

“Glory and grief” a sermon for Waitangi Day preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin on Sunday 6 February 2022. The readings were Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5:1-11.

There are times when the Church has a special opportunity to choose what is good.

Years ago, I heard the story of how during the Japanese occupation of Korea, the Korean church had so stood with the people, that people came to see it as one of their own, and from that credibility the church grew. The church had been regarded as foreign, an import from overseas, but its reputation changed. And so it was that the Korean Church in the 20th century grew from 5% of the population to 55%.

Of course, if the church had stood with the people in order to grow, nothing would have happened. The important point is the solidarity and consequential credibility.

182 years after the Treaty was signed, the church has again reached such a moment in New Zealand, not for the first time, but certainly a moment where it can choose solidarity with the people.

More than any other institution in our nation, the church has a special responsibility to ensure that the principles of the Treaty are honoured, and that involves standing up and standing out.

It would be easy to go with folk who speak of te reo Maori being thrust down their throats. It would be easy to go with folk who talk about us being one people and no one should be advantaged over other people. It would be easy to go with folk who use the language of apartheid and separation. It would be easy to speak of Maori needing to get over it. I hear these phrases. They are not for us. How good that people in retirement villages are learning te reo. How good that leaders are recognising the place of tangata whenua.

In the early years of the church in New Zealand, the Methodist Church stood as a mission church alongside the Catholics and Anglicans. The Methodist Church was one of the most significant Maori churches in the country. Then numbers dropped dramatically. Methodist historians say that it happened when during the disputes over Maori land in particular places, the Methodist Church sided with settlers, whereas the Catholics and Anglicans at least argued about how best to respond.

The church in New Zealand has reached such a moment of choice again. What is different is that this time, many churches are exploring what it means to be bicultural and how to live out the principles of the Treaty. This exploration doesn't fit within our old categories. Among the most active are what used to be called the most conservative, including here in Dunedin the Elim Church.

So we come to this time. Dare I say - Knox Church has come to this time.

The Treaty of Waitangi arose from the highest of motives, from an inspiring vision. There was an Isaiah kind of vision, high and lofty.

In the 1830s in Britain, there were networks of Christian parliamentarians and public servants. They pressured the British parliament to abolish slavery. The majority of people in the Colonial Office were also part of these influential Christian groups.

One of those was James Stephen who was permanent undersecretary. Firm in his convictions, he opposed Wakefield's planned settlement of New Zealand.

Stephen drafted the instructions given to William Hobson when he was sent to New Zealand in 1840. They included these words ...

All dealings with the Aborigines for their Lands must be conducted on the same principles of sincerity, justice, and good faith as must govern your transactions with them for the recognition of Her Majesty's Sovereignty in the Islands. Nor is this all. They must not be permitted to enter into any Contracts in which they might be ignorant and unintentional authors of injuries to themselves. You will not, for example, purchase from them any Territory the retention of which by them would be essential, or highly conducive, to their own comfort, safety or subsistence. The acquisition of Land by the Crown for the future Settlement of British Subjects must be confined to such Districts as the Natives can alienate without distress or serious inconvenience to themselves. To secure the observance of this rule will be one of the first duties of their official protector.

What a hope!

The Church was directly involved in the signing. Chiefs often signed the Treaty because they trusted the missionaries who encouraged them to sign. The experience of my own iwi was typical. After the signing at Waitangi, it was conveyed through the motu and late March early April, 1500 Maori gathered at Port Waikato, but the official bringing the Treaty was delayed. The local missionary, Robert Maunsell, realised that the people would disperse without the Treaty being signed. He had a

copy of an English version which he explained to the people so 32 chiefs signed, including two of the few women who signed.

More than that, because of the missionaries, Māori saw the Treaty in spiritual and Christian terms. The te reo name for the Treaty is 'Te Kawenata o Waitangi' ('the Covenant of Waitangi').

It is believed that Hobson said to each signing chief "He iwi tahi tatou" ("we are one people"). The missionary, Henry Williams, had come up with those words from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Dame Joan Metge says it means "We two (many) peoples together make a nation".

So the treaty wasn't simply signatures on a piece of paper. It was a spiritual and political covenant, a marrying of two peoples, expecting both to benefit, working together with their shared energy and resources.

The vision of unity was soon betrayed. From about 1843, the treaty seemed of little importance. People like Henry Williams who helped transcribe it, were dismayed at the failure of the Crown and its representative to honour it. Clear breaches were ignored and armed confrontations escalated.

The Maori voice was silenced. The treaty was forgotten, lost and nibbled at by rats. In 1877 a judge declared it "a simple nullity" because 'the savages' who signed it could never have understood what they were doing.

A long line of advocates including missionaries and later Maori prophets and kings achieved only a token hearing when they raised concerns about the obvious betrayals and injustices. When Maori began to resist, organize, question, challenge and pull out surveyor's pegs, military campaigns were mounted by successive governors and laws were enacted to support dispossession, including confiscating 'rebel' land in the richest parts of the country.

But Maori were resilient. Despite being worn down by war and deception new visionary leadership set them on a road to restore their rightful place. The Treaty became the heart of the Maori renaissance of the 1970s when a new generation of activists could no longer tolerate the duplicity.

Fifty years later, that renaissance is bearing fruit. In a moment we will hear what it means in the realm of social work. But we could equally be talking about law or education or health science or theology.

We at Knox have come to this moment, of standing up and standing for partnership, resisting the politicising, resisting the dismissive slogans, choosing solidarity.

The vision of Isaiah can touch our lips, and win our hearts again, as we live the Treaty with our family, our friends, our colleagues, our neighbours, our church.

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made known in Jesus, given in grace*



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