

Resolving Conflict - Restoring Balance

Kim Workman
Founder and Strategic Adviser
Rethinking Crime and Punishment

Greetings to you all, kia ora tātou.

When I looked at the draft programme about a month ago, I was intrigued by the splurge that described the after dinner speaker. It talked about someone who was dynamic, humble and entertaining. The only person I know who fits that bill is Judge Andrew Becroft. When I realised that it was me who was being described – I was a bit overwhelmed. With advancing years, I have become less dynamic, certainly less humble, and my entertainment value depends on whether or not I have remembered to take my medication.

It has been an exhilarating day, and a great privilege to mix and meet people, all of whom have a heart for the restoration and maintenance of peace within the community. People with a gift for reconciliation, and a passion to resolve difference. Social theorists throughout the ages have presented two starkly different views of the world – that the world comprises two primary groups those who seek consensus, and those who enjoy conflict.

Today I experienced a collective striving for meaning through consensus. I was privileged to listen to people who placed a central value on consensus as being at the heart of a healthy, functioning community. People committed to developing ideas about what is right, good, just in our world, and how that might be achieved. People, who while they accept that there will be conflict, see their role as mediating that conflict, and presenting and promoting common values, common interests and common good. People that believe it is in our mutual interests to be governed in accordance with goodness, righteousness and justice. People that for most of their lives, have been committed to making a difference.

I would like to claim that when I entered the New Zealand Police as a 17 year old Police Cadet, I was committed to making a difference in the world. Nothing however, could be further from the truth. First, it was not my chosen profession. My father and the local policeman, convinced that my taste for hard liquor would lead me into a life of crime, colluded in making an application on my behalf to join the Police Cadets. Their first try was unsuccessful, as I only weighed 9 stone, and had a 34" chest measurement – well below the minimum requirements. They were not however, to be denied. My father hauled me into Superintendent Bill Carran's Wellington office, and when the Superintendent realised that he had played rugby against my grandfather, (who he

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claimed was the dirtiest player he had ever encountered), my weight magically increased to 9 ½ stone, and I was judged to have a 38" chest.

It wasn't only my newly acquired chest measurement that I took with me into the Police. I also took a whole set of values, beliefs and a world view with me. Like most young New Zealanders of that time, I was raised to think that no evil deed should go unpunished; that wrongdoers deserved what they got, and that the responsibility of the "good guys" was to dish it out to the "bad guys". As a child growing up in the post-war period, I harboured few doubts about our role in ridding the world of those forces of evil which threatened our "Pavlova Paradise". I was firm in the belief that my role was to ensure that those who broke the laws, were punished. The greater the crime, the harsher the punishment. "They" would get what they deserved, and New Zealanders could get on with their lives.

Where did these attitudes come from? I don't recall my parents being particularly punitive – while my father applied the razor strop from time to time, neither of us enjoyed the experience. I do remember that these attitudes were shared by my peer group, and were expressed with great heat and emotion from time to time. Children unfortunate enough to have a parent in prison, were treated as pariahs – they immediately became "forbidden territory". The remaining spouse, (inevitably female) was cut off from the local community –no longer invited to join the Mother's Union.

In those days I was firmly in the camp of those that thrived on conflict. Conflict theorists argue that beliefs about goodness and righteousness and justice are nothing more than a thin veneer that conceals personal gains and losses, personal costs and benefits. People who thrive on conflict believe that the organised state does not represent common interests, but instead represents the interests of those who are in power and control. As a result, the powerful people become the 'insiders' in society, and those with less power become the "outsiders" – more likely to be seen as the marginalised in this world – the 'dark underclass' and at the extreme end of things, the criminal class, or as one former prominent Whanganui citizen would have it, - the 'ferals'.

I spent 17 years in the Police, and much of that time struggled with ideas about how best to resolve conflict –realising that often the things we did in the name of justice, created more rather than less victims. As a Police Officer working in the Wairarapa, one was judged on the basis of the number of arrests one made in a given year. The 'top cop' in our team made twenty arrests one year, - and seven of them were on people who had assaulted him. There had to be a lesson in there somewhere. Young unfit criminals were arrested and sentenced to Corrective Training – a three month short sharp shock – identical to the boot camps that Judge Becroft has criticised. They returned to the town as fit young criminals, and 90% of them reoffended within 12 months. There had to be a lesson in there somewhere. The Police avoided dealing with

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domestic violence at all, unless someone died, or was hospitalised. There had to be a lesson in there somewhere. Racism was rife; when a Māori male assaulted his Pakeha partner, he was arrested – when a Pakeha assaulted his Māori partner, she had got what she deserved. There had to be a lesson in there somewhere.

Race politics in those days could get quite entertaining at times. I spent four years in Masterton from 1965 until 1969, and there were three incidents that shaped my future approach to policing and criminal justice. Born in Greytown, on returning home to the Wairarapa, I was immediately requisitioned into the Māori Anglican Kapahaka group. We would practice and perform regularly. Practice's were usually followed by a session at the Pioneer Hotel, the drinking spot for working families, and a place where the local crims hung out. After a few months, I received a formal memorandum from the Inspector, directing that I desist from my cultural activities, on the grounds that it was unseemly for a Police Officer to be seen publicly cavorting in a flax skirt. I thought hard about how to respond, and replied that I would be pleased to desist, once he had arranged for the disestablishment of the Police Pipe Band. While nothing more was said, that memo (and my reply) cemented my place as an outsider within the Masterton police establishment.

The following year, the two man CIB office suffered a severe staffing shortage – both personnel went on long term sickness leave, and I was offered the opportunity to become a one man CIB office. My sessions at the Pioneer paid off – friendships forged within the criminal world meant that after six months, there was a 43% increase in crime clearances. I learnt a valuable lesson; that within crime families, and within whānau living on the edge of poverty, were people who wanted a better life for themselves and their whānau and who were prepared to support proactive policing if it was done within a framework of engagement, of mutual trust and respect. There were only so many acts of theft, burglary, car theft and violence, that they were prepared to tolerate. Identify the pro-social actors, and policing became an entirely different proposition.

The third incident came as the result of developing closer relationships with the whānau that lived on the Cameron block, the state housing estate. Situated alongside the Block was the Masterton East Free Kindergarten – full of pakeha kids, but no Maori. Those Cameron Block whānau that had enquired about enrolling their children, were told there was a waiting list and the waiting list was closed. Being curious, I got one of the whānau to ring up the kindergarten and ask to enrol – sure enough the waiting list was closed. I then rang up, and in my best BBC voice enquired – and was told I could enrol my child the next day. So I turned up in the company of eight Māori mothers from the Block. Our ope of eight whānau briefly occupied the grounds, and I supervised their enrolment. I made the mistake of wearing my uniform, and I got into quite a bit of trouble. It was before the days of the Race Relations Act or the Human Rights Act. But I want to make this point. It seems to me that if we are serious about being effective

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Ambassadors of Peace, then from time to time, we must exercise a moral authority which transcends the rational enforcement of the law. It is that moral dimension which sets us apart as guardians of community peace.

In 1972, a Churchill Fellowship to study at the Delinquency Control Institute in Los Angeles for three months, along with 59 American Police and Probation Officers. It was a wonderful opportunity to start exploring my developing conflict resolution skills.

The Los Angeles Police Officers I met struggled with race issues – the memories of the 1965 Watts Riots were still raw. The riots exploded after two white policemen scuffled with a black motorist suspected of drink-driving. After six days of rioting, it had left 34 dead, 1,032 injured, and over 4,000 arrested. I became close friends with Bill White, a black Probation Officer, who worked as a liaison officer with the Black Muslim community. I moved into Bill's home and he introduced me to the Black Panthers, and the Black Muslim movement. They were still dealing with the aftermath of years of economic and political isolation. It began for me, a process of politicisation, which is still ongoing.

On the lighter side, we got to hear some great live jazz from the likes of Dizzie Gillespie, John Coltrane. Miles Davis, and McCoy Tyner, along with the blues of Ray Charles.

Highlights included visits to Mexicali and Tijuana to observe policing approach a genuine Rolex s. The cultural differences were significant. I recall the Police Chief (a retired University Professor) in Mexicali explaining that they did not have juvenile crime in Mexicali. Instead, they had “naughty boys, and mischievous girls, who eventually grew up”. So they instead, had “a concerned policy of doing nothing”. Forty years later, we are starting to understand the value of keeping young people out of the criminal justice system for as long as possible.

When I came back from the US, I began thinking more deeply about approaches to resolving conflict and restoring peace. As I reflect on my own life, I realise that my personal approach was never consistent with that of a consensus seeker. My behaviour vacillated. While my role models at that time were Whiti Te Rongomai, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, there were times when my behaviour was more reminiscent of Attila the Hun.

Often, it seemed that our struggle was with bureaucratic process. How often, when I get involved in a healing process with the victims of crime and their perpetrators, , did I lose touch with what we wanted to ultimately achieve, and instead, and became preoccupied instead with following the rules. How often, when we developed professional standards for what we did, was the focus on process rather than a restorative outcome; one which embraces the common good.

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These issues are never clear cut, and the resolution of conflict – often involves the brokerage of power. My first recollections of family violence and child abuse was within our collective whānau in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Living in the Wairarapa township of Greytown, it became clear to me by the time I was 8 or 9, that there were children turning up at school, with horrific bruising, without proper food, and filthy clothing. We all knew who those whānau were, and their dysfunction rested heavily on the shoulders of us all.

How did our whānau respond? Well, there were people who took on the role of child advocates. While their approach might not receive current day approval, within the times, they were very effective. The most effective of all, was one kuia, who was a force to be reckoned with. More than anything, she loved children. With her sixth sense, she knew when a child was not being properly fed, was dirty and unkempt, or had inadequate clothing. She would literally kidnap the child from school or off the street, and even from their home. They would be marched back to her home, to be scrubbed sparkling brown, given a big feed of steak and eggs, and a new set of clothes. Then they would be taken back to their home, in full view of the village.

The absolute shame of having one of their children chosen for this unique treatment, was sufficient to keep some whānau on the straight and narrow for at least six months. The Australian criminologist, John Braithwaite, later referred to it as "*reintegrative shaming*".

There was more serious violence, with children being subjected to serious abuse. Responsible members of the collective whānau would then take the child out of the house, and relocate that child with other whānau. Their return was the subject of negotiation around a change in lifestyle and behaviour.

There was one thing that never happened. The abuse was never reported to the Police or to the authorities for fear that the child would be taken away and placed into the care of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education. Today, that would be called a "*differential response*". Some slipped through the cracks. My whānau, the present Mayor of Carterton, Ron Mark was removed from his whānau at the age of six, and was only repatriated back into Kahungunu ki Wairarapa about 17 years ago.

Over the next 40 years, I had many opportunities to learn from those with an instinctive heart for peace and reconciliation, for restoring community balance. For me, it was something that grew from a small seed, that struggled in barely fertile soil, but that has finally sprouted and started to grow. For others, the drive for the common good is more fundamental to their being.

What Have I Learnt?

There are some things that I have learnt from this struggle – let me share some of those with you.

It seems to me that there is within every human being – a desire to seek peace and reconciliation . A search for legitimacy. What is it that stops us from achieving that place in our lives, the place in which we engage in the world so as to contribute to peace and justice, and take our whānau with us? It seems to me that there is a common element that prevents that happening - fear.

The Path to Freedom

I recall the parable that Jesus tells of Lazarus, the hungry beggar. Lazarus spends his life looking with avid eyes at the crumbs falling from the rich man's table, the table from which he is excluded. By and by, the story goes, both Lazarus and the rich man die and the rich man, from his place of torment, can see Lazarus, blissfully happily in the "heart of Abraham". The rich man begs that Lazarus be allowed to bring him some water, but is reminded that the abyss that separated them in life, now separates them in death.

We are all frightened of those who are different, those who challenge our authority, our certitudes, and our value system. We are frightened of losing what is important for us, the things that give us life, security, and status. We are frightened of change, and even more frightened of our own hearts. It is fear that makes us push the poor, the needy, the disenfranchised, the mentally unstable, and the criminals, away. It is fear that causes those people to be scapegoated, - as evil, as dangerous, or as genetically inferior. We fear activists and dissidents. We fear difference – those who are strangers amongst us. We fear failure - - of reaching out and being rejected, and most of all, we fear the prospect of loss and change.

When we instead, see people whom society has excluded, as friends, and people with gifts to bring to others, then we establish a place of community where each person finds their place and where we can live in mutual trust. If each whānau opened its heart to a few people who are different and became their friends, and received life from them, communities would change.

An openness to the weak and the needy in our own groups helps us to open our hearts to others who are weak and needy in the greater group of humanity. It is the first sign of a healthy community.

The second sign of healthy belonging is the way community humbly lives its mission to others. It does not impose its vision on others, but listens to what they are saying and living, to see in them all that is positive. It helps them to make their own decisions; it empowers them.

As we begin to see others' gifts, we move out from behind the walls of certitude, seeking to identify that which unites us, rather than that which sets us apart. That is the third sign of a healthy community.

Finally, a community may evolve to the point that it recognises the errors of the past, to recognise its own flaws, and to seek the help of experienced people from outside the group in order to be more true and loving, more respectful of difference, more listening and open to the way authority is exercised. The community that refuses to admit its own errors or seek the wisdom of others risks closing itself up behind the walls of "superiority".

Community Promoting Peace

Whānau that mature to the last stage, discover a common humanity which allows them to be themselves, intertwined with each other, receiving and giving life from one another. It is at this point that a community contributes to the peace and common good of the nation - and are called to be people of service, people of peace, and people of justice. As we recognise that we are bonded together by a common destiny, we are at that point, called to be concerned about others.

May you walk that long journey, may you find the time to rest. May you then stand up and continue, strengthened to engage once more in the struggle for freedom. And may God guide and protect your every step. Allow me to close with a Franciscan Prayer, which for me, sums up the life that I struggle to lead:

"May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you will live deep in your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer, so you will reach out your hands to comfort them and change their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so you will do the things, which others say cannot be done."

Amen