

REFLECTION 4 FEBRUARY 2024 “PEOPLE OF TE TIRITI”

By Rev Dr Fei Taule’ale’ausumai

Given that we celebrate Waitangi Day on Tuesday it is fitting that we consider what it means for us today? In the light of the new coalition government, we have already witnessed the huge unrest and backlash from many New Zealanders at the blatant re-colonising whitewashing of our race relations. It is a really sensitive subject for many, some not wanting to go there others not wanting to give preferential treatment to the indigenous people of Aotearoa, others like the leader of one of the coalition partners who is himself Tangata Whenua, stating that Maori are not the indigenous people of Aotearoa. In Australia they call their indigenous people the First nations. So, Maori having paddled their waka from Hawaiki nui, Hawaiki roa and Hawaiki pamamao were the first people to arrive in Aotearoa naming it the Land of the Long White cloud. The other coalition leader insisting that we are one nation and there should be the same treatment for everyone. That’s quite rich given that the majority of people in our prisons are Maori, the majority of people living under the poverty line are Maori, those who will die early deaths are Maori. The statistics are similar with indigenous people who have been colonized the world over. The displacement of people, the theft of land and identity is a common theme for all of them.

So, what! Do we just continue to stand by and watch in happen? I know SAOTT have been very active in its protest and solidarity with Tangata Whenua and honouring the Treaty. It seems that today we need to again be in solidarity with the people of this land as tangata o te tiriti.

As a country we have difficulties expressing our national identity. Waitangi Day is witness to that. For many people Waitangi Day is just a holiday. At the time Aotearoa NZ were debating over the mondayfication of public holidays which then raised a host of new problems for employers about paying time and half for which day, the actual day or the Monday or both? For others Waitangi Day is associated with protest. We struggle to come together around this day which symbolises the birth of our nation through the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

In the words of Rev. Dr. Allan Davidson who I had the privilege of studying Church history under he says: “We are living at a time for which there are no

blueprints for the kind of society and world we are becoming. Part of our struggle in New Zealand is in learning to live with our past in the present in a way which helps us go into the future celebrating our diversity and affirming our unity. Another part of our struggle as a country is with the religious, cultural, ethnic, economic diversity that provides us with much richness, but challenges us with new understandings of toleration and inclusiveness.

In 1840 the church through its missionaries helped make possible the Treaty of Waitangi. Hone Heke, the first chief to sign, even went as far as to describe the Treaty as a covenant, that is, what was agreed to in 1840 was invested with sacred character. Henry Williams in 1844, during the war in the north had 400 copies of the Treaty printed and distributed among Maori. As someone deeply involved in its signing, Williams described the Treaty as the Maori "'Magna Charta" whereby their lands and rights would be secure to them'.

On Sunday the 9 February 1840, New Zealand's first Governor, William Hobson, attended a church service at Christchurch, Russell, in the Bay of Islands. The preacher was the Head of the Church Missionary Society, the Rev'd Henry Williams. Williams took as his subject 'the duties and opportunities of government'. Unfortunately, nothing of his sermon survives. For Williams his topic would have seemed quite appropriate. He was a minister of a church with special rights and privileges by law in England. The Church of England, as an established church, was comfortable with its role as 'chaplain to the nation'. There was no ambiguity for Williams when Hobson asked him to help translate the Treaty of Waitangi into Maori. Williams and many of the other Church Missionary Society missionaries took an active role in securing Maori adherence to the Treaty. 'Missionary influence' in securing acceptance for the Treaty 'was significant simply because many Māori trusted the missionaries' good intentions'.

Historian Michael King commented in an interview that one of the lucky things for New Zealand 'was that we were formally colonised at a time when the evangelicals were in charge of the British Government, and we got a treaty. And that treaty, for all its imperfections, was in the words of Michael King, motivated by humanitarian concerns.' In 1840 the churches through Anglican and Methodist missionaries, with the Catholic Bishop, Jean Baptiste Pompallier having a walk on part, were centre stage in helping lay the foundations for the New Zealand nation.

Of course, many protest today that the Treaty is a fraud for these reasons: In brief, Maori in the first article of the Treaty ceded their 'kawanatanga' (governorship), or in the English text 'sovereignty' to the British Crown. The second article affirmed the 'tino rangatiratanga' (sovereignty) or 'entire supremacy' of 'their Lands and Estates, Forests, Fisheries and other properties' and made provision for them to sell land. The third article of the Treaty guaranteed Maori the rights and privileges of British subjects. The meaning of all this is very contentious and complicated by different versions and two languages which don't always say the same thing. Talking about current issues to do with the Treaty is like crossing a minefield blindfolded.

Michael King in his Penguin History concludes that for New Zealand

The bicultural reality remains a given, about which all New Zealanders need to be informed, and through which they will have to continue to negotiate - as national governments, as local governments, as community organisations and as individuals.

Finding ways to negotiate and enter into dialogue requires imagination and courage. Throwing words or mud at each other will only cause further discontent. Confrontation provokes confrontation. We need to take seriously our history and be willing to enter into dialogue with one another and find creative ways in which there can be a win / win situation.

According to former Minister of Pacific People's Aupito William Sio, many of us are interpreting the recent Government rhetoric as aiming to devalue the worth of Maori as people, devalue the worth of Maori taonga. Te reo Maori, tikanga, and devalue the meaning and legal foundation Te Tiriti o Waitangi plays, for selfishly short-term political gain.

Political focus is short-term, from election to election, whilst the view of Maori who focus on whanau wellbeing is long-term and intergenerational. A conversation on Nationhood and Identity, based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation, requires leadership. It requires good leadership, Not fear, or hatred, or leadership that whines.

Sio continues to say, we require leadership that is searching for wisdom, for a new vision. Leadership that will listen to the whisperings of their ancestors, connecting back to their Turangawaewae, connecting and listening to the spirits of the environment. I call this he says in accordance with my Samoan lens, Sailiga o le Tofa Mamao – 'In search of wisdom and vision'.

This is the right time to seal up the outcome of our conversation in a legislative form that may be similar to a Constitution of Aotearoa.

One that is fit for purpose and following the call from the heavenly constellations Matariki Kainga hokia, the call to return to our home, the call to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi as our base and foundation.

Our readings from the Hebrew bible are a popular text when Samoan's gather Psalm 133 verse 1, "How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live in harmony! Romans 12:18 "Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody".

The first paragraph of our St. Andrew's mission statement I believe sums up really what our country should be aiming to achieve. "Wherever you are on your (faith) journey, wherever you have come from and wherever you are going to, whatever you believe, whatever you do not believe, you are welcome here. And we can add in this country.

Admittedly, from day one the coalition government have taken this country back into the stone age. The country sits by while 3 men share their pet projects with the nation, articulating out loud things that they have always mumbled under their breath in opposition and also outside of parliament. It's not always good to voice those silent thoughts out loud without considering the implications and impact it will have on race relations, national identity and harmonious relationships of peace and a nation choosing to live with justice and integrity. For me as a Tangata o te Moana, a person of the Pacific, it is my place to stand with tangata whenua as my tuakana to put a stop to what is happening to our country at the moment. It's a travesty. Nga mihi.