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WAIRUA MAORI RUA MANO : MAORI SPIRITUALITY 2000

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Maori Spirituality as it was in its early form of primal religion and some aspects of what it is today in the new millennium. The paper argues that while Christianity has made a strong hold on Maori Spirituality, never the less, primal belief is very much alive in the midst of the ordinary life of the Maori, especially in the precinct of the Marae. The paper begins by looking at pre-European Maori beliefs and their genesis story which laid down the charter for the dynamic relationships between Maori and their environment as it unfolds in the dramatic myth stories, handed down orally from generation to generation. These stories guide the Maori to an understanding of where they come from, who they are and where they are going.

The impact of the arrival of another culture along with Christianity brought about dramatic changes for Maori in their relationship with their ecology, their gods and with one another. Conversion to Christianity was slow and ponderous. The Gospel, introduced by the missionaries, contributed to Maori becoming British subjects but the results were disastrous for Maori. The Treaty, in its Maori text, was signed by most chiefs ceding governance to the British Crown while guaranteeing the chiefs' supremacy over their land and property, their 'tino rangatiratanga'. It was the beginning of the end for Maori.

By the turn of twentieth century, colonisation, through greed and broken promises, had stripped Maori of their land and their 'tino rangatiratanga'. The Maori population was in a perilous situation and many predicted Maori would soon to be extinct. With the help of modern technology, a new dawn of consciousness became evident as contemporary arts of carving, tukutuku weaving, and painting took shape within the precincts of the Marae.

Performing arts also came into their own as formal speeches, waiata, poetry, action songs, poi, and haka served to inspire and encourage the younger generations within the bounds of the Marae, the last bastion of the Maori. The Marae became a pivotal point for Maori survival and spirituality.

For over a century the indigenous people of Aotearoa were subjugated and served as a second class citizen within their own country under the rule of the State and Church. However the Anglican Church in New Zealand, in 1990, changed its constitution of 1875 to embrace the Treaty of Waitangi. It meant, for its Maori members that through self-determination, self-propagation and self-supporting activities, their 'tino rangatiratanga', their 'wairua'(spirituality) had finally been achieved, but this is only one section of the community in Aotearoa. The challenge and the hope is that the wider community, especially the governing body, may yet accept 'tino rangatiratanga' for what it is, an expression of Wairua Maori, Maori Spirituality.

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‘E hara taku toa i te toa taki tahi engari he toa taki tini.’

‘My strength is not in my oneness but in my many supporters’.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1998, a song, sung by a young Maori group, spoke about their Tino Rangatiratanga and the difficulties they encountered as they strove to search for their mana, to give meaning to their lives. It voiced their sense of loss and despair as young Maori struggle to find employment. How can they stand tall without financial security and with the likelihood of loosing rooves over their heads as their parents prepare themselves for the inevitable eviction from their state home? When will they have their next full meal? How are they to keep warm with the power cut off? What can we do about our baby girl's asthma? God! If there is a God, why don't you answer? Where are you? Its so dark and cold! There is anger and frustration. There is no God. Let us go back to the Maori gods!

The problems confronted by beneficiaries and the unemployed, as well as Maori were also highlighted in the same year by the Anglican Church which organised 'The Hikoi of Hope'. They were joined by other churches and concerned groups and walked from all corners of New Zealand to Parliament to protest at the intolerable levels of poverty and social breakdown in the country. With high unemployment, (Maori 15.5%; NZ Official Yearbook 1997), poor health and about 18% of households in New Zealand living below poverty line. Maori are 2 ½ times more likely to be in poverty than Pakeha.

The young Maori singers make a whimsical suggestion that perhaps things would improve greatly if they were to return to their Maori gods. Behind this cynical remark, one cannot help but feel that these young singers are longing for a return to things Maori, where Maori could charter and be in control of their own destiny as it was before being swamped by Colonialism. To do things in a Maori way would feel good and

would be profitable for Maori, a right to self-determination, like a growing young nation during the period of the 1830s to the 1860s where Maori religion was still strong and alive.

The questions that immediately comes to mind are, is it possible to go back in time and revive the belief in Maori gods? Would going back to Maori gods bring about the change that these young people are looking for? What effects would this change bring about? After 150 years of Christianity, and influence by other World Religions, is there room for Maori gods? Can Maori reject the 'Pakeha' God so easily? Is it still possible to be both Maori and Christian? Would Maori gods be able to go surfing in this world of Internet and Virtual Reality? What relevance, if any, would Maori gods bring to modern society let alone to floundering young Maori people as we enter the 21st century? By going back to the Maori gods will this remove the yoke of Maori suffering and injustices of the present and the future? Will Maori be able to attain their 'tino rangatiratanga'?

This thesis contends that a position of compromise can be achieved between the new belief and the old belief for the young Maori of the new millennium, that there is room for Maori 'gods'. Or, to put it another way, that Maori spirituality has a more meaningful application for young Maori people in their modern world than perhaps any transplanted religion could do from another world viewpoint. With the strong resurgence of Maori renaissance come the inevitable tensions as feelings and emotions of fear and pride rise to the surface. By sharing and talking about these concerns, it is hoped that there will be a better understanding of the dilemma that confronts Maori. It is perceived, and commonly stated that Maori are a 'spiritual people'. When people try to spell out what this actually means they run into a number of difficulties. For some it means someone who is religious, like going to church, or people who are holy and thereby deny

themselves the joys and pleasures of this secular world, a carry-over of Westernised thinking of people who live cloistered lives as monks and nuns do. This thesis then, seeks to examine and explain the beliefs and practices of the Maori as they were held and practised in pre-European times. It will also examine the influence of the Christian religion on Maori culture and the changes that took place leading up to the present day in the context of a particular religious identity that has meaning and relevance for the present. To help reach a formative conclusion, this four-part thesis will look at various aspects of Maori religion throughout Aotearoa - New Zealand history and work through a possible scenario for the new millennium.

The four parts will consist of:

Part 1: Maori Genesis – Primal Religion – Maori Cosmology

This will mainly cover the area of Maori beliefs before the arrival of the Pakeha. It will define Maori spirituality and beliefs as set out in the Maori mythical stories, particularly as set out in Grey's book of "Nga Mahi a nga Tipuna".

Part 2: Close Encounter with Christianity.

The arrival of another culture from another world, with their superior technology which had some powerful consequences on the Maori, will be examined. This part will endeavour to give some insights on the impact of Christianity on the Maori and their world, the interaction of the gospel and the cultures which was "both complex and dynamic".¹

¹ Davidson, Allan. *Christianity in Aotearoa*, Wellington, 1991, p.7

Part 3: Changes in Maori Religion: Marae and Performing Arts.

The heart-beat of modern Maoridom can be felt, heard, seen and savoured on the marae. With the arrival of modern technology Maori traditions and culture changed and adapted. An aesthetic revolution took place borne out of the pain and suffering of the people. This part will examine some of these changes as art form became innovative, direct and powerfully expressive.

Part 4: Maori Spirituality in the New Millennium

Young Maori of today are faced with many challenges as their forebears were before them. Can they survive and still be 'Maori'? Will it be necessary to discard their 'Maori gods'? Will there be a need for a totally new being to be able to 'surf the inter-net' and enter into 'virtual reality' in the new millennium? Will they be able to maintain their Tino Rangatiratanga?