

BYRON RANGIWAI

## My Emerging Theology

*Hikurangi te maunga*  
*Rangitāiki te awa*  
*Koura te tangata*  
*Te Patuheuheu te hapū*  
*Ngāi Tūhoe te iwi*

Hikurangi is the mountain  
Rangitāiki is the river  
Koura is the ancestor  
Te Patuheuheu is the clan  
Ngāi Tūhoe is the tribe

*Tāwhiuau te maunga*  
*Rangitāiki te awa*  
*Tangiharuru te tangata*  
*Ngāti Manawa te iwi*

Tāwhiuau is the mountain  
Rangitāiki is the river  
Tangiharuru is the ancestor  
Ngāti Manawa is the tribe

*Tūwatawata te maunga*  
*Whirinaki te awa*  
*Wharepākau te tangata*

Tūwatawata is the mountain  
Whirinaki is the river  
Wharepākau is the ancestor

*Hikurangi te maunga*  
*Waiapū te awa*  
*Porourangi te tangata*  
*Ngāti Porou te iwi*

Hikurangi is the mountain  
Waiapū is the river  
Porourangi is the ancestor  
Ngāti Porou is the tribe

My theology is informed by my identity and upbringing. The pepeha above triangulates my multiple connections to land, mountains, rivers, ancestors, hapū, and iwi. My theology begins with the creation of the universe. The Māori creation story begins with Te Kore. However, in some traditions, the creation process, which ultimately starts with Te Kore, is initiated by Io,

the Supreme Creator who has many names.<sup>1</sup> The term Te Kore is often compared with the biblical notion of the void, the nothingness. However, Mikaere (2011) argues that far from being empty, Te Kore is actually a state of endless potential. According to Marsden:

Te Korekore is the realm between non-being and being: that is, the realm of potential being. This is the realm of primal, elemental energy or latent being. It is here that the seed-stuff of the universe and all created things gestate. It is the womb from which all things proceed. Thus the Māori is thinking of continuous creation employed in two allegorical figures: that of plant growth and that of gestation in the womb (Royal, 2003, p.20).

Emanating from the cosmic incubator of Te Kore emerged Te Pō; and out of the numerous developmental stages of Te Pō came the primordial parents, Papatūānuku and Ranginui who, while incessantly clasped to one another, produced a number of progeny (Marsden in Royal, 2003; Mikaere, 2011; Reilly, 2004). The offspring of these ancient parents grew dissatisfied with the darkness that resulted from their parent's unending embrace, and so one of the children, Tānenuiarangi, pushed Ranginui and Papatūānuku apart, which moved the universe into a new stage, Te Ao Mārama (Mikaere, 2011; Reilly, 2004). Within Te

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<sup>1</sup> Io refers to a supreme being. The concept of a single celestial parent is contested by Mikaere (2011) who argues that the notion of Io is a post-Christian development (see Mikaere, 2011, pp. 233-237, 241-246, 249; see also Cox (2014) and his chapter entitled: *The debate over Io as the pre-Christian Māori Supreme Being*). However, Marsden (in Royal, 2003), Shirres (1997), and Schrempf (1992) maintain that Io was an atua for some hapū and iwi, before Pākehā contact. Furthermore, Moorfield (2011) insists that some hapū and iwi have an Io tradition that may be a response to Christianity. However, Moorfield (2011) also argues that references to an Io belief occur in a number of traditions from the Polynesian islands, including Hawai'i, the Society Islands, and the Cook Islands, suggesting a more ancient tradition. Binney (1995) contends that Io may have travelled with Māori from the wider Pacific.

Ao Mārama, human life was created through the materialisation of human form, and through sexual intercourse. Tānenuiarangi formed the first woman, Hineahuone, and procreated with her. My theology emerges out of this ancient context. My theology is in the whenua. Whenua is the Māori word for both land and after birth. For Māori whenua is more than 'land'; "...it is much more than a mere resource; it is a large part of Māori mana as well as being the primary ancestor; it embodies the past and, at the same time, is the foundation for future generations" (Williams, 2004, p. 50). Marsden avers:

Whenua was the term both for the natural earth and placenta. This is a constant reminder that we are of the earth and therefore earthly. We are born out of the placenta and therefore human. As a human mother nourished her child in the womb and then upon her breast after the child's birth, so does Mother Earth (Royal, 2003, p. 68).

In most iwi the whenua, or placenta in this context, is buried in a place of significance; and at death, the remains are interred in the whenua – the land. "This symbolises interconnectedness between people and the land..." (Williams, 2004, p. 50) through genealogy and the cycle of life and death. Māori ancestors are therefore spiritually and physically anchored to the land. Higgins (2012) states: "Land is one of the key elements to Māori identity. It embodies the histories, genealogies, and spiritual connections to the past, present, and future" (p. 412). Whenua is a word that is intimately linked to Papatūānuku wife of Ranginui, the primordial ancestors of ongoing influence from which Māori and all living things descend (Marsden in Royal, 2003; Moorfield, 2011; Williams, 2004). Marsden states: "Papatuanuku – 'Land from beyond the veil; or originating from the realm beyond the world of sense-perception', was the personified form of whenua – the natural earth" (Royal, 2003, p. 44). As the posterity of Papatūānuku, Māori are connected to

the whenua through whakapapa. Whakapapa connections to whenua are essential to Māori identity (Cheater & Hopa, 1997; Higgins, 2012; Walker, 1990; Williams, 2004). Marsden contends:

Papatuanuku is our mother and deserves our love and respect. She is a living organism with her own biological systems and functions creating and supplying a web of support systems for all her children whether man, animal, bird, tree, grass, microbes or insects (Royal, 2003, p. 45).

Stressing the importance of Māori identity with whenua, Williams (2004) argues: "Māori are not just joined to the land, they are an integral part of nature, with a relationship to every other living thing, defined by whakapapa" (p. 50). Mikaere (2011) maintains that from the perspective of a Māori worldview, the entire universe is connected:

...the single most important message to emerge from our creation stories is that we are connected, by whakapapa, to one another and to all other parts of creation. Everything in the natural world, ourselves included, shares a common ancestry (p. 313).

Referring to Māori as children of Papatūānuku and the connections of all living things, Marsden maintains:

Papatuanuku's children live and function in a symbiotic relationship. From unicellular through to more complex multicellular organisms each species depends upon other species as well as its own, to provide the basic

biological needs for existence. The different species contribute to the welfare of other species and together they help to sustain the biological functions of their primeval mother, herself a living organism (Royal, 2003, p. 45).

My theology is infused with wairua. Wairua can be described as 'spirit', while the word wairua itself means 'two waters' (Pere, 1991). Pere (1991) explains that wairua possesses both positive and negative elements, affirming, as an example, that water can both provide and enhance life or take it away; here, balance is key. According to Durie (1994), taha wairua is about faith in and communion with unseen and unspoken energies. This correlates with Pere's (1991) argument that "[t]he physical realm is immersed and integrated with the spiritual realm. A powerful belief in spirituality governs and influences the way one interacts with other people, and relates to her or his environment" (p. 16). Taha wairua or spirituality is commonly thought to be the most important aspect of Māori wellbeing because, if the wairua is not taken care of, a person is disposed to illness and misfortune (Durie, 1994). Durie (1994) maintains:

A spiritual dimension encompasses religious beliefs and practices but is not synonymous with regular churchgoing or strong adherence to a particular denomination. Belief in God is one reflection of wairua, but it is also evident in relationships with the environment (p. 70).

Regarding the maintenance of spirituality, Pere (1991) states: "The natural place of worship/communion with Io Matua is Papatuanuku – Mother Earth [,] where one can relate to the hills, spaces of water, the heavens, everything that is part of us" (p. 16). My wairua is refreshed and re-energised when I visit the whenua where I am from. The waters of the rivers and ocean wash my spirit. The winds of Tāwhirimātea invigorate me. The

lofty mountains of my pepeha anchor my body and spirit to the land. This is my theology.

Māori are a highly spiritual people. I come from a whānau of spiritual people. From a young age, I have always been obsessed with religion. I was born into a whakapapa of syncretistic theology: a mixture of traditional Māori beliefs and rituals blended seamlessly with various Christian denominations and Ringatū - a syncretistic religion created by the nineteenth-century Māori prophet Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki. My great-grandfather, Hāpurona Maki Nātana, who was married to Pare Koekoeā Rikiriki, was of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Manawa descent. His mother was Rangimaea Fitzgerald who was born of a Ngāti Manawa mother, and an Irish father. She was a devout Catholic. My grandmother, Rēpora Marion Brown (nee Maki), who contributed significantly to the development of my personal theology, told me that her grandmother Rangimaea was a 'staunch Catholic' who fasted often, refrained from eating meat on Fridays, and frequently prayed the Rosary.

In the late 1980s when I was perhaps 8 or 9 years old, I became very interested in Catholicism. I attended Sacred Heart Catholic church in Murupara. Going to church was literally a case of doing as the 'Romans' do. I crossed myself with holy water upon entering the church and genuflected with both sincerity, and great drama, my eyes fixated on the seemingly life-sized, 3D, blood-drenched crucifix. In a slightly irreverent comment, I heard that when the red light is on, Jesus is home (in the tabernacle); but when it's off, he's out shopping! A member of the Christian brothers had wanted me to become an altar boy. I would have thoroughly enjoyed wearing a cassock and surplice, ringing sanctus bells, and swinging a thurible, but it was not meant to be as I was not Catholic, and had not been baptised at all.

Nanny Pare was Ringatū and so was her daughter, my grandmother. Koro Hāpurona and Nanny Pare had many, many children. They were baptised alternatively: the first Ringatū, the second Catholic, and so on. Their last child was baptised

Presbyterian. Throughout my growing-up years, I attended many Ringatū services with my grandmother and other members of my whānau. Some of these services took place at the marae and many others took place at the farmhouse of my grandmother's sister; her husband was considered somewhat of an authority on spiritual affairs. When my uncle was unwell we took him to see Nan's brother-in-law who provided solutions to help with his healing. I enjoyed the drone of the Ringatū chants. To this day the waiata and hīmene of the Ringatū faith bring me a sense of great comfort.

In the early 1990s, I attended the Elim church in Murupara. Some of the people at church were very strict. Some of the other kids were not allowed to watch cartoons, as talking turtles and characters with superpowers were considered to be ungodly. During my time with Elim, I attended a Christian camp. At this camp, we prayed in tongues for the fall of Saddam Hussein. We raised our hands and voices in prayer and praise to the Lord. I had no idea how to pray in tongues, but I was told that it is a special language that only God can understand. To me, it sounded like gibberish. I decided that my particular style of glossolalia would be to repeat "peanut butter" over and over again.

In 1996, when I was 16, I converted to Mormonism and became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – more commonly known as the Mormon Church. I had been seduced by a sense of absolute belonging coupled with fun activities and the potential of one day serving a mission and emulating the actions of the American missionaries that taught me about the Mormon Church. In 1997 I attended the Church College of New Zealand for my final year of high school. Church College was an unforgettable experience punctuated with life-long – or as Mormons might say, "eternal" – friendships, and many more fun activities! In 2002 I was called by the Mormon Church to serve a two-year mission. I had doors slammed in my face. I was accused of worshipping the devil. I was asked to

show my "Mormon underwear".<sup>2</sup> I was verbally abused, threatened with violence, and chased by vicious dogs. I was severely overfed by well-meaning and hyper-hospitable Pasifika families. I was embraced by "mission aunties" who baked fresh bread, and cooked boil-up. I rode bicycles and walked the streets, come rain, hail or storm, door knocking and preaching the Mormon gospel: the good news that an American prophet named Joseph Smith had restored the true gospel to the earth! In 2003 I was removed from the mission and excommunicated from the Church by the Mission President for a serious breach of Church rules, thus ending a six-year term with the Mormons. My maternal grandfather, Edward Tapuirikawa Brown, was Ngāti Porou from Te Araroa. He, like most of the iwi, was raised Anglican. He was not a church-going man, but he did believe in God. Some years following my excommunication from the Mormon Church, I decided to follow the religion of my grandfather's Ngāti Porou people, Mihingare. Archbishop Don Tamihere of Ngāti Porou maintains: "...religion - which I'm more inclined to refer to as whakapono - is an integral part of Ngāti Porou life. It's been blended into our tikanga to such an extent that it's really hard to tell where Christianity begins and tikanga Māori ends" (Husband, 2018, n.p.).

Nan was born in 1940. She was 40 years old when I was born in 1980. My great-grandparents, Nan's parents, travelled from Murupara to Gisborne to be there for my birth. My mother became quite ill when I was born. My grandmother, Nan, had to care for me. She surrounded me with love and prayer. Nan was a spiritual conduit; she blessed my life through her karakia. Nan passed away on 1 December 2017, the day of her wedding anniversary. She was 77 years old.

I spent the last 37 years listening to stories from my Nan. Stories about her upbringing, about her life growing up in

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<sup>2</sup> Devout Mormons wear what they call the Temple Garment; they receive this after making covenants with God in the Temple. These sacred undergarments may be likened to the holy vestments of a priest: an outward sign of an inward commitment.

Waiōhau, living next to the marae. My emerging theology comes out of the stories that Nan shared with me throughout my life. Her faith in God - as a practicing Ringatū - was immovable. She prayed for God's guidance and protection in her life and in the lives of all of her family members, especially her mokopuna. The following description of God represents my theological explorations, influenced by Nan.

God is the pulse of the universe  
God is the sunlight piercing the kawakawa leaves  
God is the first breath of a pēpi born on a dirt floor  
God is the belly of a kererū heavy with miro berries  
God is the crackling of wood in the kāuta  
God is rēwena bread - te taro o te ora - cooked in the embers  
God is mīti tahu reconstituted with pūhā  
God is collecting rongoā in the bush to heal the whānau  
God is white bread with jam dipped in cream  
God is a chipped enamel mug burning my bottom lip  
God is the 'fragrance' of kānga wai bubbling in the pot  
God is the eel squirming in the hinaki  
God is a full puku after the hākari  
God is the taniwha lurking in the river  
God is the potato we touch when exiting the urupā  
God is the branch the tohunga uses to sprinkle us with water  
God is the marae bell calling us to prayer  
God is the tokotoko pointing to Papatūānuku and Ranginui

God is ngā Atua Māori in the environment  
 around us  
 God is the mauri that animates life  
 God is the wai that negates tapu  
 God is Koro's grave in Cassino  
 God is the log floating up-stream  
 God is the faded poppy wreath in the wharenuī  
 God is the sorrow of a broken heart  
 God is the strains of wailing and tangi  
 God is the warps and wefts of a whāriki  
 God is the medals sent home after the war  
 God is the green lizard scurrying under a rock  
 God is the aroha of a Nanny for her mokopuna  
 (Rangiwai, 2018a, pp. 171-172)

I will now reflect upon each line of the piece and how it relates to my emerging theology.

***God is the pulse of the universe***

God is Te Atua. The word atua refers to an ancestor with continuing influence; or a god, demon, supernatural being, deity, ghost, strange being, or an object of superstitious regard (Moorfield, 2011). While the word atua is commonly translated as 'god', Moorfield (2011) argues that this is a misconception of the original meaning. Tate (2012) maintains that the missionaries took the word atua and used it to describe the Christian God, capitalising the 'a' in 'Atua' to distinguish the Christian God from the others, and in my view, to signify the "superiority" of the "...the only true God..." (John 17:3, AKJV). My view of God constantly changes. My perspective on God is like a prism: God's light enters, it is reflected and refracted and becomes a rainbow. My perspective on God is also like a kaleidoscope: with each twist and turn, my view changes significantly. For me, God is the pulse of the universe; the divine spark; that which gives life and animates the world around us.

God is the force that causes change and movement in the heavens. God is the primordial cosmic heartbeat.

***God is the sunlight piercing the kawakawa leaves***

Many ancient cultures worshipped the sun. I've always thought that worshipping the sun made complete sense. We can see and feel the sun. It gives us life; without it, we cease to exist. The rising sun gives us hope and the setting sun gives us a sense of closure: that every new day brings a chance to start afresh and every sunset brings the opportunity to reflect on the day that has been. The rising and setting of the sun is like the coming and going of the seasons; it is also like the birth of a child and the surety of death. The sun is critical to life and is, therefore, part of my theology.

***God is the first breath of a pēpi born on a dirt floor***

My grandmother was raised, like many Tūhoe of her generation, in a tiny house with a dirt floor. Though the floor was made of dirt, it was highly polished. New babies born into the family were born on this floor. My great-grandfather was known to many in Waiohau as a type of “mid-wife” in that he supervised the births of many children in Waiohau. My great-grandfather was known too for this ability to settle babies who were disturbed with karakia; some babies were taken to him to be settled down when they were very ill or very unsettled and Koro would use karakia and ancient techniques to settle them.

***God is the belly of a kererū heavy with miro berries***

The smell of kererū boiling in a pot, to me, is the smell of heaven. A few times in my life I have had the privilege of tasting the waikōhua and flesh of a boiled kereru. It has a smell and taste that only those who have tasted it will recognise. The combination of the gamey flesh with the fragrance of the miro

berries is so distinct; the smell and taste is simply indescribable. In Tūhoe tradition, kereru is a special food. Nan ate the kererū first and whatever was left was eaten by my Papa, my grandfather. Nan fed me with kereru flesh and waikōhua. This experience was so special to me that I reflect on the smell, taste, and experience of eating this delicacy with my Nan, as part of my emerging theology.

***God is the crackling of wood in the kāuta***

In old-style Māori homes, like the home that my grandmother grew up in, the kāuta, or kitchen was located to the side of the house; it was not inside the house. Food was cooked over a fire in cast iron pots and pans. The crackling of the fire gave warmth, and through the heat of its flames, nourishment was provided to the whānau. As a source of energy, heat, and essentially, food, the fire of the kāuta was literally life-giving. Fire, therefore, is part of my theology.

***God is rēwena bread - te taro o te ora - cooked in the embers***

Nan made the best rēwana bread. Ever. She cooked her bread in her special cast iron camp oven. She mixed the ingredients together, kneaded the dough, and then let it rise. Once baked, her rule that the bread could not be cut until it had cooled down. Sometimes she broke this rule and allowed me to eat the bread hot, dripping with butter and jam, and washed down with hot, milky tea. When Nan was growing up, she often cooked bread in a hole in the ground. A small hole was dug, a fire was lit in the hole, and the camp oven containing the prepared dough was placed inside the hole and covered with the embers. Bread provided the whānau with nourishment. Bread - te taro o te ora - is the bread of life, and Nan's bread is part of my theology because it represents the love and care that she put into feeding her family. Her bread gave us both nourishment and comfort and is a true symbol of her manaakitanga.

***God is mīti tahu reconstituted with pūhā***

Mīti tahu is meat that has been preserved by roasting it until it is dried out and crunchy. Mutton was a favourite source of meat to use for this preservation technique, particularly because the meat was very fatty. The meat could be stored for a long time in its own fat. When meat was required, it could be reconstituted by placing it on top of pūhā summering in a pot. Once reconstituted, the whānau could be fed. This is what Nan and her generation grew up eating. It was one way that they preserved food for future use. It was a means of being prepared so that nourishment for the whānau and provisions for manaakitanga would always be available. Being prepared to feed whānau and manuhiri is an important part of my theology.

***God is collecting rongoā in the bush to heal the whānau***

My whānau are a whānau of healers. Collecting rongoā and using it in the process of healing is part of our practice as a whānau. Koro Hāpurona had intimate knowledge of the ngahere and the flora and fauna therein. Rongoā is part of our whānau theology and is, therefore, part of my theology.

***God is white bread with jam dipped in cream***

Flour and bread were and are important staples for Māori whānau. Nan and Papa would give me white bread and jam and a saucer of cream to eat. My grandparents fed me all of my favourite foods whenever I wanted them. I spent every day before and after school with my grandparents from the time I started school through college. My grandparents took great pleasure in showing their love through food and in other ways. Papa would drop me off at school and pick me up in the afternoon if it was raining; I never got wet. Nan would always cook a hot breakfast consisting of porridge, brown sugar and cream, hot buttered toast, followed by eggs and bacon or

sausages. Nan would polish my shoes and have my school uniform warming by the fire. Nan referred to me as her “heart”. My grandparent’s love for me is part of my theology.

***God is a chipped enamel mug burning my bottom lip***

Nanny Pare and Koro Hāpurona had enamel mugs and so did my grandparents. The mugs were white with blue rims. Some of the enamel had chipped off leaving black pits in the surface of the mugs. These mugs were filled with tea which was consumed throughout the day. Nan would make for me tea with sugar and milk. I would dunk biscuits or cream crackers into the tea. I would sit and listen to the stories of my grandparents; I would listen to them talk with their relatives and friends. Drinking tea and sitting at the table listening was how I gained and learned *kōrero*. Drinking tea in love and fellowship, giving and receiving *kōrero* is part of my theology.

***God is the ‘fragrance’ of kānga wai bubbling in the pot***

Anyone who has had the ‘pleasure’ of smelling *kānga wai* cooking in a pot knows that it has both a unique and pungent odour. While the smell is for many people impossible to get past, once you do, you realise that the taste of *kānga wai*, or fermented corn, is wonderful. Topped with sugar and cream, *kānga wai* is a prized delicacy. Commonly known as rotten corn, the smell of *kānga wai* definitely lives up to its name. The smell of *kānga wai* and the pure pleasure of eating it reminds me of my great-grandparents and grandparents. On one side of the family the *kānga* was mashed with a texture like fine porridge, and on the other side of the family, it was left more or less as whole kernels swimming in a thick corn soup. The eating of *kānga wai* takes me back to the *manaakitanga* demonstrated at all times by my great-grandparents and grandparents. *Manaakitanga* is part of my theology.

***God is the eel squirming in the hīnaki***

When my grandmother was perhaps 14 or 15 she wrote a letter to the editor of Te Ao Hou which described some of the activities that our whānau engaged in based around gathering food and in particular tuna or eels. She mentions too that the eels were being gathered, and prepared by drying, for the Tekau-mā-rua, “the twelfth”, which is a special time for the Ringatū faith held on the twelfth of the month.

Ki a Te Etita,

Tena koe. E tonono atu ana ahau i taku reta ki a koe. I te Rahoroi ra ka mea mai taku Papa ko wai e haere ki te toa ki te tiki pihuka mo a matau raina. Ka mea atu ahau ki taku Papa, ko 'hau. Ka haere ahau ma runga i te pahi. Ka tae atu ahau ki te toa mea mai te Mangumangu, he aha taku pirangi. Ka mea atu ahau, he pihuka mo a matau raina. I taku taemaitanga ki te kainga ka haere matau ki runga o Waikokopu ki te hi tuna mo te tekau-ma-rua a te Hahi Ringatu. Ka uru atu matau ki roto o Waikokopu ka pahi matau i te awa tuatahi me te awa tuarua me te awa tuatoru. I to matau taetanga atu ki te waiariki ka mea mai taku Papa me noho mai ahau ki reira. Ka haere taku Papa raua ko Rihari ki te hi tuna. Ka noho mai ahau ki te waiariki ki te kaukau. Kotahi haora pea ahau i reira ka hoki mai taku Papa raua ko Rihari i te hi tuna. Ka mea atu ahau, “E hia a korua tuna me nga taraute?” Ka mea mai a Rihari, “Hai aha mau?” Ka mea atu ahau ki a Rihari, “Hai kai maku.” I to matau putanga mai i roto o Waikokopu ka kautehia e 'hau e hia nga tuna. I mea atu ahau ki taku Papa, “E rua tekau ma rima a korua tuna.” I to matau taetanga mai ki te kainga, ka whakairiirihia e taku Mama nga tuna kia marokeroke ai i te ra. I te marokeroketanga o

nga tuna ka tipokapokahia e taku Mama nga  
piropiro. Koiane te mututanga o taku korero,  
Na to hoa,  
Na Repora Maki,  
Ko te Kura Maori o Waiohau (Te Ao Hou, 1955,  
p. 46-47)

Tuna are an extremely important part of my whānau theology. They are our kaitiaki. They give us life by providing us with food. The tuna is part of my theology.

### ***God is a full puku after the hākari***

The blissful feeling of having a full puku following a hākari is a feeling that most Māori would know and understand. At the end of significant events such as tangihanga and unveilings, the hākari is feast which neutralises the tapu of death and allows mourners to emerge again into the common world. At the end of my grandmother's tangihanga in December 2017, the whānau pani, the immediate, grieving family, us, sat on the main table and were given the best food. After eating, I went into the wharepuni and slept until the next morning. After three or four days of 'running on empty', with very little sleep, and very little food, the hākari gave me the opportunity to have a large meal, engage in conversation, hear the singing and laughter of whānau, and to finally, to virtually collapsing in a heap, on a mattress in the wharepuni, surrounded by the images of all of my whānau who have passed on. The communal meal, the hākari, consumed with whānau, hapū, and iwi, is part of my theology.

### ***God is the taniwha lurking in the river***

Taniwha are experienced by Māori in many ways and in many forms. Moorfield (2011) defined taniwha as water spirit, monster, dangerous water creature, powerful creature, chief,

powerful leader, something or someone awesome. Taniwha may appear in many forms such as logs, reptiles, whales, and are believed to live in the sea, lakes, rivers (Moorfield, 2011). Taniwha are regarded by some as guardians but may also cause harm to humans (Moorfield, 2011). Nan taught me that some taniwha or "manas" as she called them, had the potential to protect us, or to "slap us". A balance had to be achieved. Tikanga had to be observed. Karakia had to be used. Safe passage had to be negotiated. Life can be like a taniwha. It can be unpredictable. Sometimes are blessed with abundance. Other times we are suffering without. At time whānau are blessed with the arrival of new babies. At other times whānau suffer in the depths of mourning and despair. The taniwha lurking in the river reminds of Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 (AKJV):

<sup>1</sup>To every *thing there is* a season,  
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:  
<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that*  
*which is* planted;  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
<sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones,  
and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from  
embracing;  
<sup>6</sup> a time to get, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
<sup>7</sup> a time to rend, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time of war, and a time of peace.

Acknowledging the absolute fragility of life is part of my theology. I understand that the balance of life can be tipped over at any point. My theology is one that understands that in the face of death and grief wairua continues forever.

***God is the potato we touch when exiting the urupā***

Nan told me that in more recent times some of the tapu of the urupā at Waiōhau had been lifted to make things easier for the next generation. Presently the urupā is open, with the various denominations mixed together. When Nan was growing up the denominations were fenced-off from each other: the Ringatū in one area; the Catholics in another area; and the Protestants in yet another area. The tapu of the Ringatū part of the cemetery was believed to be so great that if a non-Ringatū entered, they would die. Nan said that when exiting the cemetery, the people had to touch a potato, held by a Ringatū tohunga to remove the tapu of the urupā. After touching the potato, the people had to go with the tohunga down to the river.

***God is the branch the tohunga uses to sprinkle us with water***

At the river, the Ringatū tohunga used a branch - which he dipped into the river - to sprinkle water over the people while at the same time articulating Ringatū karakia. This ritual was a means of engaging in whakawātea to free the people from tapu. The use of water and the use of karakia as a way of negating tapu is a critical part of Māori theology and thus is part of my theology.

***God is the marae bell calling us to prayer***

The bell was imported from Christianity. The ringing of the bell is an important signal at the marae that brings whānau together for “church”. “Church”, which is what we call a church service,

is held for all sorts of occasions, particularly for tangihanga, unveilings, memorial services for ANZAC day, and other occasions. Our marae in Waiōhau is a Ringatū marae and so the prayers of the Ringatū faith generally precede the prayers of other denominations. The ringing of the bell, the call to prayer, the karakia of the whānau is part of my theology.

***God is the tokotoko pointing to Papatūānuku and Ranginui***

When a koroua stands to speak with his tokotoko, he points to the various geographical locations of the whenua. He points to the earth, to Papatūānuku; and he points skyward to Ranginui. The tokotoko can be used as a pneumonic device as a means to recall whakapapa. Whakapapa which can mean to layer up is the genealogical context out of which Māori emerge. Knowledge of whakapapa reveals the composition of the Māori universe and worldview. The tokotoko, as a physical representation of whakapapa, is part of my theology.

***God is ngā Atua Māori in the environment around us***

Atua Māori exist in the environment around us. Ngā Atua - commonly referred to, somewhat inaccurately, as the gods - reside and are active in the physical world. Atua (singular) or ngā Atua (plural) are more accurately described as ancestor deities with continuing influence over particular domains, such as Tangaroa, Atua of the sea, and Tāne, Atua of the forest. Iwi, hapū, and whānau also had specific Atua, kaitiaki and other spiritual beings such as taniwha who provided protection or, conversely, punished people for breaching appropriate behavioural protocols; these entities could be turned against one's enemies (Simmons, 1986). In my whānau we are acutely aware of our kaitiaki who appear in the forms of certain animals; we acknowledge them and we recognise that we are to engage in appropriate behaviour within their realms in the

environment. Our whānau theology emerges out of these experiences. This is part of my theology.

***God is the mauri that animates life***

In 1886 Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki gave the people of Patuheuheu, Ngāti Haka, Ngāti Manawa, and Ngāti Whare a prophecy of hope called Te Umutaoroa or the slow-cooking earth oven. His prophecy foresaw the emergence of eight hāngī stones, each with a special mauri, through which all resources taken through colonisation and Pākehā deceit, would be restored to the people. These mauri inspire us to look to the future and work toward transformation for our people. Mauri is the vital essence that gives life to animate and inanimate objects. Mauri gives life to all living things. Mauri gives life to taonga Māori. Mauri is part of my theology.

***God is the wai that negates tapu***

Wai has the power to change the state of something from tapu to noa. Wai is a neutraliser that can make the unsafe and volatile, safe and stable. Nan taught me that karakia, day and night, was important to wellbeing. She said, "talk to that man upstairs". For me, wai represents the neutralising power of faith and prayer and is, therefore, part of my theology.

***God is Koro's grave in Cassino***

Nanny Pare and Koro Hāpurona's house contained many photographs. One particular photograph I remember was that of Nanny Pare's brother, Private Roihi Rikiriki of the 28<sup>th</sup> Māori Battalion, who died 18 February 1944 in Italy (Roll of Honour, Auckland Province, 1939-1945, Auckland Museum; Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Nominal Roll No. 5, 1942).

**Image 1: Private Roihi Rikiriki's grave at Cassino War Cemetery, Italy, plot VI, H, 2**



(Aumua, 2009, n.p.)

Remembering our dead constantly is something that I was raised with. We speak to the photographs and memorials as though these people are still alive and with us, and from a Māori perspective they are. From a Christian perspective, they are alive in God. Remembering Koro Te Roihi and all those that have passed on is part of my theology.

### ***God is the log floating up-stream***

Logs have been mysteriously known to float up-stream. Some say that this is a sign of some sort. Others, that the log is the manifestation of something spiritual, perhaps, of a *taniwha* or *kaitiaki*. Commenting on *tipua*, Tregear (1904) states that when they appear they are "...not always visible in a frightful or terrifying shape but assumed the appearance of ordinary creatures or things" (Tregear, 1904, p. 538), and that "...at Rangitaiki River was a *tipua* log of totara wood above which no eel would pass" (Tregear, 1904, p. 539). Cowan (1930) also writes about a number of "taniwha-logs" or "demon-logs" that moved through lakes and rivers; these were considered to be omens warning of impending war or death. I grew up hearing stories that, to some, might be considered terrifying. Stories about *taonga* that would come to life and cause tragedies. Stories about cannibalism. Stories about Te Kōoti's guns in the Horomanga ranges. Stories about special trees with life-giving properties. Stories of tree used to hang *tūpāpaku*. The phenomena and *tohu* of the Māori world are, to me, physical signs from the spiritual world. When interpreted, they can be used as a means of guiding our lives. They warn us of impending danger and cause us to be prepared for the worst. Like God's appearance to Moses in the form of a burning bush, Māori *tohu* are physical expressions of spiritual phenomena. These manifestations and signs are part of my worldview and therefore are part of my theology.

***God is the faded poppy wreath in the wharenuī***

Koro Roihi Rikiriki passed away during the War. We remember him and all of the other fallen soldiers with poppy wreaths that we use on ANZAC Day. While I have mixed feeling about War and about ANZAC Day, I am obliged to remember and honour my whānau that have passed away in battle. Their photos are laid out on the mahau of the wharepuni. They are placed on mattresses, with white sheets, and treated as though they are people sitting. The photos are adorned with greenery, and kuia in black sit next to the photos and weep and wail. Remembering and honouring the dead is part of my theology.

***God is the sorrow of a broken heart***

Everyone dies. Nan was no stranger to mourning and grief. She lost siblings. She lost her husband and two sons. She lost many people but she kept going. Nan was a very strong person. Though her heart had been broken over and over again, she had tenacity and knew that she needed to stick around a bit longer to be a rock for her whānau. When Nan passed away, it broke my heart. To me, this pain is a reminder that there is a spiritual life to come, and that this physical existence is but a temporary pit-stop. Grief, sorrow, lamenting and mourning is part of my theology.

***God is the strains of wailing and tangi***

In the depths of despair, deep in the strains of wailing and tangi, you get lost. You lose yourself momentarily. I have experienced this deep wailing a number of times in my life. It is a dark place. It is a place where time and space seem to collapse or close in. It is a place where the comforting embrace of whānau is all that there is to bring you back into the light. When Nan died, I cried so much and so hard that I felt as though I was losing my mind. When I cried and wailed for Nan as they closed the coffin, I felt as though I became lost in a dark hole. My whānau gathered

around me. My mother held me and rubbed my back. I could feel the embrace of whānau all around me both physically and spiritually. In that intense moment of grief and pain, my whānau anchored me so that I could not fall permanently into that shadowy place. Being there for whānau in times of need is fundamental to being Māori, therefore it is part of my theology.

***God is the warps and wefts of a whāriki***

I see whāriki as a metaphor for the universe. The warps and wefts of whāriki represent for me the weaving together of physical and spiritual realities. At the beginning of life, the weaving is in its infancy. Toward the end of life, the whāriki is a rich tapestry of life's achievements, victories, and sorrows. At the end of life, the whāriki unravels, and the physical lays in tatters while the spirit remains. God is at the helm of all things. Karakia adorns the whāriki like glittering stars, punctuating life's ups and downs. Recognising God's hand in both the physical and spiritual realities through karakia is part of my whānau theology and is thus a part of my personal theology.

***God is the medals sent home after the war***

Following the deaths of whānau, hapū and iwi members in war, their medals were sent home to their respective whānau. These medals became taonga to those left behind. These medals represent the memories of our fallen men who went to war. These medals represent the wailing widows and the children who had to grow up without fathers. This theology of remembrance forms part of my whānau perspective and so is part of my theology.

***God is the green lizard scurrying under a rock***

Nan said that if I was ever lost, the green lizard would give me directions. The environment provides signs for us to follow, but

only if we can read and interpret them. Seeing, understanding, and interpreting these signs, and communicating with kaitiaki in the environment, is part of my whānau spirituality and theology, and therefore part of my theology.

***God is the aroha of a Nanny for her mokopuna***

My grandmother practically raised me. Her influence on my life is undeniable. She sacrificed much for me and encouraged and believed in me always. My grandmother came from a different world to others in her generation. She was raised in Waiōhau, the home-base of the Patuheuheu hapū. She was a native speaker of the Tūhoe dialect and she came from a world where the spiritual and physical were seen as one. This piece speaks of the tangihanga process and emphasises the intensity of the grief we experience as Māori when someone close to us dies, but also the healing that comes from being surrounded by whānau.

You lie in state  
In the wharemate  
At Patuheuheu marae  
Adorned with a taonga  
That I gave to you  
A pounamu Hei Tiki  
Kahurangi grade – fine, light  
And without blemish

Your passing cuts deep  
Into my fragile, broken heart  
The tears sting my cheeks  
The hūpē dries on my black t-shirt  
Like the trails of a dozen snails  
Glistening in the summer sun

The grief drains me, vampirically  
Like a squirming black, leach

Pulsating and feasting  
On the arteries of my aroha  
Its sharp mouthpiece gnawing  
Intensely and purposefully

Images of you unwell and  
Dying, haunt my thoughts  
I recall your suffering  
Each time I close my eyes  
Hospital scenes and last moments  
Projected on my eyelids  
In High Definition realness

When you made your descent  
Beneath Papatūānuku's skin  
I watched from afar and wept  
Hinenuitepō's embrace  
Nor Jesus' promise of heaven  
Did little to comfort me  
Your chrome nameplate  
And myriad plastic flowers  
Now mark your resting place

My whānau are my healers  
The rongoā for my pain  
Their presence and love  
This begins the healing  
As does the incessant crying  
Behind closed doors  
When I am alone (Rangiwai, 2018b, 173-174).

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