

Opinion - Sharon Evers' programme 25 March 83.

I was in the District Court at Kaikohe when the case of disorderly behaviour was heard against nine Christians arrested during the Ecumenical Service in the Waitangi Treaty House grounds on the morning of Waitangi Day this year.

I've read the reactions in the newspapers since they were arrested. The words used are 'disruption' and discourteous 'futile gestures', 'protesters' 'arrogant' and so on. The Anglican Bishop of Wellington even went so far ~~as to~~ ~~to~~ tell a reporter ~~that~~ their action smacked of anarchy.

I heard what Minister of Lands Jonathan Elworthy said on TV about the nine - he called them 'goats' and claimed their actions were 'disgraceful'. I've read his letter to the NCC in which he asks if any disciplinary action was to be taken against them. He thought, and said so publicly, they were guilty even before they appeared in Court.

These nine Christians have caused a stir - they have obviously stirred the national waters.

They have made people angry and caused strong statements.

But those strong statements speak mostly of how naughty they were, that they are protesters (which suggests they are in some way evil).

I have, sadly, come to the conclusion that very few people, including Jonathan Elworthy, have understood what they did and why they did it.

So the court hearing was important. For there - under oath - they have to explain. And it's what I heard and saw in that courtroom I want to give my opinion about.

The nine ordinary Christians spoke with strong conviction of their belief that, as the Churches in New Zealand ~~were~~ involved, through the missionaries, in the preapration of and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi so now the Churches should accept responsibility and be involved in righting the wrongs that Treaty has brought about.

~~Whether you agree there are wrongs to be righted or not doesn't really matter.~~

The point is <sup>wrongs to be righted.</sup> these nine feel with deep conviction that there are <sup>And that's</sup>

what they are on trial about. Not whether you and I agree or disagree with them but what their convictions pushed them to do.

Even the Judge in the case was moved by their testimony. He called it "very moving and very clear". He referred to their action as being of the highest ideals, noblest of ambitions and the worthiest of motivations"

~~These are not criminals.~~ These are people <sup>whose</sup> ~~who~~ conviction led them to take certain actions. Peaceful actions I might say and that has to be said again and again, <sup>for</sup> ~~but~~ I have come to realise that many people assume that if you are arrested you must have been breaking the law or doing something violent.

Their actions were peaceful and - as I heard them testify in Court - <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ done only after much prayer and reflection, because they genuinely believe any observance of the Treaty of Waitangi has to be accompanied by the realisation of what has been done to Maori people in the past and what continues to be done today - ~~and~~ that we Pakeha people, as Christians, need to repent about that before we can claim to be in the right frame of mind to work for creative change in the race relations of this country.

But to get back to the Court.

All but one of the nine were convicted and fined. The Judge, while uttering not one word ~~or hint~~ of criticism about them, <sup>the</sup> ~~or~~ integrity of their action, had to admit that, on the day their actions were, as he said, the antithesis of order and therefore disorderly. And that was th charge - disorderly behaviour. So, in the strict sense of the word, they had to be convicted.

But that's not an end to it.

X I know there will be people all over N.Z. who will breathe a sigh of relief. "Good", they will say, "the court has meted out justice . They have been punished for their crime." I can even hear Christians saying that.

But that's not the end of the matter. For you see the issue is not whether these people violated issues of etiquette by interrupting a Church service. The issue is the churches past and present involvement in how the Treaty of Waitangi is worked and lived out among the people of New Zealand.

And that's the issue we cannot ignore.

# Those nine stood in a long line of tradition at the District Court at Kaikohe.

If you don't believe me grab your Bible and start reading the prophets of the Old Testament. Isaiah, Amos. You read them.

Read what Jesus said. <sup>He spoke against</sup> ~~About~~ the authorities and the need for a new life.

They killed him for saying that = they were so angry.

Why are all the prophets only dead people? Why will people <sup>believe that</sup> ~~accept~~ prophets are only ~~these~~ dead writers in the Bible.

There are prophetic people today. Who say things prophetically today. And, in my opinion, three of those defendants acted in that prophetic tradition in the court at Kaikohe. Gaylene Jackson, Joan Cook and Bronwen Olds spoke in evidence on behalf of the whole group. I was moved by the clarity and the strength of their Christian stand.

In a way how the court decided to punish them for disorderly behaviour was irrelevant.

# They spoke at the Church service on the Treaty House grounds.

Let me read to you what one of them read to that congregation - or rather didn't read - ~~entirely~~ because she was taken away by the <sup>police</sup> ~~police~~ before she had got very far.

And please remember she tried to read this before the service started. She didn't disrupt any service. It hadn't started. As a prophetic warning to that congregation on that day she read from the prophet Amos:

"I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take <sup>no</sup> delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings  
and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
~~But~~ <sup>But instead</sup> let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

Now, in my opinion, there's no way we can ignore that. And instead of shouting

disruption, disgraceful, discipline them we should shout our mouths and think about what that is saying.

I am proud to have met and become friends with nine Christians who pray, reflect and act.

Eight of us have been convicted in the Court at Kaikohe for alleged disorderly behaviour at the Ecumenical Service at Waitangi on February 6th.

Ever since the day we were arrested we have remained firm that the base issue at the heart of our actions is the failure of the Pakeha people of this country to honour their promises in the Treaty of Waitangi.

We took our actions as Christians because God is not neutral; is always on the side of the oppressed and we have no alternative but to stand with Maori people in our struggle for justice.

We are not surprised the court convicted us on the issue of law and order while totally ignoring the issue of justice because the culture of only one