

A Home for All: Renewing the Oikos of God

Cate

This week we continue the theme a Home for All: Renewing the Oikos of God. Last week we looked to our own experience of home, themes emerged of being home to self, then to others, then to the world, first being then doing and also of home as belonging, of welcome and hospitality.

We learn what home is within the paradigm of the culture in which we're reared, within its worldview. Most of us are marginally unaware of our bias and can assume our way of 'knowing' is the way.

This week as we broaden our scope to look at Aotearoa/NZ, home to people of many different cultures, we're going to listen especially to the voice of Maori, Tangata Whenua.

Today's reading speaks of Wisdom: She, a reflection of eternal light passing into holy souls ... God loves the person who lives with wisdom. The wisdom of God that passes into holy souls is known through the unique expression of each holy soul. It is unique and it is varied.

A Home for All - suggests a capacity for difference to cohabit in a way that each feels at home, that there is a place of standing for all, where each has and is given a place to stand and express their understanding of this.

Anton, we talk of home being culturally nuanced, influenced by a mix of values that constitute our worldview. In our conversations you've suggested further that worldviews tell us much about our ideas of personhood. What do you mean by that?

Anton

Some years ago when I joined a large State Sector organisation in Wellington, I was facilitating a group of senior managers over a three day period. At the start, the CEO introduced me to the group in terms of my professional background and experience. I knew a number of the people already, including the kaumātua for the organisation. At the coffee break I joined him where he introduced me to a small group of Māori who were at the three day event.. "This is Anton Spelman" he said. "He's one of ours." And that was it.

Last week I referred to a major difference between behaviour that can be described as transactional and behaviour that is relational. The CEO's introduction was an example of transactional behaviour. The Kaumātua's was relational. If we generalise this, we see a transactional way of thinking is foundational to a Western worldview perspective. And conversely relational thinking is a strong feature of Te Ao Māori. The process of coming home to self involves getting clearer about the detailed shape of the worldview that we operate with. The two key worldviews are Tangata Tiriti (which describes Western worldview thinking) and Tangata Whenua (which describes a Māori worldview).

As we construct our own worldviews, we often pick and choose across worldview difference. There can be problems doing this and we need to take care. This is not the same thing as working across worldview difference but I'll get to that shortly.

The truth is that these two world views operate with very different ideas about the nature of the person. From a western worldview perspective, it is possible to conceive of the individual separately from the rest of the created order and likewise we can understand the various components of that created order quite distinctly.

In Te Ao Māori, such segmentation is not necessary because the universe is seen as process and knowledge of the world comes about through the internal consciousness that a person has of the network of interconnected relationships that spans the natural world. Engagement thus occurs on that

basis. While whakapapa helps with an understanding of what is going on, knowledge of it does not get objectified and studied in a Western sense in order to acquire knowledge.

Therefore Te Ao Māori cannot be approached as a body of propositional knowledge and attempts to do so usually end in tears.

Cate

It's a very different way to understand how you are as a person in the world. I'm struck by "how knowledge in Te Ao Maori comes about through an understanding of the importance of relationships across the natural world. It emphasises the importance of connection perhaps especially with physical geography and of relationship to place - grounding a person.

When talking together about the theme 'A Home for All' within the context of Aotearoa/NZ you posed the question, Anton "Can we all be at home or can we only be at home if we fit in?" I'm guessing this arises from your own experience. The outworking of life in this very different way of understanding how we are in the world might look quite different to the ways and systems to which we're accustomed. Are you able to give us some idea of what this might look like?

Anton

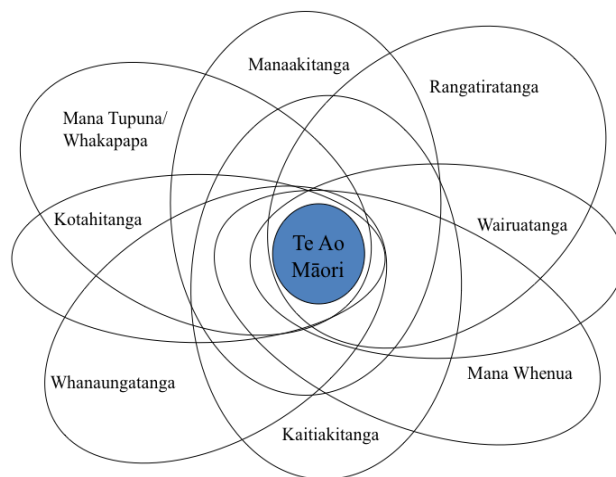
We need to acknowledge that Te Ao Māori is a world philosophy

The key cultural values of Te Ao Māori can be understood in terms of three broad spheres: spiritual, social and material.

In the spiritual sphere we can see the values of mana and tapu operating. In the social sphere, the home of whānau, hapū and iwi, we see a range of values in there. Values in the material sphere relate to balance and harmony in the use of natural resources. Mauri, as life force, is an overarching concept that bonds and binds together the diversity of the living world.

Diagram 1 up

How does it work?



Mana Tupuna/ Whakapapa, Wairuatanga, Manaakitunga, Whanaungatanga, Mana Whenua, Rangatiratanga, Kaitiakitanga together with Kotahitanga. The inter-connection of the elements illustrated expresses the necessary inclusion of these kaupapa in a comprehensive worldview that is culturally Māori.

If we are going to use Māori concepts, we need to use them in context – otherwise we will just be mixing apples with oranges and it won't suit in either world. For example, whanaungatanga is not just a Māori form of teamwork. It is a very disciplined practice that is given shape by the different whakapapa relationships that operate around it. It specifically connects my identity to how I should live, giving rise to a set of responsibilities, obligations and expectations that shape how it works in

practice. It therefore becomes the basis of role definition in the whānau and the tribe and when working well, it leads to a greater sense of the collective through the actions of individual members. This makes it a very rich concept in practice.

Teamwork on the other hand is not like that. It is discrete and it is action focused with observable outcomes. Understanding each of the selected components of Te Ao Māori is for another day. When we develop our understanding relationally in this way, we make it possible for non-Māori to engage Māori from a Māori perspective. This opens the way for a very different kind of relationship and a more satisfying experience of working together.

This also enables Te Ao Māori to be present in the conversation rather than marginalising it because it is different from a mainstream Tangata Tiriti worldview.

Diagram 1 down

Cate

This all makes sense at a fairly high level. I guess the devil is in the detail!

Anton

Well yes it is and if it is going to be important that we, as Tangata Whenua, are part of this concept of “home” that we have been talking about this morning, we need to get down to the nitty-gritty of change. This means looking at power and power relationships.

Would you agree Cate?

Cate

As I look at the history of decolonisation it has been about a loss of power for Maori and a consolidation of power for non-Māori. So, yes I see the necessity for this.

Anton

I think it’s helpful to see change in terms of three distinct powers that each group needs to retain in order for relationships to be inclusive and for mutually beneficial outcomes to emerge.

1. Power to protect
2. Power to define
3. Power to decide

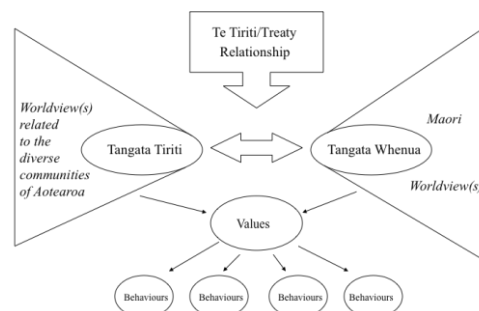
When engagement is undertaken in ways that respect and preserve the above powers in the parties, they can work together even though they have different worldviews.

When one party seeks to dominate the other in any of the three areas above, conflict results.

Cate

So if the decolonisation agenda focuses on the issues of power and power relationships it will take us into conversations about relationship development and working together.

Diagram 2 up



Anton

Yes, given all that as a backdrop, we can begin to have discussions about change. This is a process based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. That's the accountability side of things. The second part of this is where the parties engage the worldview(s) of each other to understand what is important and why. The discussion is not about problem-solving at this point.

When both parties have an understanding of how the relevant values operate in the situation they are there to discuss, they can begin to look at developing some agreed applications of values to the problem (what we are both trying to do here). This is where the thinking can begin to come together and when there is a shared overview of the issue under consideration, problem-solving can occur.

The three powers position need to be observed and preserved throughout.

Diagram 2 down

Think of what could happen if we took an approach like this to addressing the housing crisis!

Cate

Yes... mmm...

I guess what you're saying is that in order for us all to be at home in Aotearoa/New Zealand, our worldviews need to operate with more finesse and style so that none are pushed to the margins of our society and simply left there.

Sounds like a lot of hard work for anyone trying to do this on the ground.

Anton

Yes it is. However it is also a powerful call to justice that we see right at the heart of the gospel. If we are committed to that, we know what we have to do.