Querida Amazonia and *Listening to the People of the Land*

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Bridget Crisp, manager of Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand, suggested it would be worth looking at Pope Francis's 2020 exhortation *Querida Amazonia* to see how Pax Christi's publication, *Listening to the People of the Land*, lined up with it. The following document picks up on themes that are common to both. The numbered paragraphs are from *Querida Amazonia* (the full text and references can be accessed by going to the link given at the end). The pieces from *Listening to the People of the Land* (reflecting the opinions of the different authors) are referenced by page numbers.

Treating Indigenous Peoples as Lesser and Their Lands as Empty

from *Querida Amazonia*

12. My predecessor Benedict XVI condemned "the devastation of the environment and the Amazon basin, and the threats against the human dignity of the peoples living in that region." It is well known that, ever since the final decades of the last century, the Amazon region has been presented as an enormous empty space to be filled, a source of raw resources to be developed, a wild expanse to be domesticated. None of this recognizes the rights of the original peoples; it simply ignores them as if they did not exist, or acts as if the lands on which they live do not belong to them.

14. The businesses, national or international, which harm the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries, and to self-determination and prior consent, should be called for what they are: *injustice and* crime. When certain businesses out for quick profit appropriate lands and end up privatizing even potable water, or when local authorities give free access to … businesses that raze the forests and pollute the environment, economic relationships are unduly altered and become an instrument of death … We cannot allow globalization to become "a new version of colonialism".

16. Such a history of suffering and contempt does not heal easily. Nor has colonization ended; in many places, it has been changed, disguised and concealed, while losing none of its contempt for the life of the poor and the fragility of the environment.

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

Britain established its right to govern in Australia under the doctrine of "terra nullius"—"land belonging to no one" ... As Pākehā (settler New Zealanders of European descent) we congratulated ourselves that we had treated Māori so much better. Little did we realise how profoundly the complementary doctrines of terra nullius and "discovery" had affected our own country's history, or the place of Christendom in promulgating them (Healy, pp. 21—22).

When I was growing up in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the 1960s, we were taught that Australian identity was a relatively simple thing. It all started with Captain Cook in 1770 (Brett, p. 295).

If we think about the Indigenous experience, we start to see the violence in the discovery doctrine. It meant that a foreigner could enter another people's country and confer his names on their lands and bays, without regard for them or their history; he could define their being and world without knowing their language or culture, or listening to what they had to say; he could convince himself that the mere fact of his presence, whether invited or not, would be a light to these people and a blessing from God. With the backing of the discovery doctrine, Western nations took other peoples' lands and dominated their lives in the name of civilisation and Christianity (Healy, p. 4)

Listening and Dialogue Provide a Way Forward

from *Querida Amazonia*

26. The Amazon region ought to be a place of social dialogue, especially between the various original peoples, for the sake of developing forms of fellowship and joint struggle. The rest of us are called to participate as "guests" and to seek out with great respect paths of encounter that can enrich the Amazon region. If we wish to dialogue, we should do this in the first place with the poor … They are our principal dialogue partners, those from whom we have the most to learn, to whom we need to listen out of a duty of justice, and from whom we must ask permission before presenting our proposals. Their words, their hopes and their fears should be the most authoritative voice at any table of dialogue on the Amazon region. And the great question is: "What is their idea of 'good living' for themselves and for those who will come after them?"

37. Starting from our roots, let us sit around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes. In this way our differences, which could seem like a banner or a wall, can become a bridge. Identity and dialogue are not enemies. Our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves.

17. Yet even as we feel this healthy sense of indignation, we are reminded that it is possible to overcome the various colonizing mentalities and to build networks of solidarity and development ... Alternatives can be sought …

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

A terrible aspect of colonisation was the attack on the identity and soul of the Indigenous people whose land was taken over. The colonists' sense of superiority meant they rarely entered into conversations of real sharing with the local people. Such conversations would have revealed to them the meeting points between Indigenous and Christian beliefs and what they could have learnt from another people's wisdom (Healy, p. 11).

When people have a genuine voice, are listened to and taken seriously by decision-makers, the path is cleared for good decisions to be made (McDermott, p. 184)

One thing that has struck me is the two-way deprivation that is involved when one partner to a relationship is convinced of their superiority, and thus renders themselves incapable of hearing what the other has to say … When two of different backgrounds converse respectfully, enrichment comes to both. This is true for individuals and for the encounter between nations and cultures (Healy, pp. 43–44).

Theologians and local communities together began questioning causes of poverty and theological questions began to arise directly from daily life. The Bible then became a dialogue tool within the contexts of oppression. Gradually, groups of formerly "invisible" people began responding to the gospel, and thus was born a new way of doing theology, called "liberation theology" (Bergin, p. 238).

Let's be Mindful of Indigenous Identity and Sense of Community

from *Querida Amazonia*

20. … the original peoples of the Amazon region have a strong sense of community. It permeates "their work, their rest, their relationships, their rites and celebrations … Life is a communal journey where tasks and responsibilities are apportioned and shared on the basis of the common good. There is no room for the notion of an individual detached from the community or from the land". Their relationships are steeped in the surrounding nature, which they feel and think of as a reality that integrates society and culture, and a prolongation of their bodies, personal, familial and communal.

33. "A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a leveling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity". This especially affects young people, for it has a tendency to "blur what is distinctive about their origins and backgrounds" … there is a need to care lovingly for our roots, since they are "a fixed point from which we can grow and meet new challenges". I urge the young people of the Amazon region, especially the indigenous peoples, to "take charge of your roots, because from the roots comes the strength that will make you grow, flourish and bear fruit". For those of them who are baptized, these roots include the history of the people of Israel and the Church up to our own day. Knowledge of them can bring joy and, above all, a hope capable of inspiring noble and courageous actions.

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

For Indigenous Peoples, land is sacred, and long before Christianity they recognised the kinship relationship between themselves, the land and God (Betz, p. 234).

Seeing in the hired man on the roadside the incarnate face of the land, the radical identification expressed in the now familiar phrase used by Whanganui Māori: "Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au," I am the river, the river is me—was a slow awakening (Warne, p. 194).

By what right did Cook ignore the original names and overlay them with his own, asked [Nuki] Aldridge. And by what right did those who followed him make Cook's names the official ones? This, said Aldridge, was the beginning of the process of "separating us from our whenua [land]."
That poignant phrase—"separating us from our whenua"—refers not only to the huge physical loss of land but also to the breaking of whole sets of relationships that bound communities to their lands and lands to their communities (Healy, p. 28).

Pacific practices of sharing reflect awareness of the common good and that none are the ultimate possessors of the earth's wealth (Healy, p. 164).

The African concept of ubuntu recognises that no one is just an individual, but through a shared humanity is called into community and shared co-operation with others. This gives a common worldview that all the African religions, whether Christian, Muslim or indigenous, can use to forge stronger bonds of understanding and communion (McDermott, p.190).

A Consumerist Economy Diminishes Natural and Social Ecologies

from *Querida Amazonia*

13. The original peoples often witnessed helplessly the destruction of the natural surroundings that enabled them to be nourished and kept healthy, to survive and to preserve a way of life in a culture which gave them identity and meaning.

53. Frequently we let our consciences be deadened, since "distractions constantly dull our realization of just how limited and finite our world really is". From a superficial standpoint, we might well think that "things do not look that serious, and the planet could continue as it is for some time. Such evasiveness serves as a license to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen".

41. In a cultural reality like the Amazon region, where there is such a close relationship between human beings and nature, daily existence is always cosmic ... In the Amazon region, one better understands the words of Benedict XVI when he said that, "alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a 'human' ecology which in turn demands a 'social' ecology. All this means that humanity … must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology". This insistence that "everything is connected" is particularly true of a territory like the Amazon region.

58. A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal.

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

In the dawning decades of the third millennium, humanity has begun to reap the whirlwind after centuries of desecrating the world that has given us life. Ecological sub-systems are breaking down; entire species threatened with extinction; our seas polluted and our air becoming toxic; social structures collapsing and the most vulnerable despised; greed championed and kindness neglected; indigenous peoples exploited by wealthy cabals; violence promoted; neo-colonialism driven by multinationals; and the seeming failure to achieve a political consensus to provide hope for a future (Riddell, pp. 255—256).

An expert in whakapapa can trace a group's connections not just to their human ancestors, but to land, plants, animals, taonga (treasured resources), atua (spiritual powers) and ultimately to the origins of the universe. Whakapapa recognises webs of relationships which bring all things into connection. In the words of Ngāpuhi scholar, Hone Sadler, "the worldview of Māori, when it comes to whakapapa, is that everything is interrelated from the sky to the land" (Healy, p. 77).

Ngāpuhi elder Pereme Porter emphasised to the Waitangi Tribunal that to understand Māori culture is to recognise that it is a culture of relationships. "Our culture," he said, "is based on relationships with everything and everyone in Te Ao Mārama [the world of light, the physical world] as creatures that whakapapa [trace connection] to the source of that creation, the creator of the cosmos, Io" (Healy, p. 78).

We need a critique of our economic life as churches, and a rebuilding of local economies—beginning with an acknowledgement of the traditional ownership of local lands and resources (Brett, p. 297).

Contemplation and Care for Mother Earth

from *Querida Amazonia*

55. From the original peoples, we can learn to *contemplate* the Amazon region and not simply analyze it, and thus appreciate this precious mystery that transcends us. We can *love* it, not simply use it, with the result that love can awaken a deep and sincere interest. Even more, we can *feel intimately a part of it* and not only defend it; then the Amazon region will once more become like a mother to us.

56. Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense that so often we let languish. Let us remember that "if someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple". On the other hand, if we enter into communion with the forest, our voices will easily blend with its own and become a prayer: "as we rest in the shade of an ancient eucalyptus, our prayer for light joins in the song of the eternal foliage".

42. The wisdom of the original peoples of the Amazon region "inspires care and respect for creation, with a clear consciousness of its limits, and prohibits its abuse. To abuse nature is to abuse our ancestors, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Creator, and to mortgage the future" ... The harm done to nature affects those peoples in a very direct and verifiable way, since, in their words, "we are water, air, earth and life of the environment created by God. For this reason, we demand an end to the mistreatment and destruction of mother Earth. The land has blood, and it is bleeding; the multinationals have cut the veins of our mother Earth".

46. "The world is suffering from its feet being turned into rubber, its legs into leather, its body into cloth and its head into steel ... Only poetry, with its humble voice, will be able to save this world" (Vinicius de Moraes).

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

"Nga Tangata whenua o Aotearoa [the Indigenous people of Aotearoa] have had an intimate and enduring association with, and connection to, the whenua [land], the moana [sea], the rangi [sky], the hau [air, wind] and to the wai [water] since time immemorial. That association is both physical and spiritual and sustains their way of life, their culture, their political and economic identity" (p. 76, citing A. Sykes & J. Pou).

If the radical secularising of perception is resisted, it becomes apparent that there are other modes of living in harmony with both the natural and social environments that may be less destructive. A turn toward sacrality restores both respect and wonder to human interaction with the surrounding world (Riddell, p. 263).

At dawn I listened to kōkako, the soul of the forest, the bird that Tūhoe say mediates between wairua time and people time. Kōkako seem not to simply sing their notes, they send them into the world as gifts, painting the forest with song, drawing the listener into the music.
In such times the curtain between natural and supernatural feels thin, like a membrane allowing passage from one side to the other. The more I get to know te ao Māori, the thinner that membrane seems to get (Warne, pp. 199–200).

Another who perceived the unity of God, self and creation was Mechtild of Magdeburg (c1250), who worked among the sick and poor of her city. She wrote: "The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things," and "The truly wise person kneels at the feet of all creatures and is not afraid to endure the mockery of others" (Betz, p. 222).

The Gospel and Culture

from *Querida Amazonia*

68. Here I would reiterate what I stated about inculturation in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, based on the conviction that "grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it". We can see that it involves a double movement. On the one hand, a fruitful process takes place when the Gospel takes root in a given place, for "whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel". On the other hand, the Church herself undergoes a process of reception that enriches her with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown in that culture. In this way, "the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face".

69. "The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression", and "we would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous". There is a risk that evangelizers who come to a particular area may think that they must not only communicate the Gospel but also the culture in which they grew up, failing to realize that it is not essential "to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be". What is needed is courageous openness to the novelty of the Spirit, who is always able to create something new with the inexhaustible riches of Jesus Christ … let us be fearless; let us not clip the wings of the Holy Spirit.

72. While working for them [the indigenous peoples of the Amazon Region] and with them, we are called "to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them". Those who live in cities need to appreciate this wisdom and to allow themselves to be "re-educated" in the face of frenzied consumerism and urban isolation.

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

We are ready to be astonished at the insights from another culture, looking for great faith wherever it may be found (Taylor, p. 315).

In South Africa there is a variety of cultures, each deeply rooted in the life experience of people and with a long-standing wisdom, often expressed in local rites, which people find life-giving. One of the challenges of theologians today is to allow the Word of God to sprout forth from these cultures, producing "fruits that may be different from the results of other branches" (Prior, p. 302).

Needed is an approach to mission in which those who receive Christianity are respected as agents of cultural transformation and resistance (Taylor, p. 310).

"Black theology is the story of black people's struggle for liberation in an extreme situation of oppression. Black theology's starting point is the experience of black people; black theology wants to liberate people from oppressive structures of racism, political oppression, economic poverty, social alienation and spiritual enslavement. It seeks to discover what message the Christian Gospel has to offer to people who find themselves in oppressive situations" (Prior, pp. 304–305, citing Tshidiso Lephagka).

If the gospel message came to this land as a guest of the indigenous peoples, then it must continue as a dialogue of encounter with the people (McDermott, p. 182).

To discover the richness and diversity of another culture is to discover a new world that invites me to explore my motivations and guiding principles, and to see God at work in a very different way (McDermott, p. 191).

The Christian Churches and Power Sharing

This topic is not addressed in Querida Amazonia*. It is covered in Part 2 of* Listening to the People of the Land *which looks at the Churches* Programme on Racism*, and the constitutional changes made by the Anglican and Methodist Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

***The quotes on this page all come from Part 2 of* Listening to the People of the Land**.

At the heart of the Christian Gospel is a commitment to justice and reconciliation. The bicultural journey [of the Methodist Church] is a manifestation of the church's commitment to see that power is shared in the life of the church so that neither Te Taha Maori nor Tauiwi [non-Maori] are deprived of the opportunity to shape and influence the life of the church. It is the outworking of the commitment to justice and reconciliation that will hopefully energise the church's bicultural journey (Jones, p. 128).

The bicultural journey has helped the church to recognise the distinctive world view that shapes the life and perspective of each culture within the church (Jones, p.129).

The 1986 [Anglican] General Synod adopted most of the commission's recommendations, one of which was to revise the constitution. Priorities included:

- autonomy for Māori ministry within the national church
- partnership to be structurally expressed within the church
- equality of partnership to be recognised in representation at General Synod
- the Diocese of Polynesia to be invited to enter as another equal partner
- five provincial bicultural educators to be appointed to enable further growth in partnership (Puckey, p. 144).

The bicultural approach accentuates power sharing between tangata whenua (Maori) and tauiwi (non-Maori). The first emphasis of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is on relationships between communities, and between communities and the land. Power sharing is important *along with* ongoing relationship building (Nairn, pp. 108–109).

The 1983 decision [of the Methodist Church] has enabled Māori to see that being Māori is not something to be ignored or sidelined, but something to be proud of. Today, we take our place as of right as Māori, fully participating as Māori within the church (Ngaha, p. 133).

Māori Methodists had to do a lot of ground work leading up to the 1983 decision. There were some key leaders who were influential in this. In 1971, my father, Rev. Ranginohoora Rogers, was appointed as Superintendent of the Māori Missions under the direction of Rev. George Laurenson. Ranginohoora worked closely with Rev. Dr Maharaia Winiata, who wrote a landmark doctoral dissertation on Māori leadership. Their mantle was picked up by Rev. Rua Rakena. Rua and his wife, Joy, who were the activists for change when it came to pursuing a full place for Māori within the church. Under their leadership, the focus for Māori moved to re-educating our own. With Rua and Joy, we considered: Who are we? How do we take our place as Māori in the church? Do we need to stay under the thumb of another culture? Can we do things in our own way? This awareness raising meant we were more than ready to embrace the Bicultural Journey (Ngaha, p. 132).

The Methodist Bicultural Journey is not just "a Māori thing" … it is a means for honouring and valuing every member of this church. It provides the space to honour and respect those who came before. Through the values of manaakitanga and tiakitanga (honouring and caring for one another) respect for each other grows and flourishes (Ngaha, p. 137).

"We Maori are now responsible for the conduct of the church's business in our own tradition and customs" (Puckey, p. 146, citing Rt Revd Whakahuihui Vercoe, Bishop of Aotearoa).

References

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from *Querida Amazonia*

106. In an Amazonian region characterized by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions when we encounter others who think differently than ourselves. If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight, while embracing it from the core of our own convictions and our own identity.
108. In a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together for the good of the Amazon region (*Querida Amazonia*).

from *Listening to the People of the Land*

Being an honourable Christian in Aotearoa requires engaging in action at national, organisational and personal levels to build a Treaty-honouring society. It requires healing relationships and restoring honour so that everyone can flourish …
There is so much to do and so much to be gained (*Listening to the People of the Land*, Margaret, p. 292).