

AROHA, PONO, TIKA & RANGATIRATANGA

Reflections on Aroha, Pono, Tika &
Rangatiratanga.

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Aroha

To live in the love of Christ. "Ko tāku ture tēnei, kia aroha koutou tētahi ki tētahi, me ahau hoki kua aroha nei ki a koutou."

Aroha. Comprised of 2 words.

Aro - to pay attention to, to notice and hā - the breath or soul.

Hence we see that the Māori word aroha is fairly concrete, not too abstract. It is simply instructive of how we are to be towards our neighbour. It is fairly common for Christians to say they believe Christ's commandment to love while ignoring the suffering of others.

For example, eighty five percent of protestant ministers signed the oath of allegiance to Hitler. Clearly, they did not notice their neighbours being forced to wear the star of David or being carted off in cattle trucks or new, big buildings belching odd-smelling smoke.

In Aotearoa today, 85% voting in the plebiscite on Māori representation on regional councils oppose Māori representation. They haven't noticed that 94% of the original ancestral estate of the Māori people has gone or that Māori are disproportionately poor and display negative statistics across all social indicators or that Māori have been bringing their concerns to the attention of government, the Privy Council for a century and a half and more recently to the United Nations.

This ought not be possible if we are paying attention to our brothers' and sisters' breaths.

Note that Christ's commandment to love is a commandment (ture) not a recommendation.

If Jesus were merely another prophet people could be forgiven for thinking of this commandment as, let's say, a reasonable-sounding proposition. But since these are God's own words it means that this commandment is to be understood as an axiomatic principle of life. Obedience to this law will usher in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some think that the universe is a collection of molecules behaving blindly according to fixed laws driving things towards death and decay and without discernible purpose. A god-forsaken machine. It follows from this hopelessness that human life must derive meaning from human constructs, paradigms and narratives.

It is well past time to realise that these Godless, loveless narratives are making a hell on earth.

We have been commanded to love and love entails paying attention and noticing. It's not that mysterious. Pay kind attention.

Pono & Tika

Pono is the Māori word for truth.

A pononga is a word used in scripture for a servant. Pononga is a derived noun, i.e. the noun is derived from the stative. Being so derived it shares some of the meaning of its derivation.

So, servanthood implies being true. To whom was the servant true? In olden times, slaves had no option but to uphold the truth of their masters. After Christianity, pononga were released by their erstwhile masters and went home to take the good news to their iwi.

They were joyful servants of Christ. Their truth was Christ.

In the archive of instructive moral tales of our tūpuna was the story of Rāta. This chief cut a tree in the forest to build a canoe. The felling done, he went home to rest. Upon his return the following day the tree stood again, a whole living tree. He cut it down again and went home again.

The next day ditto. Perplexed, he waited about to waylay the tricksters. He found that it was the Ponaturi, the fairy people who had done this. They remonstrated with him pointing out that he had not done the necessary karakia and thus he was rightfully confounded. When he accepted his wrongdoing and did things properly he then completed his Project.

This is a story about tika, which is correctness or righteousness. As important as tika is, it cannot stand independently of pono. Being correct is only valuable if the tika, the behaviour is part of and consistent with a larger narrative of pono.

The tikanga of karakia is the manifest expression of the wider pono that due reverence, humility and thankfulness are necessary for things to work properly. The story of Rāta is not about ecological best practice because the modern view of ecology tends to be, in the modern secular setting, one about getting the world physically in good shape again as an end in itself.

Māori, I think, would prefer that the ecological goal be part of a wider view that humanity regains a deeper, broader reverence for the whole of life. In other words, the modern view lacks religious and moral context.

I use the word religious here in a broad sense. I am emboldened to use it because I saw the fervour, the passion and the deep sense of respectfulness and the quiet determination of the Māori people involved in the replanting of Lake Omapere shores (a lake that has been polluted over the years with farming and development).

I would like to conclude by considering John 11:35. Jesus wept. He didn't seek empirical confirmation that weeping was the right thing to do. He just wept. Out of compassion for his friends, yes, but he also saw the cost of this act looming in the bigger sacrifice he was about make in saving humanity.

John 11: 33 tells us that he was greatly troubled. Why, when he was about to do something rather cool and triumphant? (Raise Lazarus from the dead). He was troubled by the wretched, sad sinfulness of us whereby we need saving. He wept out of his unfathomable aroha.

If Tika can only be meaningful when tikanga, the specific acts, processes and rituals that make tika manifest are pono, then similarly, pono is empty unless it is based on aroha. St. Paul tells us so, and the hīmene, 'E Toru Nga Mea,' tells us so.

When the radical right in America insist on their constitutional freedom to free speech, they are pono. The first Amendment does guarantee that right to all. When they use that constitutional right to urge violence and hate, that is not aroha and therefore morally invalid.

We are a society insistent upon rights. It is good that we have defined legal entitlements. St Paul tells that Jesus did not stand upon his equality with God. He relinquished all, even his right to live.

Let us humbly contemplate the only worthy and reliable witness to truth, Our Lord, our brother and God.

Rangatiratanga

To exercise responsible leadership with integrity, fairness and respect. "Arahina mātou, ngā iwi katoa hoki i ngā huarahi o te tika, o te rangimārie."

A meaning of ranga is - a body or company of people.

A tira is a rank or row.

So, a rangatira, in the Māori view was one, who although possessing genealogical rights to lead, nevertheless belongs within the ranks of the people.

The late Dr. Ranginui Walker, in his book "Ka whawhai tonu mātou," discusses the culturally imposed limits on the leader's power.

The leader could not govern without the consent of the adult population, barring slaves. Colonists found this very frustrating and sometimes resorted to enticing with money an unscrupulous individual without standing or authority to sign documents of sale.

A Māori community was a skilful community of orators, and a Rangatira needed to develop all his arts, powers of persuasion and personal mana to lead effectively. The community was governed by consensus of free individuals.

Rangatira, despite their advantages of birth and education, could not force the community to anything they did not want to do. What this does is raise the bar: It is always more demanding to lead free and vigorous people than it is to lead placid toadies but the first scenario is surely infinitely more rewarding.

Even in the business arena this principle has been discovered. After WW2 the Japanese and the Germans democratised their motor car industries; worker opinions were valued, they had representation on the governing boards. Before long, Japan and Germany were easily outstripping their erstwhile conquerors in production.

There is not a former colony I know of that teaches its colonial history (Aotearoa in 2022 is just looking into inserting our colonial history into the school curriculum but I believe it is not a compulsory subject and is open to interpretation).

One of the many ill effects of this is that very few people know anything about indigenous leadership or about the great Māori leaders such as Wiremu Tamihana and Te Whiti o Rongomai. These were people of great stature far surpassing that of their colonial counterparts.

In his book, "Ask That Mountain: The story of Parihaka," (which is in our Library) Dick Scott asserts that Te Whiti was a leader of international stature and that he preceded Mahatma Ghandi by two decades in his advocacy of peaceful resistance.

Te Whiti was a Christian and deserved to be called one because although he stood up with immense courage to the cruel injustice of the state he valued human life and steadfastly shunned violence as an option. This was magnificent.

It was also vulnerable. He and his followers were arrested, detained without trial and sent to Dunedin where they were forced to work on the Portobello Road and where some died under inhumane treatment.

After his arrest, Jesus gives us a glimpse of the power at his disposal should he choose to avail himself of it. God's self-limiting of his exercise of power is what Julian of Norwich refers to as his "courtesy." In his courtesy, he allows us complete freedom to choose good or evil. We applaud him for this since we rightly see freedom as an essential and defining part of our humanity. Automatonism is anathema; not appealing at all.

I would like to reflect a little on the Superman comics which I read as a boy. Superman does good by stopping trains from derailing, crooks from stealing, asteroids from colliding with earth, and stuff like that. All this activity is about preventing external calamity through the use of extraordinary power that far exceeds our own. This can lead to wondering why God (gifted with infinite power) could not take a leaf out of Superman's book and bump Trump (Donald Trump during his time in office as the President of the United States of America), or instantly biodegrade our mountains of plastic.

This thinking is obviously pathological, and it is only interesting in what it reveals about ourselves. We are afraid and crave protection in our vulnerability. Moreover, we would like this protection to be without cost. We would like Trumpism and plastic to disappear without us moving a physical or intellectual or spiritual muscle.

Te Whiti and the ploughmen knew they were vulnerable but their love of the truth and their love for the people urged them on. Jesus did not have to be vulnerable except through the necessity to atone for sin. He was a leader who subjected himself voluntarily to slavery and death for the love of us.

Those who would be leaders should aspire to this heroic selflessness. They should aim to avoid internal calamity, promote courage and peace. Te Whiti and Jesus suffered calamity from without, Te Whiti in Christ's name and Jesus in his Father's name. Their names live on in glory.

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E Toru Ngā Mea

E toru ngā mea

(There are three things)

Ngā mea nunui

(Very important things)

E kī ana

(As stated in)

Te Paipera

(The Bible)

Tūmanako

(Hope)

Whakapono

(Faith)

Ko te mea nui

(And the greatest thing)

Ko te aroha.

(Charity/ Love)