

Commentary: History and influence of Māori nonviolence

October 10, 2022

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following account is published in honor of Indigenous People's Day, though the author and his topic are not indigenous to North America. Rather, he is Māori, the Indigenous people of New Zealand, or as Māori call it Aotearoa.

It is not the practice of the Baptist Standard to republish academic papers, complete with footnotes. An exception is made here to preserve the integrity of Renata's course work as part of a degree in Indigenous theology.

A glossary of Māori terms is provided at the end of the article. "Wh" is pronounced like "f."

One of the most significant and tragic stories of Aotearoa—New Zealand's—recent history is the story of the people of Parihaka between the 1860s and 1880s led by Rangatira, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi.[1]

As Māori land was being acquired by the British crown and European settlers at a rapid pace with the help of government legislation such as the New Zealand Settlement Act 1863, many Māori from various surrounding iwi were forced to leave their ancestral lands.[2]

Many Māori found refuge and sanctuary in the Taranaki village of Parihaka. While the Māori population was declining significantly due to numerous incoming settlers, land wars, sickness and foreign diseases, Parihaka became one of the largest Māori settlements in the country.[3]

The two chiefs of Parihaka—Te Whiti and Tohu—were well-versed in ancient Māori pūrākau and traditions, as well as “biblical narratives and [they] exemplified that in their leadership.”[4]

These rangatira had an infinity with the Old Testament, as they experienced many dreams and visions, and spoke of God’s word similar to that of the Old Testament prophets.[5]

They were believed to have been introduced to the teachings of the gospel through the freed Ngāpuhi slave Minarapa Rangihatuake and eventually were taught further by Methodist missionary J.C. Riemenschneider.[6]

Rangihatuake was among the first Māori to become bearers of the gospel of peace and was a pupil of the well-known “peacemaker” Henry Williams.[7]

Upon Riemenschneider’s first introduction to Te Whiti, he said to him, “I come in peace, bringing God’s word.”

The peacemaking-influenced Te Whiti responded, “We know that word and greet you, in God’s peace.”[8]

Through their great leadership, Te Whiti and Tohu had significant spiritual authority and influence on the people across the west coast region of Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Peacefully resisting the crown

Pākehā thought the people of Parihaka rejected Christianity as they would not practice the Sabbath on Sunday. However, Te Whiti was infused in the Bible, and his kōrero “were filled with scriptural allusions and quotations.”[9]

The various Māori of Parihaka developed a belief, influenced by Te Whiti and Tohu, in which they imagined they could overcome their present

suffering by the deliverance of the divine as God's chosen people.[10]

Across the country, they saw iwi Māori's violence and war against the British crown had failed, and they developed a peaceful resistance example defined by Te Whiti and Tohu.[11] They insisted that no land was to be sold and any crown and settler encroachment on land would be resisted peacefully and strategically.[12]

Te Whiti and Tohu hoped Māori and Pākehā could live and exist in peace side-by-side, which is why they chose to follow the biblical principle of nonviolent resistance, as opposed to war and bloodshed.[13]

The British crown was not able to get its hands on the land. Instead, it authorized the forced removal of thousands of Parihaka Māori and confiscated their lands.[14]

Colonial troops—1,600 of them—stormed Parihaka and were met with 200 children playing games and chanting mōteatea, all while some of the young Parihaka kōtiro offered the tired troops food and drink.[15] During all of this, the men and women of Parihaka sat peacefully, weapons aside, and resisted any form of violent conflict.

The troops made mass arrests, demolished the peaceful village, and raped some of the Parihaka women.[16] By the beginning of the 1900s, there was great opposition by Taranaki Māori to Christian mission and especially to the Methodist work on the west coast of Aotearoa.[17]

This effective model of peaceful resistance was implemented by Māori all around Aotearoa. Kaumatua Mike Ross mentions the Tainui iwi in 1881, through the Kīngatanga, "laid down its arms and sought to resolve differences through political negotiation with the crown." [18] The hope for the people of Waikato "was to open up peaceful political channels to resolve injustices." [19]

This not only was an act of peaceful response by the Māori King Tawhio at the time, but was an act clearly of justice for Māori from the government over the many disputed lands.[20]

The example of a peaceful God who required nonviolent means also affected the Pai Mārire—good and peaceful—movement led by Te Ua Haumene.[21]

God was referred to as the God of Peace and God of Love and also was acknowledged and praised as the “Son of Universal Peace and a Holy Ghost, Spirit of love, and Spirit of Peace.”[22]

However, some of the followers of Pai Mārire couldn’t uphold the peaceful example set by Te Ua due to the great injustices happening to their people. They broke off to create a militant arm of the faith movement and took up arms, becoming the Hauhau Pai Mārire.[23]

Global influence of Māori nonviolence

There is great power and justice in peaceful nonviolent resistance efforts. These efforts not only impacted the successful peace movements of Māori in Aotearoa—such as the 1975 Whina Cooper hīkoi from Te Hapua, the 1977 Takaparawhau (Bastion Point) protests, the 1978 Eva Rickard Whāingaroa protests, and the 2019 protect Ihumātao protests—they also impacted movements around the world.[24]

Parihaka historian Te Miringa Hohaia found the peaceful protest efforts of Parihaka made a significant impact on Mahatma Gandhi “50 years before Gandhi’s defining ‘salt march’ of 1930.”[25]

It is said Gandhi learned about the Parihaka protests from an Irish delegation who visited Aotearoa and that it “significantly reinforced Gandhi’s own ideas about non-violence and his concept of satyagraha, or

‘truth-force,’” fuelling him in his protests against apartheid in South Africa and the colonization of India by Britain.[26]

Gandhi’s efforts also impacted the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. According to the *Encyclopedia of Dr. King*, “Gandhi’s approach directly influenced Martin Luther King, Jr., who argued that the Gandhian philosophy was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.”[27] This eventually led to the nonviolent resistance of the civil rights movement in America.[28]

I struggle to see the continuing suffering and intergenerational trauma of many Māori in our present Aotearoa context resulting from colonization. I wonder where the justice for Parihaka is today. If you go there today, you will understand the land and people there are still in desperate need of healing.

In the same breath, I can see the great forward movement of the Māori people. In terms of godly justice, God has taken a record of everything that has been happening here in Aotearoa and knows those accounts in the heavenly realm.

Godly justice ultimately will come for all those affected. It is our responsibility and duty as the body of Christ to do justice here in this earthy realm while we are living and breathing on this planet.

Part of doing justice is to reflect the heart of Christ, which is to do justice actively, respond in peace as opposed to starting conflict and war, and manifest Christ’s unconditional love. God will lead us and help us to do the rest.

Glossary

- **Hauhau:** a militant offshoot of a movement founded in Taranaki in 1862

by Te Ua Haumēne in response to Pākehā confiscation of Māori land and led to the establishment of the Pai Mārire Christian faith

- **hīkoi**: walk, march, journey
- **kaumatua**: elder, adult; a person of status within the family or tribe
- **iwi**: tribe, nation, people, nationality, race, extended kinship group; often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory
- **Kīngatanga**: King Movement; a movement that developed in the 1850s, culminating in the anointing of Pōtatau Te Wherowhero as king; established to stop the loss of land to the colonists, to maintain law and order, and to promote traditional values and culture; strongest support comes from the Tainui tribes; current leader is Tūheitia Pahi
- **kōrero**: speech, narrative, story, news, account, discussion, conversation, discourse, statement, information
- **kōtiro**: girl, daughter
- **mōteatea**: traditional chant, sung poetry, lament; a general term for songs sung in a traditional mode
- **Pākehā**: English, foreign, European, New Zealander of European descent; introduced from or originating in a foreign country
- **pūrākau**: ancient stories, ancient legends originating from Hawaiki
- **rangatira**: chief (male or female), chieftain, chieftainess, high ranking, chiefly, noble, esteemed; qualities of a leader is a concern for the integrity and prosperity of the people, the land, the language and other cultural treasures

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Footnotes

[1]. Mike Ross, “The Throat of Parata,” in *Imagining Decolonisation*, BWB Texts (Wellington, N.Z.: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2020), 29.

[2]. New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga and Peter Adds, “The New Zealand Settlements Act of 1863,” *Encyclopedia, Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, 2005), <https://teara.govt.nz/en/document/3893/the-new-zealand-settlements-act-of-1863>.

[3]. Keith Newman, *Ratana: The Prophet* (North Shore, N.Z: Raupo, 2009), 80.

[4]. Allan K. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand*, 3rd ed. (Wellington, N.Z: Education For Ministry, 2004), 48.

[5]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 48.

[6]. Keith Newman, *Bible & Treaty: Missionaries Among the Māori: A New Perspective* (North Shore, N.Z: Penguin Books, 2010), 228; Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 47.

[7]. Newman, *Bible & Treaty*, 309.

[8]. Newman, *Bible & Treaty*, 228.

[9]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 48.

[10]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 47.

[11]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 47.

[12]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 47.

[13]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 48.

[14]. Dick Scott, *Parihaka Invaded* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2015).

[15]. Scott, *Parihaka Invaded*.

[16]. Newman, *Ratana*, 80.

[17]. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, 133.

[18]. Ross, "The Throat of Parata," 28.

[19]. Ross, "The Throat of Parata," 29.

[20]. Bronwyn Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven: A Century of Maori Prophets in New Zealand* (Tauranga, New Zealand: Moana Press, 1989), 179.

[21]. Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven*, 191.

[22]. Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven*, 195.

[23]. Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven*, 200.

[24]. New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga and Basil Keane, "Land Protests," *Encyclopedia, Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, 2012),

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/nga-ropu-tautohetohe-maori-protest-movements/page-3>; Lucy Mackintosh, "Unearthing the History of Ihumātao, Where the Land Tells Stories," RNZ, 2019, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/396954/unearthing-the-history-of-ihumatao-where-the-land-tells-stories>.

[25]. David Kārena-Holmes, "Taking a Non-Violent Approach to Protest," News, *Stuff*, December 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/117961126/taking-a-nonviolent-approach-to-protest>.

[26]. Kārena-Holmes, "Taking a Non-Violent Approach to Protest."

[27]. Stanford University, "Gandhi, Mohandas K.," The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, 2017, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/gandhi-mohandas-k>.

[28]. Stephen Zunes and Jesse Laird, "The US Civil Rights Movement (1942-1968)," *ICNC*, January 2010, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/us-civil-rights-movement-1942-1968/>.