

### Views from the Pews: a translator's view part 3

As some of you are aware I am part of a project working on a new translation of the Bible into Māori. Translating between two languages becomes all the more difficult the greater the difference between the cultures and world views of the societies whose languages these are. Concepts and thus the meaning of words can differ quite markedly. This was and is particularly so in work to translate the Bible from its ancient Judaic context into modern Māori. Fortunately, many of the issues of what words to use to reflect concepts in the biblical world have long been resolved, so for instance the extended meaning of *tapu* as equivalent to English 'holy' has been part of Māori usage for nearly 200 years.

None the less, the present project has been confronted with some interesting problems. The first of these is the name of God. In Hebrew, the name of God is written as YHWH (יהוה). If you look at the top of our magnificent *Te Deum* window above the sanctuary, you will see these four letters inscribed over a triangle signifying the Trinity. However, when reading aloud, Jews replace it with the word 'the Lord'. This is also the policy of the earliest Greek and Latin translations, and the vast majority of English translations. In many English versions, you sometimes see 'Lord' in small capitals; this is the sign that what is in the original text at that point is YHWH.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the name 'Jehovah' was invented, combining the consonants of YHWH, with the vowels of the Hebrew word for 'Lord'. This was adopted in Māori as the name *Ihowā*, which is used in earlier Bible translations. The issue arose for us, as there is now a feeling that out of deference to the Jewish practice of not pronouncing the Divine Name, one should not use a version of it in translations. We did not want to use *Te Ariki* 'the Lord' as this was already in use for those cases where the Hebrew actually says *Adonai* 'the Lord'.

We decided to use *Io*, the name of the single highest divinity in the Māori account of the coming to be of the world. *Io* is described as the 'parent' of all things in heaven and on earth. We felt this fitted particularly well with our treatment of the sections in Genesis 1, where God enlists Earth and Sea almost as co-creators, e.g. vs. 11 'Let the earth produce vegetation...' To emphasise their role as agents at this point, we have used *Papatūānuku* and *Tangaroa*, the 'personifications' of earth and sea in the traditional Māori account.