

SUMMARY:**Part 1 Historical foundations**

The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) – founding document of New Zealand guarantees Religious freedom
Catholic Church statements (1989 and 1995) continue this theme
NZ Bill of Rights Act (1990) affirms the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion ...
Human Rights Commission published The NZ Statement on Religious Diversity (2007)

Part 2 Religious collaboration today , e.g. in mutual respect, practical projects such as night shelter services, environmental projects, advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable

Part 3 Threats to Religious freedom, e.g. bioethics, social concerns, responding to refugees

SPOKEN TEXT (8 mins)**Introduction and Part 1 Historical foundations**

One of the symbols of New Zealand is the KIWI ... the bird, - not the fruit, or shoe polish! It is nocturnal, flightless, protected as it is in danger of extinction ... what a great national symbol!

Well, I am one of them, who has taken flight at your gracious invitation to be part of this symposium. Thank you for this privilege, and your very warm welcome to Salt Lake City. I would like to reflect with you on interreligious freedom and collaboration, with some examples of current practice in New Zealand, and some of the challenges that face us on the road ahead.

The Treaty of Waitangi (signed in 1840 between the Maori people and the Crown) is the founding document of New Zealand. The fourth article of this Treaty of Waitangi guarantees religious freedom. The article was added to the Maori text of the Treaty at the request of Roman Catholic Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier. The translation reads: "The Governor says that the several faiths

(beliefs) of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome and also of Maori custom shall alike be protected by him".

We need to recall the historical context: No love lost between Catholic Bishop Pompallier and the British colonisers ... the memory of Waterloo (1815) was as fresh as yesterday.

The fourth article was designed more to protect the rights of Roman Catholics in the face of a dominant Anglican and Protestant majority. Over the years it has been interpreted as an article protecting religious freedom in general, and in particular the religion and customs of the indigenous Maori people.

The Catholic Church still continues to take this responsibility seriously. Church statements in 1989 and 1995, at the time of the sesquicentenary of the Treaty continue this theme. The Treaty is described as a covenant, with all the depth of the biblical notion of covenant. This entails a commitment to reconciliation and the restoration of confiscated land ... sadly we also have a long history of betrayal of the fine principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. This covenant is also "the moral basis for the presence of all other peoples in NZ" (1990 doc) ... all other immigrants and refugees who have arrived since 1840 ... and we have had to remind our Prime Minister of that recently!

New Zealand is a multi-cultural, secular, democratic society, just over 4.5 million ... a small city by American standards! Freedom of religious belief is guaranteed by law, e.g. NZ Bill of Rights Act (1990)

Over half of New Zealanders identify themselves as being Christian – the main denominations being Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Pentecostal.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in numbers of non-Christian. The landscape of religion is changing. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, make up the most significant minority religions.

Approximately one third of the population indicate they don't have a religion ... and they too claim religious freedom!

Part 2 RELIGIOUS COLLABORATION

The days of fierce intolerance of other faiths and religions fortunately are over. I am not sure this is necessarily out of respect ... it could be more a question of indifference or apathy. Religion - so what? Sport is much more important!

The most visible forms of religious collaboration are in social services and practical projects such as night shelter services, environment projects, advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable, refugee resettlement.

The picture is encouraging; especially in the light of the threats to religious freedom I would now like to mention:

Part 3 THREATS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NZ:

Bioethics:

Redefinition of Marriage Act, 2014 (get on with it!) Su'a William Sio, Labour Party member for Mangere was exemplary in his opposition to the Bill, and in the advocacy he did with other faith communities and denominations, to ensure that ministers of religion who are also marriage celebrants would

not be forced to conduct “same sex marriages”. The storm has abated somewhat - the numbers are not as high as originally anticipated (except for “marriage tourism”, whereby mainly Australians come to NZ to get married under NZ law)

Obligation on doctors and nurses to assist at abortion - the law allowing abortions in NZ was passed in 1977 (up to 20 weeks, with two certifying consultants); up till now, there has generally been provision for doctors and nurses who refuse to participate in such procedures; there has recently been controversy around the question of parental consent for a girl under the age of 16 to have an abortion

End of life choice Bill: earlier this year, a young lawyer with terminal brain cancer took her case to court to ensure that her doctor, if asked to assist with euthanasia, would not be prosecuted. The court upheld the current law, by which the doctor would be prosecuted; but it has reignited the debate around the legalising of euthanasia.

Eugenics and development: there is a certain pressure on some development agencies - and in some cases they willingly agree with this - to include and to enforce birth control in exchange for development aid.

Social concerns :

Easter trading (currently shops are closed on Good Friday and Easter Sunday as well Christmas Day): This was originally a protection of family time, but it is an indicator of social change that there is increasing demand for 24-hour shopping.

High rates of incarceration - sadly disproportionate among the poor and ethnic minorities, including Maori and Pacific peoples. Need for social change and value of restorative justice ... but also care for those in prison. Earlier this year the LDS and Catholic Church signed a memorandum of understanding about working together in prison chaplaincy.. That we would alert each other to members of our respective faiths in need of chaplaincy services. I think you would appreciate the humour around the discovery that Catholics do not hold a monopoly on the prison population! Both Catholics and Mormons in prison have a strong sense of faith identity ... which at its best is recognised as having potential for repentance and rehabilitation.

Welcome of refugees: The crisis in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Europe is felt as far away as New Zealand. The current NZ government quote of UNHCR refugees of 750 has not changed in over 30 years ... and there is growing pressure on the government to increase that quota, to allow for an emergency quota in order to receive some of the millions of people currently on the move. There has been a mixed reaction: solidarity and generosity on one hand, and on the other hand, fear and exclusion. Of greatest concern is the suggestion: “Christians only may apply” - a phrase that very thinly covers a latent Islamophobia in some sections of the population. The New Zealand bishops have spoken out about this in the name of religious freedom and our country’s commitment to religious diversity.

These challenges stress the need for all people of faith to work together to ensure that the dignity - the transcendent dignity of the human person in society - is upheld. There is a wide consensus among religious faiths that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God the Creator, the ultimate source of all life and love.

For those of us who are Christian this is framed within our belief in God as Trinity ... a relational God, and a God who invites us to live deeply in that relationship with God - and with all other people and the whole of creation.

The road lies ahead of us.

Thank you.