Turn Your Face toward the Sacred Mosque

The 2019 John Robson Lecture,
delivered at the War Memorial
Conference Centre, Napier,
on Wednesday, 24th April 2019
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E ngā rangatira o Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga, e whakanui nei ia mātou, tena koutou. Mauria mai ngā mihi, mai i te karu o te Ika a Maui. Aku koroua, aku kuia; aku totara haemata, aku manu tioriori, e ngā tangata ringa raupā, nga mihi māhana ki a koutou. Ko Pat McGill, Ko te tangata pāuaua, koina te whakatinanatanga o toū tūruapō; tēna koe e pā. E ngā tangata e huihui mai nei, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

E te rangatira, Tom. I nga ra i mua, i kitea koe, toū pūkenga ki nga mahi a te kaiwawao kei roto i te Tari o te Ture. Ko koe te kaiwawao, te kaiwhakatūtū, te kaiwhakahē, ki te manaaki o tātou tikanga, o tātou ritenga, o tātau mana motuhake Māori. I tenei ra, ko koe te poutokomanawa o te whare e tu nei.

I have just acknowledged , the mana whenua of this area, Ngāti Kuhungungu ki Heretaunga, the kaumatua that are present, and all those that are participating today. I made special reference to Tom Hemopo, who has been a strong advocate for Māori rights within the criminal justice system, initially while a public servant.

It takes great courage to stand up and be counted on matters of principle, especially when those principles have been breached by one's employer. This lecture is named after one such man, John Robson, Secretary for Justice between 1961 and 1969. Robson is described as a consumate public servant, one who took a careful approach, preferring consultation and compromise, who had an instinct for how far to press against the politically possible, and when to do so. But he could not be pushed too far.
A major test of Robson's integrity came in 1966, when New Zealand committed troops to the Vietnam War. Church leaders, publicly criticised this move, and three serving prison chaplains put their names to a full page advertisement in *The New Zealand Listener*, expressing opposition to the war in Vietnam.[1] Minister of Justice, Ralph Hanan, reacted badly to this criticism and asked Robson to terminate the Prison Chaplaincy Service.

[1] Brown, C. (1981), *Forty Years On.* Christchurch. National Council of Churches.

Robson was a great advocate and supporter of the prison chaplaincy, and regarded the church as an important actor in bringing about positive change in prisoners.[2]

[3] As Robson tells it,

> *"The Minister's request ignored the history of the question and the administrative justification for the current arrangements. … What troubled me most of all was the Minister's motivation for wanting to make the change. This political element would be perceived by the chaplains as unjust, and inevitably it would lead to loss of morale among them and a drop in our standing with the churches.*[4]

A prolonged discussion then took place "between two determined characters," and Robson noted that:

> "*if Hanan issued this minute requiring me to carry out this directive, then I would submit my resignation and retire*," even though "*from a constitutional angle the minister had to win,"*

Hanan eventually gave way. Robson comments further:

> *"this was a crucial moment for the chaplaincy – the work of fourteen years could well have been nullified and strangely enough the crisis was precipitated by something that had nothing whatever to do with the work of prison chaplains.*[5]

What is interesting about this, is that Robson was concerned about the standing of his department with the church. It is almost a total reversal of today's situation, where the churches are largely ignored by the public sector, and resort to banging on the government's door, begging for attention and inclusion.

After a long battle with dementia, John Robson died in 1992. In the same year, an important but largely forgotten book 'Justice, Ethics and New Zealand Society' turned the nation's attention to questions of goodness, justice, meaning, reason, knowledge and evidence.[6] Aotearoa New Zealand was undergoing a significant political upheaval at the time; the book focussed on such issues as the adminstration of justice, Treaty issues, sovereignty, property rights, collective and individual interests and rights, and Māori ethical and metaphysical views.

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[2] Robson, (1966). "Tell us about Penology in New Zealand," *The Chaplain*, *(1966)* Vol. 1, No. 2
[3] Robson, *Sacred Cows and Rogue Elephants,* p 280.
[4] Ibid, 280
[5] Roberts, J. Prison (1975). "Prison Chaplaincy in New Zealand." Dissertation, Diploma in Criminology with Honours, Auckland, University of Auckland.
[6] Moana Jackson, The Treaty and the Word: The Colonization of Māori Philosophy, in *Justice, Ethics and New Zealand Society,* Graham Oddie and Roy Perrett (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992. pp 1 – 10.

The first article was written by an emerging Māori voice; that of Moana Jackson, who spoke to you earlier today. Entitled "The Treaty and the Word: The Colonisation of Maori Philosophy" , Moana argued that while the tangible and obvioius effects of colonisation were being slowly recognised by pākehā, the intangible and subtle were not. He put it this way:

"... the injustice of land confiscations and the horror of massacres at Rangiawha and Matawhero are accepted as causes of shame; but the dismissal of the tenents of Maori religion is not. The transportation of 'rebel' Māori and the rape and consequent spread of syphilus among Māori women are acknowledged as blatant wrongs; but the denial of Māori concepts of legal theory and political practice is not. Indeed, as quickly as revisionist Pāskehā historians uncover evidence of the former, revisionist Pākehā lawyers redefine the latter.

They were words of anger, but also of truth; a truth borne out in his words,

> *"a cultural and racist arrogance which persists today – now more often covert rather than overt, more often cloaked in the newspeak of bicultural rhetoric or legal pluralism rather than the open bluster of colonialism."*

I was asked recently what I thought John Robson would have done with Moana's 1998 report "He Whaipaanga Hou". I thought carefully and replied "First, he would have read it - he would have read the <u>whole</u> report. Second, he would have thought carefully about it, looking for someone way to respond positively, rather than dismissing it out of hand." Robson, believed in consultation and compromise.

Moana Jackson's comments about the rhetoric of biculturalism was worryingly prophetic. Much earlier, Eric Schwimmer's 1968 description of biculturalism referred to full citizenship in three senses: equal civil rights; full sharing in processes of government and exercise of power; and equality of resources and capacities necessary to turn equal rights into fully equal opportunities.[7]

[7] Schwimmer, Erik. 1968. *The Māori People in the Nineteen Sixties: A Symposium.* Auckland: Longman Paul.

In the 1980's I worked within the State Services Commission, as an enthusiastic advocate for biculturalism, a proselytiser even, spending some years persuading government agencies that this was the future. I challenged taken-for-granted pākehā wisdom about the effectiveness of authoritarian approaches to social policy decision-making and control, and questioned assumptions about the validity of traditional Western bureaucratic approaches. To be successful, biculturalism had to penetrate western public-sector norms and procedures, and then reshape the public sector in order to legitimate and acknowledge Māori beliefs and values.

Government agencies responded by institutionalising Māori knowledge and expertise, then began to define and authenticate this knowledge, in itself a form of colonization. That was not the model proposed by Schwimmer in 1968, nor was it what Māori wanted.

What was it that we wanted? Māori wanted the state to promote autonomous cultural reproduction and development which would lie beyond the reach of the state, and to establish "border controls" to ensure against bureaucratic intrusion.[8] But what developed was a contradictory model.[9] Pākehā preferred 'soft' bicultural ideals of inclusion that invited Māori into existing institutional frameworks, while Māori preferred 'hard' biculturalism and separate institutional space from pākehā.[10] The 'whanau ora' model comes closest to meeting that criteria.

[8] Fleras, Augie. 1999. "Politicising Indigeneity: Ethno-politics in White Settler Dominions." In *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand,* edited by P. Havemann. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

[9] Grant, Darryl. 2012. Paradox Lost? Four Theoretical Perspectives on Whānau Ora. Master's thesis, University of Otago.

[10] Humpage, Louise. 2004. "Liabilities and Assets: The Māori Affairs Balance Sheet." In *Tangata, Tangata: The Changing Ethnic Contours of New Zealand*, edited by Paul Spoonley, Cluny Macpherson, and David Pearson. Melbourne: Thomson Dunmore Press. pp 25-26

New Zealand's major public-sector reform during the mid-to-late 1980s, following a national crisis of economic and political viability, focused on single-line economic performance. In the process it sacrificed the ideals of diversity and pluralism and the rights of people to enjoy their own traditions in a way that made sense to them—ideals consistent with the values of a fair and just society.[11] The development of outcome measures that integrated spiritual, physical, mental, and social dimensions were still some years away.[12] Instead, a dominant political philosophy of competition and devotion to market forces prevailed.[13] Government programs managed and delivered by Māori used co-opted and state-approved Māori values and Māori expertise. It was Tom Hemopo who in 2002, while a probation officer in the Department of Corrections, challenged those assumptions through a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal.

The Last Thirty Years

Since 1985, successive governments have moved the nation and the media toward a market economy; one that placed high value on financial success, individual effort, and an intolerance of those who are dependent on the state.

It is important to understand that we are not born with our values. They are shaped by our social environment. By changing our perception of what is normal and acceptable, politics alters our minds as much as our circumstances. There was a time in New Zealand history, when we believed that anyone who needed health treatment should receive it without payment, when tertiary education should be free, when it was normal to care for those who were less fortunate than ourselves, and both wrong and abnormal to neglect them.[14]

When we change the way society works, our values shift in response. More people believe today that the State has less responsibility to support the poor and weak, especially if they are seen as being primarily responsible for their own situation.

We live in a contaminated moral environment. We have become used to saying something different from what we think. In his autobiography, Sir Geoffrey Palmer mourns the loss of frank public service advice to ministers; instead senior he says,

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[11] Kelsey, Jane. 1997. *The New Zealand Experiment: A World Model for Structural Adjustment*? Auckland: Auckland University Press & Bridget Williams Books.
[12] Kingi, Te Kani. 2002. *Hua Oranga Best Health Outcomes for Mäori*, PhD thesis, Massey University.
[13] Wetere, Koro T. 1988. *Te Urupare Rangapü: Partnership Response*, Wellington: Office of the Minister of Mäori Affairs, Parliament.

public servants find out what the minister wants, and then feed that back to the Minister in their advice.[14]

It would however, be unfair to single out public servants for criticism. Over the last thirty years, we have all learned not to believe in anything, to ignore each other, to care only about ourselves. We have adopted the language of managerialism, of performance based measurement, a lexicon in which concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility and forgiveness not only sit uneasily, but have lost their depth and dimension, sounding a little ridiculous in the context of a ministerial or management report.

For thirty years we have tacitly accepted an arrogant and intolerant ideology that reduced the nation's workers to a force of production and the environment to a tool of production. But we didn't inherit it; we helped create it. Because we failed to act independently, failed to exercise our rights, failed to close it down, we became collaborators.

> In the meantime, we have become less equal and more diverse. We know from research, for example, that a higher level of ethnic diversity within a community leads to 'social isolation,' and the mistrust of others.[15]
>
> People who live in communities with higher ethnic diversity distrust not only those from other races, but also those from the same race as themselves. The end result is an increase in social isolation and loneliness. People in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down' ... to pull in like a turtle. It manifests in a number of ways; a distrust of neighbours and friends---regardless of their ethnicity; a lack of faith in politics and the difference their vote can make; a tendency 'to volunteer less' and to 'give less to charity.' Solace is found in watching television, and increased use of social media.

More significantly, as we 'hunker down ' – as we purposely live our lives without engaging with our neighbours, and the wider community, our psychological wellbeing takes a hit. Dislike festers into hatred; avoidance of ethnic others blossoms into unbridled racism. In that scenario, a greater sin emerges – the crime of indifference. We withdraw into our own private world, so as to protect ourselves, as the world experiences harrowing upheaval.

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[14] Geoffrey Palmer, *Reform*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2013. p.720

[15] Putnam, R. D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian political studies*, *30*(2), 137-174.

Indifference is a form of seduction. It is so much easier to look away from victims, thus avoiding interruptions to our work, our dreams and hopes. It becomes personally invasive to be involved in another person's pain and despair. Our neighbours are of no interest. Indifference reduces others to an abstraction.

Indifference to suffering is what makes a human being inhuman. Unlike hatred and racism, it does not elicit a response. Indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor – never his or her victim. When we continue to allow solitary confinement, abuse of children in state care, invasive searches, and tied down beds, we deny victims a spark of hope. We deny their humanity, and betray our own.

The challenge for diverse communities is to work together toward the common good; treasuring our differences and uniqueness, but at the same time affirming our common heritage and values, those things which hold us together.

It is impossible to consider that idea, without reference to the tragic events of the 15th March. The cold-blooded slaughter of 50 Muslim men, women and children, has turned the minds of New Zealanders towards the evils of hate and racism as we became aware, through the public testimony of Islamic leaders and victims, of two things. First, that the people of Islam in New Zealand have over many generations, been the subject of racism and hate. Second, they are overwhelmed by the generosity, love and compassion shown by New Zealanders of every race, colour and creed.

New Zealanders will never be the same again. We are having the sort of public conversation that we have diligently avoided in the past. We are acknowledging that there is a darker side to our Paradise, and that in order to mature as a nation, we must cast light on our collective character.

A week after the event, I caught a taxi at the Auckland Airport to go into the city. The driver was wearing a kufi, an Islamic skull cap. It was a shared journey - I spelt out the name of the street, which he entered into his GPS system, and we got there. We had a stilted conversation along the way; his English was better than my Arabic. As I alighted, I bowed towards him, and said "Bless you my brother" At that, his smile lit up the universe, he wrapped his arms around me, and we embraced.

It is equally impossible to talk about the 15th March without reference to our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. Professor Chris Marshall, another of today' speakers, described her response as a beacon of hope for a new kind of political leadership,[16] commenting;

It is hard for New Zealanders not to feel a sense of pride in her performance - and a pride also that our small country, notwithstanding its own entrenched injustices, has spawned a female leader of such calibre, courage and compassion.

Chris Marshall goes on to quote Dr Ghassen Hage, who speaks of Jacinda Ardern's response as exemplifying what he calls the "difficult love" that crosses cultural boundaries and embraces multiplicity and difference - a deeply felt love that can cross rather than erect cultural boundaries and that can heal rather than entrench divisions.[17] She responded in a genuinely human way, a way that allowed compassion rather than political calculation to guide her actions.

What was so remarkable, was that when Jacinda turned her face to the mosque, New Zealanders of all shapes, sizes, colours and beliefs, followed suit. It brought to mind, the prophetic words of the Prophet Mohammed, as contained in the Qu'ran, concerning the qiblah, the direction in which Mohammed and his followers should pray.[18]

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[16] Chris Marshall, 'Jacinda Ardern's 'pitch perfect' leadership was no performance', Article in 'Stuff', 8 April 2019. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/christchurch-shooting/111873366/jacinda-arderns-pitch-perfect-leadership-was-no-performance

[17] Ghassan Hage, 'You can't copy love: why other politicians fall short of Jacinda Ardern', The Guardian, 26th March 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/26/the-difficult-love-of-jacinda-ardern-cannot-be-easily-emulated-not-by-white-australian-culture-loving-itself

[18] Surah al-Baqarah ('The Cow'), Verse 2, (144-50)

Let me read them to you;

> *Indeed, we see the turning of your face to heaven, so We shall surely turn you to a direction which you shall like; turn your face towards it, and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord; and Allah is not at all heedless of what they do.*
>
> *And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and surely it is the very truth from you Lord. And Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.*
>
> *And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you are turn your faces towards, so that people shall have no accusation against you, except such of them as are unjust; so do not fear them, and fear Me, that I may complete My favour on you and that you may walk on the right course.*

Islam is not an entirely separate belief system from the Judeao-Christian tradition; Mohammed referred to himself as the 'seal of the prophets'; the last of a long line including Abraham and Jesus. When the verses refer to 'those who have been given the book' it refers to Jews and Christians.

Jacinda's actions were in fulfilment of prophecy**.** We are called to **turn our faces toward the mosque**. When we all face the same direction, we are anointed with a sense of overwhelming love and compassion. It is at that point that we start as nation to have different conversation. **Turn our faces towards the mosque.** It is at that point that Treasury's efforts to develop measures of wellbeing and happiness take on a new meaning. **Turn our faces towards the mosque.** It is only then that we understand that our indifference permitted the institutional abuse of children in state care.

Turn our faces toward the mosque. We then understand that when the Minster of Justice acknowledges that racism exists in New Zealand, he is paving the way for change. **Turn our faces toward the mosque.** At that moment, we claim victory over social isolation and loneliness, and explore the notion of a common identity, common values, and a common good.

Turn our faces towards the mosque. It is then that we begin to mature as a nation. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.