

natural

sexual act at the right time in life, became a hidden secret which men were curious to

explore. Thus unnatural attitudes to sex developed. What had been 'natural' became 'sinful'. Then he looked at what is happening in European countries today, with people wearing bikinis, topless waitresses and nudist camps and beaches for

nude bathing. He asked the question, "Who is naked now?"

While listening to his talk I was struck by the parallels of what happened to the Aboriginal people of Australia and what happened to the Samoan people as a

result of the coming of the Christian Missionaries with their Victorian ideas of

civilization and moral ethics.

I cannot profess to be an authority on the Samoan culture as it is so complex that it would be difficult for anyone who was not born into it to claim to have a

full understanding of its customs and traditions. Likewise, my knowledge of the Aboriginal

culture is limited to what I have gained from having friends in the Aboriginal community

and reading some of the vast range of literature now available on this subject.

However, I

feel that the common experience of their contact with the Christian missionaries is a bond

between these two peoples.

Christianity was readily accepted in Samoa because of a promise that was given to Malietoa Tavita. There is a legend in Samoa of a Goddess, Nafanua.

Nafanua

features in Samoan mythology from the time of Queen Salamasina somewhere in the 16th

century and was also around just prior to the arrival of John Williams who brought

Christianity to Samoa in 1830. The tradition tells that four high chiefs went to Nafanua

to receive a kingdom from her. To three of the chiefs she gave areas of land for them to

rule over but when Malietoa Tavita came to her she said to him,

Alas, all the kingdoms are gone. I have no more to give you. But wait, you will receive a kingdom from heaven and you will be its ruler.

When John Williams came to spread the word of the Heavenly Kingdom of God, Malietoa Tavita felt this was the fulfillment of that promise. He readily accepted

the message and encouraged the missionaries to spread their teachings.

Similarly, according to information given in the video documentary "Blackout Spirituality", the Aboriginal people were expecting to receive some kind of guidance, and when the white man came, they thought that this was what they were waiting for and they stretched out their hand to him. But he did not help them. He used them, persecuted them and stole their children from them.

Because the Samoans were the majority race in Samoa and because of their strong, traditional social structure, Christianity was largely grafted on to that structure and many of the cultural patterns have been woven into the fabric of the churches.

The early missionaries learnt the Samoan language and translated the Bible into Samoan. They then sent Samoan men overseas to be trained as priests and pastors and later, set up a Theological training school in Samoa. Today most of the church leaders are Samoan priests or pastors and they have become influential through the Village Councils.

These developments are completely opposite to what happened in Australia where the tribal law and social structure was so closely linked with the environment of the country that the white invaders could not recognize a 'civilization' that was not existing in terms of settlement, buildings and farming. The nomadic ways of the Aboriginal people labelled them as savages, little better than animals, and indeed some early settlers saw them as vermin and pests who stole their sheep and cattle and they hunted them down like animals.

When one reads the stories of the conflicts between the early settlers, who had the law on their side, and the Aboriginal people, one can understand that the events of those days are as hard for the Aboriginal people to forgive as it is for the Australian prisoners of war who worked on the Changi Railway to forgive the Japanese, or for the Jews to forgive the Germans for the years of the Holocaust.

But there are many parallels between what effect the Missionaries had on the Aboriginal people and the Samoan population. One of the devastating effects of white people coming to both countries was the introduction of diseases for which they had

no immunity and which wiped out hundreds of Samoans and Aboriginals.

In both Samoan villages and Aboriginal tribes, with the coming of the missionaries, children were separated from their parents, although this was done in a more humane way in Samoa than in Australia, where police and welfare workers just grabbed children from the Aboriginal camps and put them in institutions run by various religious denominations. They were put there to learn the 'white man's ways' for 'their own good'. They were to learn to read and write and to become useful servants for the white people. This meant that besides their school work, the children were made to do all the cleaning and household work of the missions. They lost their language and their culture.

This was a very traumatic time for both the children and their parents and many Aboriginal people today still bear the scars of the bitter memories of that time.

Many are still trying to establish their tribe of origin and their parentage.

In Samoa the children were taken to the home of the Pastor to be educated and to learn Christian ways. This meant they were still within their own village, but the separation from the parents denied them the learning of the oral traditions of their culture. It seems that the evening was the time when the family would lay on their mats and the children would learn all the stories and traditions from their parents and grandparents. When one understands the complexity of the Samoan social structure and the strictness with which these customs are observed, together with the oral history that has been preserved down the centuries, one can realise the amount of training that must have taken place for the custom ways of the people to be carried on down through the generations.

Some churches, particularly the Methodist Church, regarded singing (other than hymns) and dancing as sinful and, in the case of the Aboriginal corroborees, a heathen ritual to be discouraged. This was a disaster for the Aboriginal people as it was through their corroborees that their laws and dreamtime were taught and preserved. Similarly, for the Samoan people, much of their history was preserved through the

ceremonies that they observed. Song and dance came naturally to them as an expression of their culture and identity, with the love of music and rhythmical movements.

Although the white people didn't recognise the Aboriginal social structure, there are great similarities between the Aboriginal Tribal Community and the Samoan village life. Both have the family as a base unit of the community and this is expanded to the extended family, which, in Samoa is a village and in Australia, is a tribe.

Eric Fromm wrote a book called *To Have or To Be* in which he put forward the theory that there are basically two philosophies that govern the way people relate to each other, and he labelled these 'To Have' and 'To Be'. The people who live by the 'To Have' philosophy are those who place more importance on material possessions than on other people. They have a clear understanding of what is theirs and what belongs to other people. They feel they have an exclusive right to what is theirs.

The 'To Be' people are those who put human relationships before material possessions. Whatever one person has, is to be shared with the family or tribe. In fact, there are strict rules in both Samoan and Aboriginal tradition for the way the kill of a pig or kangaroo is to be shared out with the family or tribe. In Samoa, money that is earned is to be given to the family Mata'i or chief who then shares it out to the family according to their needs.

Because the Aboriginal people were nomads who had to change camp according to where the food and waterholes were at any particular time of the year, the only possessions of value to them were their hunting weapons and their corroboree artifacts, like the didgeridoo and clapping sticks. They had no problem in sharing these and all food caught or gathered was shared. There was no his or hers, mine or thine, and in fact, their very existence depended on the unity of the tribe.

In Samoa there was little that could be claimed as personal property. A family would live in a fale but it was their responsibility to share it with other family members or guests who wanted to visit and there seems to have been no

limitation to the length of the stay. Food was harvested and shared cooperatively.

In the same way Aboriginal families, when they acquire a house, will put up family and friends for weeks at a time, until they get the urge to move on. If they own a car and someone in the family or tribe wants to borrow it, there is no way they can refuse him.

The Samoan community differs from the Aboriginal in that the Samoan Chiefs are acquisitive of titles; most of the wars in Samoa were not over ownership of land but for titles over land that gave power to the owner. The orators also were into building up their own status through the acquisition of fine mats that were the items representing wealth in that society. In fact, the rulers in ancient Samoa were often induced to divorce their wife to take on another for the sake of the fine mats and gifts that would come to the orator from that transaction. Samoans became Chiefs by reason of their hereditary right to a title within a family, while Aboriginals became elders according to their knowledge of the Dreamtime and spiritual laws. The Samoan village today is governed by a Council of Chiefs or Mata'is, while the Aboriginal tribes have a Council of Elders.

The Aboriginal people have their Dreamtime to explain the creation of the world and there are gods and totems in their spirit world that are not unlike the creatures in the Samoan myths and legends. This is particularly so in the ability of animals to take on human qualities and the way that humans can be transformed into animals and birds and even to rocks.

Both the Aboriginal Dreamtime and the Samoan mythology were threatened with extinction with the coming of the Christian Missionaries. Such stories had no place in the story of creation as given in the Bible, so they were to be rejected and best forgotten. A whole generation of children were deprived of this rich heritage that is comparable to the myths and legends of Greece and Rome in European countries or the Sagas

of the Nordic people.

The recognition of One God is now firmly rooted in Samoa which strongly identifies itself as a 'Christian country'. The growing atheism of the Western world, as result of disenchantment with religious practices today, has not attacked their faith, but there is still some belief in evil spirits that can take possession of a person. This belief is said to account for some of the intellectually or physically disabled children and influences the community attitudes towards them.

In Samoa there is an ancient belief in Nifoloa, a long toothed aitu (spirit) who can appear in many forms. If he bites someone, no puncture mark is seen but the victim suffers a great deal. Unless a certain Samoan medicine is applied immediately, the person will die. Anyone who displeases the aitu can fall victim to him.

Similarly, there are Aboriginal people who can 'point the bone' to cause a person to become ill and die, and medical science has yet to come up with an antidote for this fatal malady.

Probably because there were so many dialects of language for the Aboriginal tribes, the missionaries gave no recognition to their language and insisted they learn to speak and write English, so the language of many tribes has been irretrievably lost. They were only oral languages and were never recorded.

Today there are big changes in the attitude of the Christian Churches. The Pope, when on an Australian tour that took him to the Northern Territory to meet the Aboriginal people, expressed regret at the past misguided policies of the early Christian missionaries and encouraged the Aboriginal people to incorporate some of their own cultural practices into their church services. At least one church allows an Aboriginal elder to carry out an Aboriginal purification ceremony in the church. But there are no Aboriginal bishops yet.

David Lewis, in his book *From Maui to Cook* refers to the publication of a book *Worship in the Pacific Way* which came out of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1974 and quotes some random examples of Island traditions being introduced into the Christian Churches. He refers to this as 'Fa'a Pasifica' which is the term being used by many people for the changes occurring in the churches in the Pacific region. Some of the changes he cites

are:

A Chimbu priest saying mass in traditional regalia.

A whale's tooth being presented to a bishop at his consecration.

A New Caledonian minister administering communion with coconut water instead of wine.

I have been told that in some Communion Services, fine mats (which were traditionally used when seeking forgiveness) are now being used in the service of Samoan churches.

One of the most tangible evidences of this changing respect for traditional beliefs is the official recognition of sacred sites. A major milestone in this development occurred when the Australian Government gave Ayers Rock (now known by the Aboriginal name of Uluru) back to the Aboriginal people to be administered by them in cooperation with the Parks and Wildlife Department. Many other sacred sites have since been claimed and set aside as reserves.

It is unfortunate, or perhaps inevitable, that the Christian Churches have splintered into so many sects. It is certainly a drain on the resources of the village people in Samoa when they have to maintain as many as three or four different churches and priests or pastors in one village. These different churches seem to be prepared to live side by side but are resistant to the entry of the Bahá'í Faith into their territory.

Their opposition is understandable - when they learn there are no clergy in the Faith they realise there is no future for them as paid pastors. Also, every individual in the Faith who joins the Faith is one less person to contribute financially and with gifts of food, etc. to the support of the pastor and his family.

In Australia, some of the Aboriginal settlements that are still under the pastoral care of the churches, have banned Bahá'ís from coming onto those settlements and the people have to leave the settlement to talk with them. This is denying them a basic right of freedom of belief in the same way that some Village Councils have banned Bahá'ís from coming into their villages.

Both Australia and Samoa are signatories to the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, but the Churches and Village Councils are still in a position to restrict the freedom of religion of people in their areas of administration.

In Samoa there is the Government law that applies in the towns, but in the villages the Mata'i Council governs according to traditional laws and in Australia the Government is giving some recognition to tribal laws in tribal areas but the white man's law applies in white man's territory.

In Samoa there is a legend of the promise given by their goddess Nafanua that the dynasty of the old gods would soon be superseded by another one, and that the new God would rule over all Samoa. In the Australian Aboriginal legends there is the promise of a time when sacredness will envelop the world. There is a rainbow dance that is done at the time of the initiation of youth into men. The climax is when the Rainbow Snake (the origin of creation) swallows the youth. This is when sacredness takes them over and they become men. There is a belief in their Dreamtime, or Alcheringa, that when the Rainbow Snake awakes and Alcheringa processes the effect of the Europeans, sacredness will swallow the world.

In October 1993 the "Heart of Australia Calling" Festival was held in Alice Springs in observance of the Year of Indigenous People, proclaimed by the United Nations. Perhaps this was the event to awaken the Rainbow Snake and herald the return of the Dreamtime.

The Pacific Islands have prophecies about the 'Return of the Dreamtime' coming when man has finally settled the entire world. This will herald the advent of Longo, the Great Peacemaker, the King who will unite all the Tribes, and the Manifestation of Rongo, who will have the power to enlighten the West at its darkest moment.

When Raymond Wymarra, Aboriginal Elder of the Injinoos Tribe in Cape York, brought a Message Stick to Samoa, and from there, took it to most of the Islands of the Pacific, inviting their people to join with the Aboriginal people for the "Heart

of Australia Calling" Festival, he collected messages of friendship and goodwill for presentation to the Aboriginal Tribal Elders at the Festival. Many people from the Pacific region flew into Alice Springs to take part in this Festival which created a feeling of oneness and unity for the Aboriginal people and their Pacific neighbours.

The history of the early settlement of the islands tells of the common origin of many of the Pacific Island people and of how time and distance have been responsible for the differences of language, custom and culture that have developed.

Perhaps with the 'Return of the Dreamtime', acknowledgment can be given to this common heritage and to their common humanity which requires that they live in close cooperation and peace with each other for their common good.

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