.

Tribalism I can address—especially after living in a still highly tribalized indigenous community for just on fifty years, and especially as I have become an increasingly unapologetic irritant, an "insider" critic of some aspects of the less than godly behaviors emanating from within the communities with which I am most familiar. Identity politics and theological education I can most definitely address: they have been my life's work as a privileged, pioneering, lay, indigenous woman. So I will focus this discussion on the theme of contemporary identity politics and theological education.

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But first a glimpse into identity politics. One of the questions I always ask myself is, Who am I, to be addressing a global audience? There are various descriptions of me in circulation. And personal biographical pieces are always contrived: we are obliged in so many ways to make ourselves look impressive and credible, especially in the church, the academic world, and other monolithic institutions within which we struggle to pursue our professional careers. We endeavor always to appeal to others to be taken as acceptable, to be taken seriously, to feel a sense of belonging. And so in the politically laden process of self-definition, or identifying ourselves to others, we very selectively appropriate bits and pieces of identity-based data in order to build an attractive (or at least agreeable) image of ourselves. And we do so in such a way that we instinctively position ourselves advantageously against others. What we are asserting, of course, in snapshot form, is our current unique sense of identity. This is what differentiates me from you, in fact, from all others. Unself-consciously I am asserting that my identity is what prevents me from being identical to anyone else. Were I to consider every single dimension of my identity, it is impossible for there to be another me anywhere on God's earth.

So identity politics is what emerges out of this milieu of identity-making through the claims and counter-claims for recognition, and for the rights for individuals and groups of similar individuals. If we were the tolerant and open societies we hope to be, these politics would remain relatively benign. But we live now in increasingly pluralistic societies characterized by complex layers of difference across religious, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and class divides (to name just a few popularly asserted signifiers of difference). But what a heavily loaded phrase "identity politics" has now become!

I understand identity politics at its heart to be about the wide range of ways in which political activism and theorizing are consolidated around shared perceptions of the experience and/or the perception of injustice among members of certain social groups, such as women, gays and lesbians, indigenous people, people living with disabilities, and so on. These groups have been and generally still are marginalized, alienated, or oppressed within the larger sociopolitical context. These groups are committed to reclaiming their distinctiveness from the characterizations pressed upon them by a dominant group or system. The goal of identity politics is to achieve and maintain

a greater degree of self-determination and self-definition, as part of resolving or redressing historic injustice.

Public education in our respective nation-states has been one especially important site within which the relentless indigenous yearning for sovereignty and self-determination has played itself out. This yearning has at its heart the identity politics project, or the insufficiently contested assertion that indigenous interests will only ever be truly honored once the authentic and necessary aspects of ethnic identity are fully restored across all aspects of the educational enterprise. And so indigenous language, tradition, art, and spiritual practices form the basis of a sustained cultural recovery project.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Maori people have been variously blessed, challenged, inspired, enriched, and sometimes frustrated and troubled by the emergence and development of those educational initiatives now so legendary among those of us privileged to be indigenous educators. The Aotearoa New Zealand and Canadian models have been at the forefront of the international indigenous educational project, so it is not surprising that there are very close levels of collaboration between and among our professional educators. At all levels of public schooling, beginning at preschool and extending through to university, there now exist full indigenous curricula taught and studied in indigenous languages.

The movement initiating this extraordinary project had its beginnings in my homeland in the most simple of events. It was the concern of an indigenous grandmother for her urban-born grandchildren. She wanted so much for her new *mokopuna* (grandchildren) to know and to experience the fullness of indigenous language, culture, tradition, and songs, and to be constantly surrounded by the enduring love and affection and attention of the elders. She also recognized the increasingly troubling plight of urban Maori families well afflicted with the negative side effects of youth crime, poor educational achievement, homelessness, poor health, and poverty, all fueling a sense of marginalization and leading to a downward spiral into antisocial and destructive behaviors. This was the prevailing context that enabled and empowered the movement for indigenous education. It was a thoroughly organic movement that had its genesis in the compassionate and very lovingly defined principles of *Te Kohanga Reo*.

While in retrospect the project to recover the traditional ways was ambitious at best and beautifully naive at worst, it nevertheless

attracted sufficient popular support among young Maori parents. And so in 1981 the first *Kohanga Reo*, or infant language nest, was officially opened. Newborn Maori babies, together with their parent or parents, were nurtured into their language and their traditions within an environment totally devoted to cultural pride and revival. Because of the extraordinary, far-reaching, and compassionate vision and activism of some especially gifted and talented middle-aged Maori women, the *Kohanga Reo* movement set the stage for all the contemporary indigenous educational initiatives of the past twenty or so years. By the mid-1980s there were regular exchanges occurring between indigenous educators from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Hawaii. Maori had set the benchmark against which other indigenous educational endeavors could then be positioned.

Given its time and sociopolitical context, the emergent educational rationale or philosophy had to do with survival for indigenous people. The modus operandi was focused upon the increasingly vociferous rhetorical claim that "indigenous people invoking indigenous solutions to indigenous problems" was the best possible and likely most enduring solution. The struggle was initially premised on three primary platforms: the desire for recognition (as *tangata whenua* or the original people of the land); the need for restoration of the indigenous people (often to some kind of mythically framed former status); and an appeal for redemption, an acknowledgment that a justice imperative is at the heart of all indigenous claims for self-determination. Here we have the beginnings of perhaps the most potent and enduring of identity politics in higher education—those framed within the highly fraught and still largely uncontested narrative of race.

All of this was in response to a *then* largely unchallenged proposition about the causes of indigenous disadvantage. So-called liberal race-based thinkers proposed the following sequence account of indigenous disadvantage: (1) colonizers arrive and disrupt the sociopolitical circumstances of indigenous people; (2) the circumstances of indigenous people are irrevocably changed and they—by now, the racialized other—either adapt or fail to adapt; (3) those who adapt successfully move on, and those that don't remain impoverished, socially disadvantaged, and marginalized from mainstream life.

The difficulty with this analysis is that it arbitrarily establishes or constructs indigenous people as the racialized other and then it proceeds to absolutize the indigenous "condition." In other words, it does not allow for any reconceptualization of who indigenous people are as

a group. It does not allow for any reconsideration of the myriad ways in which race as a category is constantly being filtered through political, social, economic, and cultural upheavals—and not always helpfully. It does not take account of the ways in which group interests are assigned; it often does not choose to recognize the ways in which status is ascribed both inside and outside the group. It does not deign to acknowledge the ways in which agency is attained and enabled to flourish. And finally, it is indifferent to the ways in which cultural roles are prescribed, let alone enacted. One of my favorite writers on this subject, Howard Winant, concurs that this view is problematic in seeing race and race theory as an "objectivistic" fundamental category.[1] Winant goes on to describe how potentially dangerous this uncontested race logic can be: although it is acknowledged in theory to be a sociohistorical construct, race in practice is often treated as an objective fact. One simply *is* one's race.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the divide in contemporary populist race politics has largely been prescribed through the employment of our nations' most "compelling" political device—the Treaty of Waitangi.[2] On this basis, one is racially determined to be either Maori or Pakeha (white). For a period toward the end of last century, all new migrants from arbitrarily determined periods in history were categorized as *tauiwi* or "visitors from somewhere else"; but despite their extraordinary diversity, they were for political purposes all deigned to be Pakeha.

The process of primary racial categorization varies throughout Aotearoa New Zealand as I know it does in Canada. But the basis of categorization is incredibly unstable. As our overall national demographics continue to change in the most dramatic ways, we can naively cling to our narrow and meaningless blanket categorizations of who we are as New Zealanders or Canadians. Or we can commit ourselves to understanding more deeply the implications of seeing ourselves, indeed of celebrating ourselves, as diverse people who together comprise God's intended shared humanity. In an earlier paper, "Justice or

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[1] Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 17.

[2] The Treaty of Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand's founding statement of principles, originally provided the basis upon which relations between Maori as original inhabitants and the Crown (as represented by Pakeha as original settlers/colonizers) was to be mediated.

'Just Us'?" I asked my primarily nonindigenous audience to think about this: if the collective civic project is indeed securing justice for indigenous peoples, all in the society need to be involved, because the moral demands of shared citizenship require no less. If, however, the project is simply about restorative justice for indigenous peoples, and we ourselves keep insisting that we have no need of help from those we regard as the colonizing other, then we should call our project "just us" and not "justice."[3]

The vexing question of how we disrupt the currently simplistic and erroneous discourse on race and identity politics in our nation is not easy to discern. The task is not made any easier by the inability, the unwillingness, or (possibly) the strange naiveté of academics and policy-makers who address race matters while failing to account for precisely who and, therefore, what they are claiming to represent. Oddly enough, Maori, for example, are seen as belonging to a race because (it is popularly alleged) Maori people have a distinctive language; a unique set of cultural rituals that are enacted from time to time; identifiable values that tend to emphasize a preference for group lifestyle and well-being rather than for individualized ways of life; and a *marae* or traditional meeting house base for the preservation, protection, and perpetuation of our indigenous custom and traditions. On the other hand, Pakeha or "white" people are not popularly perceived as a race because they are alleged to have no culture. Alternatively, they are challenged to see the culture they claim to have as a very recent invention resulting from latent Pakeha guilt-stricken reaction to Maori claims for a link between colonial imperialism and contemporary Maori suffering and disadvantage.

In this perception of Maori as a race—a perception yet to be contested by Maori—there is an elision of the meaning of race with that of culture. In this discourse, it is culture—a distinct, individuated entity typically associated with a people, tribe, or nation—that is being referred to. From this vantage Maori—or, more correctly, being Maori—requires description and analysis as an integrated totality. Having a so-called universe of shared meaning, Maori have set ourselves apart from other cultures. But we have yet more accurately

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    [3] Jenny Plane Te Paa, "Contemporary Identity Politics in Higher Education: Justice or 'Just Us'?" Unpublished paper presented at a Faculty of Theology Seminar, Otago University, Dunedin, July 2006.

to define who we are in that respect. No cultures are or ever were fixed in time and place. Therefore all associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained; they are not given "natural" facts.

The two major racial categories that dominate the politically charged race discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand—Maori and Pakeha—thus have been artificially and arbitrarily created and are being maintained in the same way. The absurdity of simply reducing human variety into discrete and conveniently color-coded categories—Pakeha (white) and Maori (brown)—is clear. Such a simplistic means of classifying people leaves many people without hope of being classified. Yet this seems to be totally irrelevant to those who assert this narrow position. Even if one could set aside consideration of migrant peoples (and I do not believe for one moment that this is possible), where, for example, do the children born of a relationship between a Maori and a person of non-Maori ancestry fit? Where do adoptees without the privilege of biological certainty fit? It follows, then, as Winant asserts, that objectivist treatments, lacking a critique of the constructed character of racial meanings, also clash with experiential dimensions of the issue.[4] There is in these approaches an insufficient appreciation of the performative aspect of race, as postmodernists might call it.

The approach that sees race as an objective condition fails on three counts. First, it cannot grasp the processual, relational, nor (I suspect) spiritual character of racial identity and racial meaning. Second, it denies the historicity and social comprehensiveness of the concept of race. And, third, it cannot account for the ways both individuals and groups must manage the incoherent and conflictual racial meanings and identities ever present in everyday life.

One of the greatest dangers I have seen arising primarily from this objectivist tendency is that it defines group or individual authentic identity through its opposition to an "other." Reclaiming identity in this way actually only reinforces dependence on the "other"—otherwise why on earth be so hugely critical? This tendency, known as the "moralizing revenge of the powerless," simply reinforces the "wounded attachments" it still naively claims to sever. "Politicised identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching,

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4   Winant, *Racial Conditions*, 18.

restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in its politics; it can hold no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain."[5]

As a tertiary (postsecondary) educator who is also a theologian, my deepest yearning is that our sacred teaching and learning spaces are always sites of liberation and of freedom, of bold new inspiration and of hope, and of radical transformation and therefore always potentially of redemptive justice. I am profoundly concerned with God's justice. I am profoundly committed to devoting my life's work to the pursuit of ensuring that God's justice prevails for all and not just for some. I do so desperately want to see Maori—indeed, to see all indigenous peoples—positively represented across the spectrum of life's opportunities and activities both nationally and internationally. I believe those of us responsible for educational leadership in any discipline are morally obligated to be sure that our efforts at ensuring equitable participation in all forms of education for all who desire and deserve to participate are founded on defensible theoretical understandings and their associated institutional practices.

What troubles me greatly as a tertiary educator is that, in spite of now nearly thirty years of sustained and commendable intervention by so many well-meaning professional individuals and groups in the vexed arena of "indigenous educational underachievement," and the significant increase in participation levels in university level education we have yet to see any significant improvement in the numbers of indigenous people achieving professorial or senior academic status other than in those departments dealing with indigenous or cultural studies. I know that statistics are by nature vexatious things, and I know that all forms of critical analysis are complex. But the fact remains that within those critical disciplines popularly described as belonging to the knowledge economy, or in other words those disciplines that directly and indirectly have the capacity to influence socioeconomic status dramatically and positively, indigenous professionals are rarely if at all represented. This is true of medicine, economics, sociology, law, political science, engineering, medical research, information technology, and so on it goes.

I note with increasing alarm that theology is similarly afflicted. It may not be the most compelling academic field for anyone, let alone an indigenous person, to consider. Nevertheless, the responsibility of

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[5] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 74.

providing a prophetic voice (of both vision and critique) for the public square on matters of social, political, economic, and spiritual importance is hardly a minor or inconsequential professional role.

The continued underrepresentation of indigenous peoples in influential disciplines is quite widespread in postcolonial contexts. I detect here a perverse institutionalized response akin to what I cynically describe as "cultural cringe." Indigenous students—all of whom I believe are inherently capable of achieving at the highest levels as long as the standard preconditions to any successful academic performance are provided—are being steered by well-meaning liberals of all shades toward the culturally safe niche of cultural or indigenous studies. (Remember those I described earlier who articulate grievance politics, sometimes on behalf of indigenous peoples, by way of expressing their so-called race-based solidarity with the victims of colonial imperialism.) This well-meaning liberalism is also being practiced in the classroom by those who insist that indigenous students do not need to meet "white Western" standards. My sadness is that unless and until indigenous students are moving with ease and with credibility across the entire spectrum of academic studies, and subsequently are able to have an impact on the broadest possible range of professional occupational groupings, all of the social problems inherent in educational underachievement will continue to be rendered manifest in our societies.

It has been in the course of my own life's work and being—and mostly as a result of the variously privileged and occasionally accursed experience of being a pioneer in so many of the professional roles I have been entrusted with—that identity politics have impacted virtually every step of my own journey. What has been fascinating (to put it politely) is that my identity has been institutionally constructed (for the purposes of my employment by the church) as simply "Maori lay woman," while every other aspect of my composite human identity has sometimes made me the target of unfettered institutional abuse. I am not naive: I know that my positioning myself in a leadership role within an inherently patriarchal, residually racist, and unapologetically clericalist institutional structure means that the gifts of these three aspects of my overall identity were not going to be immediately recognizable—let alone instinctively appreciated!

So my detractors have had the full spectrum of choice. I have experienced criticism or abuse because I was a layperson, and therefore presumably ignorant about the church, theological education, and ministry formation. (The fact that I am the only person in Aotearoa

with a Ph.D. in theological education was deemed insignificant.) My identity as a woman has been taken to mean that male ordinands would, purportedly, have difficulty relating to me. (It has actually been the fact that I am divorced which has caused huge discomfort to those crusading on a morally conservative platform.) Or else I have experienced criticism or abuse because I am Maori (but unfortunately, in the eyes of some Maori, not Maori enough or the right sort of Maori) or because I am too Maori for some Pakeha people who have not liked my intellectual critique of much of anything.

It is because of all of this and much, much more that I have become increasingly concerned about the misuse of identity politics, especially within theological education. If I thought for a moment that one single aspect of my identity—especially that of being Maori—was being seen as the sole arbiter of my worth as a self-respecting professional theologian—let alone my composite identity as a decent, talented, caring, fun-loving, hardworking academic, mother, heterosexual, liberal, Christian, arts-loving, French Armenian Pakeha Maori New Zealand citizen, writer, and lover of animals, then I would feel utterly misrepresented or at least underrepresented!

Each of these distinctive dimensions—behind which are also collectivities—is a variation, a sampling of those to which each and every one of us belongs in one form or another. It is out of this complex of connections, interrelationships, and systems of meaning that our particular unique identities emerge in fluid and dynamic ways. No one of these collectivities can or should be defined as our singular or even primary identity. Given our inescapably plural identities, we must decide upon the relative importance of our different associations and affiliations, and how these are best maintained, nurtured, and built up for the betterment of the families, communities, and societies within which we all live—in other words, for the common good.

I am not in any way trying to detract from the strengths or the beauty or indeed the conditional legitimacy of singular racial identity. No doubt in most cases our sense of racial identity can be a source of intense pride and joy, and thus of strength and confidence. However, it is also true that cultivating a strong and exclusive sense of identity, especially an overwhelming sense of belonging to one group, inevitably evokes a perception of distance and divergence from other groups. As Amartya Sen describes it, in-group solidarity then helps to

feed between-group discord.[6] The project for justice becomes the ideology of "just us." The preconditions for tension, conflict, and potential violence are thus established.

How many of us who identify primarily as indigenous have heard—or even worse, participated in—the often unflattering and always generalized disparagement of nonindigenous peoples as oppressors, colonizers, imperialists, dominant, insensitive, cold, racist, and so on? Conversely, how many so-called colonizers have used different and predictable themes to disparage indigenous people as lazy, untrustworthy, violence-prone, arrogant, aggressive, sexist, and promiscuous? What concerns me is the ease with which erstwhile intelligent human beings can be so easily persuaded by the sheer force of racial rhetoric into an uncritical acceptance of conformist behavior.

Many of you may be familiar with New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team. And many of you may be familiar with the *haka* (or challenge) usually performed as a gesture of solidarity with New Zealanders whenever we are performing and/or achieving significantly, as in the recent Olympic games. The *haka* is an extraordinarily spine-tingling, culturally artistic dance form when performed well and purposefully. As with all art forms, it has been rightly subjected to revival, renewal, reform, and recreation. All the gestures and movements are normally intentional, comprehensible, and meaningful. However, in 2005 a startlingly new *haka* was developed especially for the All Blacks as they prepared for their Rugby World Cup campaign. It was first publicly performed during that campaign and caused extensive and (in my view) justified uproar among some sections of the community. This particular *haka* is concerned primarily with goading and ultimately intimidating the opposition into a position of weakened submission. But at the end of the 2005 performance came a never before seen performance gesture. The movement is utterly unambiguous and mimics a throat-slitting action. The cultural experts, including the choreographer, argued aggressively that it was a culturally ordained performance and any criticism of it ought to be seen as inherently racist in its interpretation.

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[6] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

Given our global times and circumstances it seemed extraordinarily naive and frankly foolish to me that anyone would endeavor to argue on cultural grounds for the incorporation (let alone the celebration) of such a violent and potentially deadly gesture in a so-called traditional dance performance. Our public newspapers and television spent days debating the subject. The cultural "purists" held out for their position and the cultural "detractors" asserted theirs. I was increasingly appalled and outraged at the unconscionable complicity of Maori with the spurious and barely intelligible cultural justifications being proffered in defense of what is, in today's sociopolitical climate, morally and politically indefensible. One of my much-admired public square commentators, Amartya Sen, concurs:

> [T]ypically, such conformism tends to have conservative implications, and works in the direction of shielding old customs and practices from intelligent scrutiny. Indeed, traditional inequalities, such as unequal treatment of women in sexist societies (even violence against them), or discrimination against members of other racial groups, survive by the unquestioning acceptance of received beliefs (including the subservient roles of the traditional underdog). Many past practices and assumed identities have crumbled in response to questioning and scrutiny.[7]

While indigenous peoples in New Zealand and Canada have yet to experience anything of the murderous identity-based conflicts so tragically present in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Congo, Israel/Palestine, Fiji, Pakistan/India, and elsewhere, we must be ever alert. As long as the preconditions are established, then the possibility of violence will remain. Sen again: "Violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror."[8]

If identity-based thinking and acting can be amenable to such brutal manipulation, then where is the remedy to be found? I am not for a moment suggesting the suppression or restriction of the invocation of identity. As I have said, identity can be as much a source of warmth and richness and mutual delight as it can be a prompt for acts

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[7] Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 9.
[8] Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 2.

of terror and violence. What is needed instead is an effective intellectual challenge to the force of the singular belligerent identity claim made by competing or plural identities. It is in this arena that theological discourse can and should be employed, especially by those who teach and minister within religious communities. It is here that theological education itself can take a proactive leadership role in the vexed and enduring challenge of teaching how best to honor and follow the Christian way.

Of course, there are all manner of challenges and problems here, not least those arising as we struggle with the inherent tensions between being autonomous persons together in relationship (and relational persons striving for autonomy); with difficult ethical issues such as human sexuality; with being called to minister to a broken, poor, and violent world; and with living within and ministering to a divided church as we are called to mission and to reaching out.

But at the same time, the assertion of human commonality has been used as a most potent form of resistance to degrading attributions in different cultures over many periods of time. Certainly for Christians, the claims outlined in Paul's letters to the Galatians assume poignant significance in respect to subverting the singular identity argument. None of this is to suggest for a moment that the structural inequalities so readily evident between and among the peoples of the world should ever be minimized, overlooked, denied, or understated in any way whatsoever. However, the process of refocusing the intellectual debates—those necessary precursors to enduring change—must also confront and reject the tendency of those from the underside to assert a strongly contrived oppositional discourse grounded in the politics of grievance.

The model I prefer—developing quality bicultural theological education—is intended to enable indigenous people to move beyond the unhelpful and mutually debilitating politics of grievance. It presupposes the responsibility of the partners to act with goodwill toward each other, each recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the other, each negotiating with mutual respect and compassionate concern to alleviate those respective weaknesses and so to encourage, celebrate, and lovingly and intentionally develop each others' strengths. Some years ago I proposed a program for bicultural theological education in my own theological college. This proposal is still relevant today, especially in giving deep honor to indigenous aspirations and indigenous contributions.

It is only by contextualizing the lived experiences of those "on the margins" that theological students and their teachers can begin to problematize the information with which they are confronted, by asking critical questions and by challenging simple answers to what are always complex and highly politicized issues (especially those having to do with economic injustice, educational failure, political disenfranchisement, and so on). The clear understanding here is that knowledge always reflects larger power relationships in any society. This normally means that those with greater social, economic, and political capital usually have more influence/power over major decisions, particularly in education.

The development of critical consciousness is essential to the successful structural embedding of a bicultural theological educational paradigm. An embedded bicultural theological educational paradigm ensures that the narrative of past experience will continue to be told and retold, in order to ensure that those who will eventually be appointed to lead the church can begin now to join the ongoing collective struggle toward truly redeeming that past experience. Students and teachers ought to see themselves as social agents responsible for reconceptualizing their communities in ways that enable them to initiate and undertake transformative action and social change, and to contribute daily toward the establishment and maintenance of a just, compassionate, and ecologically sustainable community.

Bicultural theological education therefore requires a radically revised curriculum and teaching pedagogy. These must proceed from imagining a world characterized by peace and justice for all. Bicultural theological education should not shrink from exposing the global forces at work to suppress, limit, and even remove the life chances of the weakest or most vulnerable among us. Bicultural theological education must see itself as transcending particularity; it must insist upon individuals, not only knowing and loving what is good in the traditions of their own primary cultural group, but also understanding and appreciating the traditions of others, while at the same time critically rejecting the worst of all traditions. This is the commitment to seeing the world and its multiple concerns from more than one viewpoint.

Bicultural educators will be cultural prophets, unafraid of speaking theologically of race politics. They will say that when we allow racial or ethnic self-consciousness to dominate, we lose the qualities of tolerance, civility, and curiosity. The fundamental challenge to us all

as God's people is to understand the suffering of others as well as their joy.

This bicultural theological education project does not presuppose an easy transition. The task of establishing and honoring pluralism in any society is demanding moral work. The fact that theology is a crucial central undergirding to the project is, however, immensely reassuring, for here is the discourse of justice, inclusivity, peace, and liberation. Pluralism, or the capacity to build bridges of loyalty across ethnic or racial difference, must be mobilized in bicultural theological education. This is the only way of making sure we care enough about people who are different from ourselves to stop us from using those differences to destroy one another. The task is not to replace one ethnocentrism with another; neither is it to assimilate all peoples into one hybrid "normal" being. The risk of that hybrid's being white Anglo-Saxon is too great to take. The only alternative that does not threaten us all with potential schism is the hard work of forging, maintaining, and renewing bicultural partnership relationships, those that accept the diversity inherent in any civil society and that rejoice in the opportunities to learn endlessly the ways and the God-given worth of all peoples.

What is needed in order for the project to succeed is not a pristine theoretical model, nor an impressive institutional site. What is needed is what Stephen Carter describes as a commitment to reconstructing civility: "for us all to learn anew the virtue of acting with love toward our neighbours . . . a revival of all that is the best in religion as a force in our public life. Only religion possesses the majesty, the power, and the sacred language to teach all of us . . . the genuine appreciation for each other on which a successful civility must rest."[9]

The questions are for us all. Is it possible that bicultural theological education is poised to make a difference? Who ought to be doing bicultural education? Is it right for the churches to assume an intentional responsibility for bicultural theological education in a unique way? How do we prevent the burden of responsibility from falling upon indigenous theological educators alone? Redemptive justice is, after all, our collective responsibility.

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[9]   Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 18.

We have all experienced and hopefully now better understand the damning legacy of colonialism, particularly in respect to its effect on indigenous peoples who have remained committed to the church in spite of that awful history. Latterly we have also seen how important and how potentially dangerous the rise of ethnic identity has been. Therefore, surely by now, we are ready for committed dialogue, across difference, about the critical gospel concerns of justice and of peace. This, I believe, is the unrecognized challenge and the unrealized mandate of our call to be witnesses to the gospel. It is time we engaged as partners in the spirit of mutuality and with an abundant generosity of spirit to find the best ways of advancing God's mission and ministry for our churches in our lands and beyond. This challenge is at the heart of the bicultural theological education project. It seeks to embody the very essence of the gospel imperative for us to do for the least of those among us. Individual moral autonomy and collective state responsibility need not be a contradiction in terms. As distinctive peoples and yet as citizens in common, we can and we must first seek to achieve the conditions for mutuality. I now unequivocally believe that it is only in the absolute putting of the "we" at risk that we can ever truly realize the possibilities of our God-given shared humanity.

I want to end with two short passages. The first is the final paragraph of my own Ph.D. thesis: "What is needed is a transcendent imagination—one inspired by the instinctive human yearning for community, and one sustained by the instinctive human 'knowing' that to do God's good works is indeed to serve the precious common good."

The second is one of the loveliest short prayers from the Anglican Church's *A New Zealand Prayer Book*:

Alleluia!
God of justice and compassion,
you give us a work to do
and a baptism of suffering and resurrection.
From you comes the power to give to others
the care we have ourselves received
so that we, and all who love your world,
may live in harmony and trust.[10]

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[10] *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 478.