

Talking Cents

September 2020

Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought and to encourage debate within the church. People are encouraged to distribute these articles widely. This contribution is from Anton Spelman (Ngāti Hikairo) and Jean Brookes, both parishioners of St Matthew-in-the-City in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

Holding it all Together with Kindness

We are in a highly pragmatic election campaign where important questions about the future direction of Aotearoa New Zealand are still up in the air. A number of contemporary New Zealand think-tanks have highlighted key assumptions that underpin our current situation. We believe these need major attention as we shape up the future direction for our country.¹ It is possible to distil, from the work of these different groups, some core components of a framework to guide the development of a short, medium and long-term future, post COVID-19, one that we could all be proud of.

Our settler history shows enduring links with key western worldview values that focus on individual achievement in the way we structure and operate our public life, and in the way we measure and reward success. There is, however, a strong egalitarian dimension within Pākehā culture that insists on the importance of forging links across traditional barriers rather than maintaining rigid social distinctions. This egalitarian impulse has been seen by many change agents as an important key to unlocking movement on bias and prejudice in personal behaviour and in the oppressive systems and processes that regulate the way we live in communities.

Māori history, on the other hand, shows an equally enduring commitment to collectivist values that focus on economic outcomes for the whole group as well as individuals within it. The colonisation history of Aotearoa documents the exclusion of Māori from the processes of community governance by defining us from a non-Māori perspective. The obvious results are usually presented as Māori failure rather than a failure of the system.²

The highly contentious ‘full and final settlement’ dimension of the current Treaty of Waitangi settlement process highlights the unfinished business that exists with respect to constitutional change, i.e. securing the rangatiratanga rights of

Māori alongside those of Tangata Tiriti in the future governance arrangements of the country.³

This points us to the need for a new framework for our time, one based on a complete transformation of the principles and values which have informed our nation’s history to the present. In the first part of this article, we reflect on the ongoing problems associated with four of our currently-held principles and values that shape the way we manage our public life. The picture overall is not flattering. However, it provides us with a useful overview of how well we are doing at present. It also provides a platform for transformative change, a base on which we can create a better future for a much wider range of New Zealanders than is the case at present.

Currently, individualistic values are dominant, where the primary accountability is to ourselves and our immediate whānau for the way we live. This means achievement and success are measured primarily in terms of individual characteristics. On this basis, the effort of individuals who see the world collectively is excluded, discounted or denied.

Wealth creation as reward is primarily for individual effort and measured in monetary terms. The measurement of wealth typically excludes a measurement of the impact on the environment and on communities that are structurally marginalised. The evidence of negative outcomes is clearly seen in our health, education, housing and employment statistics.

A market approach is taken to the operation of capital. Market values reinforce the focus of effort on growth in the economy at the expense of equity and justice. The rich/poor gap is ever-widening; funding the affluence of the few has become the burden of the many.

Humanity exercises the controlling interest with respect to the environment; this is at the expense of all other parties in the natural order. The position

¹ Economic and Social Research Aotearoa. <https://esra.nz/future-proofing-aotearoa-new-zealand-life-covid-19/>
<https://esra.nz/taking-the-initiative-in-a-time-of-crisis/>.

² Ranginui Walker. (2004) *Ka whawhai tonu mātou: Struggle without end* (Rev. ed.). Auckland: Penguin.

³ *The Report of Matike Mai Aotearoa - The Independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation.*
<http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/MatikeMaiAotearoaReport.pdf>.

has been greatly influenced by an excessively anthropocentric interpretation of Genesis chapter one, especially verses 26 and 28.⁴

We could transform, restructure and re-present the above principles and values for the future in an integrated way as follows:

Primary accountability of the individual will now be to the group consisting of whānau, hapū and iwi, community and the environment. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the collectivist values position will provide the space needed for indigenous rights of Tāngata Whenua to be addressed. Through Tiriti/Treaty relationships, and two-world engagement (and understanding), a level of mutuality in decision-making will be achieved. Together, we will be able to span a world that we can already glimpse and face our future with confidence.

Wealth creation will now be for communities first and then for individuals and groups. The New Zealand coalition government started to integrate budget planning, programme resourcing and performance measurement processes across government agency silos. They used data from the New Zealand Treasury's Living Standards Framework (LSF) Dashboard, and other advice, to guide the development of budget priorities.⁵ Government economic development proposals now need to prioritise tangible benefits that enable communities to flourish as well as benefits for people employed directly in an enterprise. Economic development needs to be integrated with specific environmental production standards at an operational level, and should support the regenerative aspirations of participants working in all sectors of the New Zealand economy.

The common good will now be the focus of the way capital operates. A renewed focus on the common good will support the development of programmes to address poverty and guarantee a universally acceptable standard of living for communities and for people. The new focus was to be seen in the New Zealand Coalition Government's first 'Wellbeing Budget' in 2019.⁶ Taxation reform, income redistribution and increased state ownership of key core services that relate to the common good, all now have their part to play. In addition, private sector activity needs to make a contribution to the common good and must report on its performance to communities.

Humanity will act as one of many voices in nature when mutuality replaces domination. Measuring and managing the impact of the human community

on the environment now requires a new relationship with the environment (described in *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis in 2015). Tangata Whenua worldview perspectives will become a foundational starting point for understanding relationships with nature and managing environmental impacts of human activities. Resource consents and environmental reporting will require the voices of the various parts of nature to be heard as an integral feature of the way these activities are managed.

Currently there is no over-riding strategy for the post-confinement phase of COVID-19. If we have no plan to learn the lessons of our history, and to change for the common good, we will by default, exacerbate the current level of inequity and limit our progress as people living in communities.

Working with the framework outlined above will be an iterative process. The role of central government will be to hold it all together as we move forward, to encourage the people and communities to populate the detailed space at all levels within it, and to empower them to work out its implications from a community perspective.

The implementation of some form of Universal Basic Income, Guaranteed Basic Income and / or Universal Basic Services approach is consistent with the collectivist values position. It will become an important enabler of the transformation process, encouraging a high degree of customisation of initiatives and a high level of ownership of action programmes that follow.

Tāwhiao, the second Māori King, speaking out of the experience of raupatu in the Waikato in the mid-1800s, pointed to our common life in communities, the terms of which currently work well in the interests of too few. In moving forward, we are directed to the task of building the house again:⁷

Māku anō e hanga tōku whare.	I will build my house whare.
Ko tōna tāhuhu, he hinau.	Its ridge pole will be made of hinau.
Ōna pou he māhoe, he patatē.	Its posts will be made of māhoe (whiteywood) and patatē (seven-finger).

Tāwhiao's use of less well-known trees for the building process speaks a contemporary message about the inclusion of all, especially those whose voices are not currently part of the public processes that shape the management of community life in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

⁴ *The Bible* – New Revised Standard Version

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/genesis/1.html>

⁵ <https://treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/measuring-wellbeing-lsf-dashboard>

⁶ <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/b19-at-a-glance.pdf>

⁷ Papa, R., & Meredith, P. (2013). *Kīngitanga – the Māori King movement - Tāwhiao, 1860–1894*. Retrieved from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/kingitanga-the-maori-king-movement/page-3>