

*The bishops of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia meeting in Auckland on Feb 18 –19 and the Roman Catholic Bishops of New Zealand, issued this contribution to the current debate on the place of the Treaty of Waitangi in our national life.*

The recent debates reveal the volatile state of popular feeling about race and ethnicity. We believe the Treaty covenant provides the best way of addressing that volatility. We call for a Treaty debate rather than a race debate.

In recent years successive governments have been responsible for real progress made in resolving claims under the Treaty of Waitangi. With regard to programmes relating to Maori health, education and welfare, it is our view that such programmes are generally need-based rather than being examples of ethnic privilege. If claims to the contrary are made, we would ask that they be tested in the light of facts and figures.

As Anglicans we are distinctively known and named as Te Haahi Mihinare, the Church of the missionaries who promoted and translated the Treaty. This gives us a vested interest and an historical responsibility to honour the Treaty our forebears helped to create. As Catholics working out of a different history, we share that same responsibility.

We know the Treaty is a living document because alongside the Gospel of Jesus Christ it shapes our life as churches. . The Anglican General Synod used it to rewrite its constitution and reshape its ways of making decisions, spending money, learning, praying and serving the community together. The Treaty formed the way we walked together on the Hiko of Hope.

So we have to disagree with those who say the Treaty offers no blueprint for modern New Zealand, creates no partnership, defines no principles or constitutional relationship and serves to fuel separatism. Our experience contradicts those claims.

We acknowledge that issues of sovereignty were begged by the differences in translation between the two versions of the Treaty. Maori never intended or imagined they were giving away their rangatiratanga under Article 2. Working out those issues, especially as they apply to land and seashore, is an ongoing task.

The Treaty can't be ignored or made to disappear, enshrined as it is in the law, very clearly since the 1975 Act and in at least 32 subsequent pieces of legislation. Equally important for us, the document forms a spiritual covenant through promises made by our forebears and never forgotten by Maori. To break those long standing promises is to erode the moral foundation of the nation and undermine the ethical basis of Pakeha settlement in New Zealand, along with all sorts of other agreements, covenants and contracts. The Treaty properly honoured provides us all with a cornerstone that is the envy of other nations.

Self determination is the issue, not ethnic privilege. Government schemes giving preferential treatment to Maori account for less than 2% of the national budgets on health

and education. The evidence for such preference being effective in addressing huge socio-economic disparities is overwhelming, compared to the failure of policies that treat everyone the same. Many groups other than Maori including Pacific Islanders enjoy special access in order to achieve equity and advancement. To reduce the needs of the most needy in such ways is in everyone's interest.

Hobson's words at Waitangi "He iwi tahi tatou - We are one people" needs to be translated with great care. There are always several peoples, sometimes working as one, even within Maoridom. We live respectfully and creatively with differences of status, responsibility, history and culture. To argue we should simply be one people begs the question – which people? And on whose terms?

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