



# Growing Through Tension

*Jay Matenga's presentation at Laidlaw College's Intercultural Church Conference, Henderson Campus, May 12 2018.*

*"How James 1:2-3 can help fulfil John 17:20-23, by applying kaupapa Maori to help culturally diverse groups work through differences and witness to the world".*

**K**ia tau te aroha noa ki a koutou me te rangimarie, he mea na te Atua na to mātou Matua, na te Ariki hoki, na Ihu Karaiti. (Grace and peace to you [all] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philemon 3)  
Tihei mauri ora! (It is the sharp breath of life).

I te taha o tōku pāpā... (On the side of my father... [my heritage]).

Ko Takitimu te waka. Ko Te Waka o Kupe me Tuhirangi ngā maunga. Ko Ruamahanga te awa.

Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, ko Ngāti Porou, ko Kai Tahu ōku iwi.

Ko Ngāti Rākaiwhakairi tōku hapū. Ko Kohunui tōku marae.

Ko Terepuku, rātou, ko Tui, ko Te Matenga Kainoke Tui, Ko Aperhama Kuhukuhu Tui Matenga, ōku tūpuna.

Ko Kaki Tui Matenga tōku tupuna. Ko Taari May Matenga tōku koro. Ko Barrie James Tui Matenga tōku matua.

Waihoki, Ko Carol Margaret Diamond tōku whaea. Ko Pauline Wood tōku hoa rangitira.

Ko Jay Matenga ahau.

No reira, Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa (And so, three times greetings to you and us all).

## Scene One

(A Church's Annual General Meeting)

*Pastor, you're going to have to do something about those Maoris. They're in an out of the church all the time during the week, their kids are running amok. They're even using the showers and the kitchen without permission. Whenever there's something going on, they're poking their noses in.*

*We're good people in this church. We try to do the right thing, various folk have been very generous, but it's never enough. They just seem to take, take, take.*

*We were here long before they were and we'll be here long after they've gone. Won't be long by the sounds of it, I've heard that they're actually half-brother and sister. I think he's going to jail. Those poor kids. I hope the system treats them ok.*

## Scene Two

(At a Leadership Development Course for an International Mission Organisation)

Mosquitos dart between the sparkles dancing off the Olympic-sized pool, chased by dragonflies, translucent wings a-shimmer in the thick midday heat of South East Asia.

Inside the dining room, beside the pool, the heat is rising. Oscillating fans don't help, but nobody is thinking about the pool.

Assigned cohorts of mission leaders cluster around tables discussing the morning's events. Some lunches are barely touched. Occasionally, clear voices are heard above the cacophony, "How dare they! They just don't realize how much leeway we give them!" "I'm sick and tired of always being made to feel like the bad guy." "What about reverse prejudice?!"



Jay Matenga

*Dr Jay Matenga is the Executive Officer of Missions Interlink NZ, author of "Mutuality of Belonging" and co-author of "Mission in Motion: Speaking Frankly of Mobilization". Jay also serves as an Associate Director for the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission responsible for publications, funding, and leading its mobilization network.*

Salted among the cohorts sit other leaders, awkwardly silent, their faces unnaturally pale.

The facilitators of this organization's leadership development program had arranged the timetable to continue with a series titled "When Core Values Collide", with specific intention to draw out potential hotspots in intercultural team dynamics.

The objective for the morning was to introduce the issue of racial bias as a source of tension and outright conflict in missions teams. The facilitators asked a senior African leader (PhD Edinburgh) to introduce the roundtable discussion, which would follow after a forty-minute video from Pastor John Piper regarding a Christian response to prejudice.

The session started late and the video ran long. Opportunity for adequate processing of the topic was eclipsed by the compulsion to observe the resort's lunch time. A wound was opened and it quickly festered in the South East Asian heat.

## Tīmatanga | Introduction

These two scenes, one local and one international, are drawn from my actual experience. As my mihi attests, I am Māori on my father's side and pākehā on Mother's. I grew up in my father's tribal lands, my turangawaewae, but in my mother's home, so it was an entirely pākehā context. My education was almost entirely Western until recently when I undertook doctoral research, at a Western institution, but drawing on kaupapa Māori methodology, which I find deeply intuitive.

What I would like to share with you today is drawn from my doctoral research which was motivated by my experience of cultural diversity within the international missions context. And I believe the church can learn much from what we're wrestling with out on the frontiers of the Kingdom of God—whether they be in our neighbourhoods or across the world.

I am a cultural hybrid. I was made wonderfully aware of the benefits of this by my missionary colleagues, particularly from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. I am convinced that becoming a mature disciple of Christ requires us all to become cultural hybrids. Now, not all of us can draw on genetic hybridity, that just gives people from blended ethnic backgrounds like me a bit of a leg up. But we can all be transformed as we allow the Spirit of God to reform us in the tension of difference where we are called to love one another.

Today I want to give you just a glimpse at why I think Jesus wants His disciples to be intercultural beings, and why churches full of intercultural

believers dwelling in deep supernatural unity will prove to the world that the Father lovingly sent the Son.

By saying that I have just referenced James 1:2-4, for whom the troubles of many kinds were from within the community of faith and that persevering through the tensions of difference produce spiritual maturity. That maturity, as we persevere with one another, then fulfils John 17:21-23 in particular where our maturity is manifest in unity as a witness to the world of our God's mighty transforming power.

Furthermore, I have come to understand that kaupapa Māori, that is, foundational Māori principles and practices, can guide us along the journey of reconciling our cultural differences in Christ.

Time will not allow us to delve in depth or for me to provide a ton of evidence, but hopefully this 'wireframe' introduction will point you in the right direction and stimulate some thinking and conversation towards your churches becoming interculturally hybrid places of belonging.

## Kūare | Ignorance

In her brilliant little book, *Breaking Calabashes*, Rosemary Dewerse identifies four calabashes or gourdes that need to be smashed in order to make way for something new to emerge. Her calabash motif is linked to the romantic Māori legend of Hinemoa and Tutanekei. I highly recommend this book, copies of which can be purchased from Interserve NZ ([talk2us@interserve.org.nz](mailto:talk2us@interserve.org.nz)).

For Rosemary, the calabashes (barriers to intercultural relationships) are:

1. Stereotyping
2. Dominant Voice
3. Cultural Ignorance
4. Superiority.

The antidotes she offers for each are:

1. Caring for Identity
2. Listening
3. Epistemic Rupturing
4. Dealing in Justice.

I believe Rosemary does a great job of helping the reader to see the planks in our eyes when it comes to appreciating "the other". Buy it. Read it. Change your narrative.

In this article I will just focus on just one of these issues—that of cultural ignorance—because that is the starting point for a church that seeks to be truly intercultural as opposed to simply multi-ethnic.

## Tautuhi | Definitions

But first some definitions. For me, multi-ethnic is where people from different ethnic background co-exist but relatively separately, each keeps to their own. Multi-cultural, suggests more interaction but still under a dominant culture. In contrast, I see intercultural as a much more integrated state of interdependence and belonging in the midst of cultural diversity.

There is no generally accepted definition of intercultural. Where definitions are offered they are the preferred understanding of the presenter or author, not a universal understanding.

But I like how Ghanaian pastoral theologian Emmanuel Lartey understands interculturality, *Interculturality is a creative response to the pluralism that is a fact of life in present-day society. It calls for the affirmation of three basic principles: contextuality, multiple perspectives and authentic participation. (In Living Colour)*

In other words, we live in multiple states all the time as we interact with a multitude of others who have an impact on us...

- We share much together as human beings
- We share more with those like us, and
- We share nothing of our core personality with anyone (on one else is exactly like us).

We live in the intersection of cultures, personalities around us and in our own psyche as we make sense of the world out there and grow within it as a person made in the image of God.

Unlike cultural structuralists, cultural values analysts and proponents of cultural intelligence, interculturality is a holistic approach. It doesn't separate elements of culture into constituent parts. That's a convenient Western perspective, but I'm not convinced it plays out well in practice. There are too many working parts to try and hold together, and it requires you, as the agent, to try and control the situation rather than allowing yourself to be transformed by the encounter with other-ness.

I believe we must all become learners. All. The. Time. The very term "disciple" demands it of Christ followers.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) training can help tease out some differences in culture, and help you appreciate how we're all so different, but it can just as easily cause you to create stereotypes that tempt to you pre-judge cultures.

Cultural Intelligence writer, David Livermore developed a practice of "cultural strategic thinking" (from his book, *Cultural Intelligence*) where you become more sympathetically aware of the

culturally determined actions of "others" you interact with, while being careful not to jump too quickly to prejudicial conclusions. But it's still focused on 'dealing' with the other rather than simply 'being' with the other—and there is a world of difference between those concepts.

I won't dwell on the technical aspects of cultural competency here. My concern is to acknowledge that we're all different to varying degrees, and that difference creates tension. Furthermore, that tension is exacerbated by ignorance. Ignorance, or "relational ignorance" to be specific, is the gulf between us. The more different we are in our ethnicity, location of learning, family upbringing and life experiences, the wider the chasm.

## Noho Tahi | Living Together

Māori and other tribal-oriented (or "collectivist") peoples deeply understand the dangers of relational ignorance. The late Māori Marsden, an Anglican theologian who was trained as a tohunga, argues in the book *The Woven Universe* that the Māori way of viewing what was wrong with the world—sin, if you will—is rooted in broken relationships, which is literally tearing the universe apart. All of creation is therefore healed when relationships are harmonized. You find variations of this perspective of reality in many non-Western cultures.

A kaumatua (elder) at Makaurau marae in Mangere taught me a fresh meaning behind the practice of Pōwhiri, the welcome protocol on a marae. He suggested the term was made up of two concepts: Pō, which means darkness, and whiri, which means to weave or plait. The inference being that as the protocol unfolds it weaves together relationships that were previously relationships of ignorance (darkness), and enlightenment about one another grows.

By the end of the ceremony, when we press noses in the hongi to symbolically share each other's life essence, we have come together in a relationally illumined way. After eating a common meal together, we are then effectively one people for as long as we remain connected with that marae. We are one family. As a newcomer you get to enjoy all the privileges of belonging to that community; but you also must shoulder the responsibilities of belonging too. It's all about balance, harmony.

Māori culture is by no means perfect, and like every culture, its ideals are not always met, but by being exposed to, learning and understanding the principles of te Ao Māori, the Māori world, we can grow deeply healthy relationships. Principles like

manaaki, aroha, awhi, and whanaunga, contain preciously rich values.

After all, as psychologist Henry Cloud states in *The Power of the Other*, “Our relationships help write the ‘code’ (in our mind) of whom we become and are becoming.”

## Whakatete | Tension

Anyone remotely aware of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand will know that Māori Iwi (tribes) warred with one another. This is no different to the European feudal situation where one group wants to dominate another or, more often, where wrongs needed to be avenged. Whakatete refers to quarrelling or dissent, to create tension; but used as a verb it can mean to strengthen or prop-up.

To maintain relationships, Māori make room for robust discussion and sharing of each other’s narratives until a common understanding emerges and appropriate justice is applied by kaumatua, respected leaders. There is a great deal of tolerance for difference and tension in the Māori reality. Permanently severed relationships are an undesirable, rare and extreme occurrence—at least, that’s the theory.

Not so much in the Pākehā (or Western) reality. Pākehā are intensely uncomfortable with tension. When they can no longer sweep things under the rug (so to speak) their individualism allows them to go separate ways to resolve the tension. Nowadays, it does not take a lot for relationships to be severed in order to relieve tension. Unfortunately, this stunts the potential for personal growth and Christian maturity.

When it comes to being faced with different opinions, different ethnic preferences, or different cultural realities altogether, Joseph Shaules, in his book, *The Intercultural Mind* says,

*Foreign experiences make possible a process of deep cultural learning, one that can make us aware of the cultural configuration of our unconscious mind, and make us more effective interculturally. This learning process can be experienced in negative ways—such as culture shock or cross-cultural misunderstanding—but it also can stimulate personal growth and provoke deep-seated changes in our perception, worldview, and identity.* (Emphasis mine)

## Whakatupu | Growth

My thesis, that sitting in the tension of difference can create positive growth, comes from my own international experience and the latest research

coming out of the sciences of the mind. In particular, interpersonal neurobiology and research in the area of post-traumatic growth.

Any musician will tell you that you cannot create harmony without tension. Tension creates resonance, resonance correctly tuned creates a harmonic. I believe this is as applicable for human relationships as it is in nature.

Drawing on the work of Dan Siegel and his own research, Curt Thompson (*Anatomy of the Soul*) argues that we become who we are only because of our interactions with others, which he calls “being known”. When we are vulnerable and willing to “be known” by others from a different cultural reality, allowing their reality to shape ours, we are literally being transformed by the renewing of our mind. It influences the mapping of our neuropathways, not just in our brain but our whole our being. For example, neurologists claim that our stomach is actually the second largest brain in our being.

In her book on resilience, *Bouncing Forward*, Michaela Haas quotes Richard Tedeschi, the leading researcher on Post-Traumatic Growth, who claims,

*As many as 90 percent of survivors experience at least one form of posttraumatic growth, such as a renewed appreciation for life or a deeper connection to their heart’s purpose.*

The principle is one expressed by holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl who argues in his book *Man’s Search For Meaning* that if you have a deep sense of purpose you can grow in any circumstance. He quotes Fredrich Nietzsche of all people,

*Those who have a ‘why’ to live for, can bear with almost any ‘how’.*

So, St. James was correct. Troubles have the potential to help us mature if we persevere in faith to our ‘reason why’.

## Nō Reira | Therefore

And so, let me bring all of this together. It is my missiological opinion that unity in the local expressions of the global Church will be the greatest witness to ‘the world’ of the power of God in Christ.

This unity is fostered within the church as disciples are willing to be vulnerable to one another and learn from one another in deep humility. I believe this will manifest as intercultural hybridity, a maturity that is recognised as supernatural because it runs counter to the human impulse to reject difference and reinforce sameness.

Cultural ignorance is dispelled through encounters with ‘others’ that challenge our way of looking at the world. Shaules calls this “deep cultural

learning” but I follow educationalist James Loder in referring to this process as ‘epistemic rupturing’. In other words, rips in our ways of knowing the world, that are repaired if we sit in the tension a while and move toward recognising the relevance of the other view to our reality, and reconciling or adopting that view into our own schema or understanding of the world.

Think of body building. If you want to strengthen a muscle, you put it under increasing tension. That pain you feel after a workout are the micro-ruptures in the muscle. The worked tension tears down your muscle and rebuilds it bigger and stronger. You add the right nutrition and you have... growth. The same with our intercultural development.

The Western world does not know how to sit in tension well. Hyper-individualism is making us lonelier and lonelier, and virtual connections aren’t helping. Curt Thompson says that the mind, “left to its own volition, tends to disconnect... from ourselves and others.”

Kaupapa Māori principles can lead us back along the path of healing. Kaupapa Māori can help us read the Bible relationally again and find the true meaning of the Church—a place of deep belonging that our early church fathers called koinonia, and Israel before them called shalom.

This is the Kingdom of God and it is a diamond sparkling with many facets in the light of the glory of God.

## Turuki | Epilogue

For my doctoral research I collaborated with 18 Kaikōrero (narrators) who contributed their knowledge to my research about what it means to be whānau and what whanaungatanga meant to them. I honour all of them for their gifts to me. But I want to leave you with this snippet from my interview with Arthur Baker of Ruatoria, an Apostolic church-planter and missionary, and one-time foster father to the recently appointed tikanga Māori Archbishop Rev. Don Tamihere... In mid-kōrero, in his kitchen, Arthur said (from my thesis, Mutuality of Belonging),

*...well whānau it can be blood, it’s a blood tie, it’s a whakapapa tie, well that’s basically what it is. But, you know, we could have this man, my brother Jay up here, and there is old Tom over there. For the last 20 years we have met, we’ve got a bit of a fishing club and we go up to these special lakes—this is our fishing whānau. What we are trying to relate to, is that close element that we*

*experience and have that is like the family or the whanaungatanga in its institution.*

*You know, (take this big one-pot over here) all the components put together make the whole. Leave the doughboys out of the boil-up and you don’t know what you are talking about, it isn’t even a boil-up bro. Don’t pour that fat out of the water, I don’t care what the doctor said, you’ve got to let that meat cook in that oil, a bit of mutton brisket and whatever. Let that grease go through the puha and have those Dakota Reds or Rua because they are firm and they are good for the third or fourth boil-up. That’s the boil-up in its essence. You can’t take anything away from it otherwise its only in part. You can’t have it in part, this thing is the whole thing, you know?*

*You have the action of the rewena (the yeast) amongst all those that are gathered here, and the whānau thing begins to activate and it permeates the whole. It’s a spiritual thing, you know? This principle, it’s spiritual.*

This principle is what church should be like, it’s spiritual, it’s Biblical, it’s intercultural, unity in diversity.

## Waiata | Song

*Tūtira mai ngā iwi — Tātou tātou e  
Tūtira mai ngā iwi — Tātou tātou e  
(Look this way, let’s align together)*

*Whai-a te maramatanga, Me te aroha, e ngā iwi!  
(Seek enlightenment and love of others, all tribes)*

*Kia tapa-tahi, kia ko-tahi rā  
Kia tapa-tahi, kia ko-tahi rā  
(Think as one, act as one)*

*Tātou tātou e... Tātou tātou e,  
Tātou tātou e — Hi aue hei !!!  
(All of us together x3. Let’s do this!!!)*

*Kia tau te aroha noa ki a mātou me te rangimarie. Kia ora tātou.  
(Grace and peace. Life and wellbeing to us all)*



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\* = Highly recommended.