

One of the amusing parts of living in Nelson is the beginning of the year when we have two anniversary weekends, one after the other. This weekend we commemorate the most important event for our nation, the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the day when a covenant-treaty was signed between Māori and the British Crown. This was the first and only time that the British Empire entered into such an agreement with an indigenous people.

As Christians and especially as Anglicans, Te Tiriti o Waitangi is an important document for us to understand and uphold because of the Christian context from which it came. Since 1814, when the first Anglican CMS missionaries were invited to Aotearoa by Chief Ruatara and arrived in the Bay of Islands on Christmas Day, the Christian Gospel was well received by the Māori people and the Gospel message had a significant impact on Māori culture. Especially as the Christian message spread from Māori to Māori.

When it came to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Anglican CMS Missionaries were instrumental in its translation from English into Te Reo and in encouraging Chiefs to sign - all in order to protect Māori rights and wellbeing. What is clear when you read about this subject is that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is more than a legal document. It was written and understood by Māori as a spiritual covenant, a sacred document, a mutual agreement between two parties – primarily two Christian parties - of partnership and protection, so that in signing this covenant, Māori and Pakeha were to be all equal under God.

But as history shows us, it was the settlers and the Crown who did not honour this agreement, which even today has significant impacts on Māori health and wellbeing. Even in Nelson we had our part to play, with the first land-related conflict in the Wairau Incident and in sending 200 troops to fight at Parihaka. As a church, we also need to acknowledge that our concerns were overtaken by the needs of arriving settlers to the detriment of Māori, something that the Anglican Church has tried to redress with the new 1992 constitution emphasizing bicultural partnership and bicultural development.

I do believe there is a changing tide in Aotearoa New Zealand with a greater recognition of Te Reo and understanding of Māori world view (mātauranga) that is beneficial for us all.

Let us not forget that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not just part of the Māori story in this land, it is our story, especially for those of us who are part of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. As Archbishop Sir David Moxon states, *The Anglican church in these Islands has an historic, moral and spiritual responsibility to see that the covenantal theology in the Treaty signing process continues to be honoured, enacted and lived.* (Huia Come Home, pg 73).

If you would like to know more, can I suggest you read *Huia Come Home*, by Jay Ruka (Dean of Taranaki Cathedral).

God Bless,  
Graham