

IS THERE A NEW ZEALAND IDENTITY?

Summary of main points

New Zealand is not alone in seeking to establish its 'identity' – but the question gets raised particularly around election time.

Defining cultural identity is about trying to identify a shared set of values of perspectives.

For some people, the defining feature of our shared identity is our close connection and affinity to the land. For others, it's our love of sport – particularly rugby. For yet others, what defines us is our pioneering, can-do spirit, our 'no.8 wire' resourcefulness, our laid-back approach to life.

There may be a problem with seeking a universal, all-encompassing definition. Any definition may tell us more about the person doing the defining than help us to identify a shared 'Kiwi' identity.

We cannot talk meaningfully about a New Zealand identity without an awareness of our history – which has been shaped by an attempt to determine whether, as was asserted by Hobson at the signing of the Treaty, 'we are all one people'.

Like questions of identity, to which it is inextricably linked, the Treaty comes to the fore at election time. The Treaty is about more than 'settling grievances': for Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was seen as a covenant, which is a model of relationship central to the Bible.

Christians might see the Treaty as analogous to another significant covenant, the marriage relationship. Historically the relationship between the Crown and Māori has not been a healthy one.

Christians recognize that dealing with the past – including showing repentance for wrongdoings – is vital to any process of 'moving on'. Genuine repentance involves developing a new form of relationship going into the future.

So negotiating Treaty settlements is not something to be done with a view to leaving the Treaty behind, but the first part of a journey toward building a more healthy partnership between the parties. Genuine partnership involves both parties nourishing and sustaining each other. It involves compromise, not 'winners' and 'losers'.

There is much in our history of race-relations of which we should be proud.

New Zealand culture is shaped by our geographical isolation, and by immigration - which is creating a genuinely diverse and multi-cultural society reflected in, among other things, changing patterns of religious affiliation. Some would say we are no longer a 'Christian' nation and see immigration as a 'threat', although the Bible says that 'strangers' can bring blessing and redemption to their new land.

New Zealanders could be described as 'sojourners' because so many of us are always on the move! Again, the Bible affirms such a spirit – and Christians are described as 'aliens' and 'strangers' and members of the global body of Christ.

Questions to consider

1. What do you think it means to be a 'New Zealander'?
2. How would you define your 'New Zealand-ness'?
3. Is there a New Zealand identity, and, if so, what is it dependent upon? Place of birth? Ethnicity? Length of residence? Sharing a set of values and way of looking at the world?
4. It's suggested here that three of the defining elements of a New Zealander identity are our commitment to partnership, our warm hospitable welcome to others and our sojourning spirit. Do you agree or disagree? Are there other shared defining elements of a New Zealand identity?
5. Do you agree that our history is important for understanding our identity?
6. Do you agree with Hobson's claim in 1840 that 'we are all one people'? Are we now and have we been historically?
7. How do you view the suggestion that the Treaty of Waitangi should be understood as a covenant, analogous to marriage?
8. How centrally do you think the Treaty should feature in our national life today?
9. The *whakatauki* (Māori proverb) states: '*Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi - With your basket of knowledge and my basket of knowledge all the people will thrive*'. What are the fruits from our respective baskets (Māori and Pakeha) which will lead to the nourishment and sustaining of all, and which are the rotten fruit that need to be discarded?
10. Do you think that, historically, the partnership between the Crown and Māori has been unhealthy? If so, how might it be improved?
11. Are Māori seats in Parliament necessary or a historical anachronism? Should Māori representation be proportional or is a 50-50 balance more truly reflective of the original intention of the Treaty?
12. Should distinct Māori institutions be adopted into areas of New Zealand society where they do not exist at present?
13. Do you agree with affirmative action programmes to enable Māori to catch up in areas where they traditionally do badly – or should all people be treated the same, regardless of ethnicity?
14. Should the learning of Te Reo be made compulsory in the public school curriculum?
15. Do you view New Zealand becoming a multi-cultural society as a positive or negative thing?
16. Would you like to see more or less immigration?
17. Should New Zealand welcome more asylum-seekers and refugees than the approximately 1250 we currently do? Why / Why not?
18. Should New Zealand actively seek to raise its population to stimulate economic growth?
19. In what ways could the kingdom values of partnership, hospitality and sojourning, integral to Christian identity but also perhaps to our shared identity as New Zealanders, be practically lived out in our lives both individually and corporately?
20. Are you worried that we are no longer a 'Christian' nation? Were we ever? Is that important? What does the term 'Christian' in this context mean?