

## Waitangi, 6 February 2020

Homily of Cardinal John Dew

Interdenominational church service at Te Whare Rūnanga

Tīhei mauriora!

Ka poua te Pou tuatahi

Ko te Ao me ona mea katoa;

Ka poua te Pou tuarua

Ko te Tangata hei kaitiaki mo te Ao;

Ka poua te Pou tuatoru

Ko Tama-nui o te Ao katoa;

He Atua! He Tangata!

Whano, whano! Tu mai te Ripeka!

Haumi e! Hui e! Taiki e!

That mihi opened the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference statement in 1990, 150 years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi :

*Life has three signposts:*

*the world and all living things;*

*the people, guardians of the world;*

*the divine and human Son, the Saviour. Come let us go to the cross standing before us.*

Today we are gathered in the footprints of those who met here 180 years ago to form the partnership of te Tiriti o Waitangi. My tūpuna in faith Bishop Pompallier was present. I am honoured to follow in his footsteps.

Bishop Pompallier wasn't necessarily expected, or even perhaps wanted 180 years ago, not so much because he was Catholic, but because he was French. However, he was welcomed, and he made an important contribution to the day. As the debates and discussions took place he later described his thoughts : ***One question interested me deeply, it was that of religious freedom, about which no one in anyway seemed to trouble themselves.***

Bishop Pompallier addressed Governor Hobson, asking that religious freedom be respected. In response, Hobson affirmed "*Ko ngā whakapono katoa i Ingarani, o ngā Weteriana, o Roma, me te ritenga Māori, e tikanga ngatahitia e ia - the several faiths of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome and also Māori custom shall alike be protected.*"

HERE at Waitangi – on 6th February 1840 there was a Hope, wishes, a vision of what Aotearoa New Zealand could be.

Catholics have a hymn entitled "***Here in this place.....***

*Here in this place, new light is streaming,  
now is the darkness vanished away.  
See, in this space, our fears and our dreamings,  
brought here to you in the light of this day.*

We could say that HERE in this place in 1840 our predecessors brought their fears and their dream for partnerships and right relationships into the light of day, they hoped that darkness was vanishing. HERE in this space fears and dreamings were brought before God.

HERE in this same place we have heard the Gospel we know as the Beatitudes. I read recently that someone was saying that the language of the Beatitudes should NOT be rendered "***Blessed are the poor in heart, blessed are the Peacemakers, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. Blessed are the merciful....***

That perhaps a better translation might be "***you are in the right place if you are poor in spirit and trusting always in God: if you are working for peace, you are in the right place; if you are hungering and thirsting for justice and teaching others to do the same, you are in the right place.***"

We think of the Beatitudes as a Spirituality and they are, they are a guide and a challenge for our lives. However, they are also like a geography, because they tell us where to stand.

The place for us to stand in Aotearoa New Zealand is where people need MERCY, where they need to be treated with GENTLENESS, where all HUNGER AND THIRST for what is right for ALL people, where we show mercy – the face of God to ALL.

Those gathered here in 1840 perhaps did not, and could not, have anticipated all the faiths that would be represented in Aotearoa New Zealand 180 years later. In the spirit of te Tiriti o Waitangi, in the shoes of Bishop Pompallier I believe it is time to recommit ourselves to protecting the faiths of all who live here: of Māori custom and spirituality, of the different Christian denominations, of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Bahai'i and many other faiths; and also the freedom of religion and conscience of those who profess no faith. We are all brothers and sisters, made by God. We thank God for our diversity. We thank God for New Zealand's tradition of religious freedom and equality

However, as we stand here and reflect on religious diversity and religious freedom, we do so in the context of Aotearoa today.....remembering that less than a year ago there was horror and outrage at the deaths of 51 of our Muslim brothers and sisters killed as they were at prayer in their mosques, places which should have been places of sanctuary for them. A couple of days later I was honoured to stand alongside Islamic and other religious leaders when we used interfaith prayer to open a session of Parliament on 19 March last year.

There has been much discussion in recent years, which has often focused around two questions as if they were the only options – are we a secular country, in which religion is not part of the public sphere? Or are we a Christian country in which only one form of public prayer should be privileged?

It is good that we look HERE to Waitangi, where in these first sacred discussions about the way to live in partnership with each other, my predecessor Bishop Pompallier asked and received a guarantee of religious freedom and protection.

Our New Zealand tradition, since 1840 and since the first Parliamentary debate in 1854 is of religious diversity and religious freedom. I find it very moving that at a time when Christian denominations in other parts of the world were still learning to live and work with each other, at least three members of the House of Representatives in 1854 spoke of the need to ensure inclusion of people of Jewish faith. The first motion passed by the House of Representatives was to recognise “perfect political equality in all religious denominations.” This is a heritage that is worth remembering.

It is religious tolerance, religious inclusion and religious acceptance that is our heritage. We honour and celebrate that today.

I am a Christian, I preach Christ, who offers and brings salvation to all humanity. Christians do not want to be less than we are, we do not want to be silenced or marginalised, to be told that the faith that gives us life is just a private matter. Neither do we want any other religious group, or people of goodwill who do not identify with any religion, to be marginalised, silenced or told their beliefs are only private matters.

Other words of the Hymn I referred to say;

***“Not in the dark of buildings confining,  
not in some heaven, light years away,  
but here in this place, the new light is shining;  
now is the Kingdom, now is the day.”***

HERE in this place, HERE in Waitangi, here in Aotearoa as we re-live 180 years ago a New light is shining, Now is the Kingdom, Now is the day.

ENDS