

The Marists and Maori – Records of a 175 Year Relationship¹

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The history of the Marists and Māori in New Zealand is woven through the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand like a harakeke leaf in a kete.

The Society of Mary (Marists) was founded by Father Jean Claude Colin in France in 1836 and Pope Gregory XVI commissioned them to bring Catholicism to the Western Pacific. The Marist Order consists of ordained priests and professed brothers. It is not to be confused with the Marist teaching brothers who are a separate group who largely arrived later to teach in primary and secondary schools.

The Marists were the first Catholic missionaries to arrive in New Zealand. The Anglican Church missionaries, of course, had arrived 25 years earlier. This article will endeavour to show you something of the relationship with Māori based on the rich collection of records held in the Marist Archives which illustrate the 175 year relationship between the Marists and Māori.

The Marist Archives has a range of virtually all archival media types, including books, files, registers, photographs, maps, plans and architectural drawings, sound recordings (including reel to reel tapes and oral history tapes), glass lantern slides, videos, financial records, personal papers and digital records as well as a large number of objects.

The first group of Marists left France under Bishop Pompallier in 1836 and after a long voyage via Valparaiso, Tahiti, Wallis, Futuna and Sydney arrived in the Hokianga in January 1838 where they established a Mission, which was later moved to the Bay of Islands.

Bishop Pompallier was present at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840 and played a role in the process. On the day before the signing Pompallier cautioned the assembled rangatira against assuming that the British Crown would act in the best interests of Māori. Furthermore he was partly responsible for the fourth article of the Treaty which guaranteed religious freedom and protection of Māori custom.

Pompallier House (as we know) still stands and was the early centre of Catholicism in the far north. Its printing press played an important role in bringing literacy to Māori.

The key to this was a French Catholic layman called Jean Francois Yvert who was recruited to run the Catholic Mission printery in New Zealand.

Before leaving France he purchased all the equipment and supplies required to establish and run a printery. The type he brought with him was able to be adapted to print in Māori, Latin, English and French.

Together with four priests, four brothers, two clerics and some laymen they arrived in the Bay of Islands on 15 June 1841. Records survive of a survey undertaken in 1842 and Yvert issued a strong plea to his confreres that everyone on the Mission should have lessons in Māori and English.

Yvert established the printery at Kororareka in 1842 and trained two Marist Brothers in the art of printing. Together between 1842 and 1850 they printed at least 12 publications totalling well over 30,000 volumes and this against a backdrop of the turbulent 1840s, with war between the British and Kawiti and Hone Heke, etc.

One of their large two printing presses was removed to Whangaroa early in 1845 before Hone Heke attacked Kororareka and returned in 1846. After Yvert's departure from the Bay of Islands, the Gaveaux press found its way down to the Waikato and was used by the Kingitanga movement under King Tawhiao. From 1892 to 1933 it was used to produce the Kingitanga newspaper Te Paki o Matariki. In 1968 it was brought back to Pompallier courtesy of the Māori Queen, Dame Te Atairangikaahu.

Yvert's view on the importance of printing can be summed up in his own phrase: "Books are Teachers".

There were some major differences between these early Catholic missionaries and their Protestant counterparts. Firstly, having taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, it meant they could not own land in their own right, relying on local rangatira to loan them land for their mission stations. By the mid 1840s some of the largest land owners in the north were the Protestant missionaries.

The early Marists took their poverty vows seriously. Ensign Best recalls meeting a Marist priest on the road near Tauranga in 1842:

*"I never remember seeing a more miserable figure – Travel worn, unshaven and unwashed he wore the tri-cornered hat of his Order, his long coat and a kind of black petticoat were tucked up with skirts under the waistband and a pair of old Wellington boots drawn over his trousers. From his neck hung a large crucifix and on his back was a kind of sack containing in every probability all he possessed in the world."*²

Secondly, they were celibate and therefore did not form relationships

with Māori women (nor in fact women at all) – much to the puzzlement of many Māori. They were also French speaking, with Māori as their second language and many who lived in New Zealand all their lives did not learn to speak English all that well.

Some aspects of their approach to Māori were also different. For example, in 1841 Bishop Pompallier wrote in his Instructions for Work on the Missions:

“God does not require European dress from those who want to serve Him – he wants our hearts that is all. It is better to go to heaven wearing your own countries clothes than to go to hell in European clothes.”³

And another example:

“Sometimes the natives insist on bringing their weapons with them to Church and even using them for exercise or recreation. They sometimes like to let off a few rounds of rifle fire. These are all things the Protestant missionaries have forbidden them to do. But this strictness shows little understanding of them – there is no evil in any of this and the Bishop does not forbid it. They are free to continue.”⁴

Many Māori were attracted to the highly ritualistic nature of the Catholic Mass and, given their relationship with their own whakapapa, many were drawn by the whakapapa of the Catholic Popes who traced their lineage back to St Peter.

Lettres Reçues d’Océanie/Letters Received from Oceania

In 2009 a series of 1,365 letters written in French by the early Marist missionaries in Oceania back to the Founder of the Marist Order, Father J.C. Colin, in France was published. They cover the years 1836-1854 and contain a wealth of information about what they experienced in New Zealand and the Pacific. Part of their importance lies in the date range of the letters as they cover a period of time when Māori society was in a great state of flux.

Professor Hugh Laracy (Professor of History at Auckland University) considers them to be the most important single contribution to Pacific history since Professor J.C. Beaglehole edited the journals of Captain James Cook.

They are gradually being translated from the French by scholars from Auckland, Waikato, Victoria and Canterbury Universities and other French speakers from around the country. Those which have been translated to

date are available to bona fide scholars on the Marist Studies website: www.mariststudies.org.nz. As an example, an edited extract from a letter from Father Chouvet SM describing how Māori in Opotiki went fishing in 1845 reads:⁵

"I wanted to accompany Maori in all their fishing operations. So joining a group of 25-30 we got into a waka which was the dug out trunk of a tree. We all paddled and distanced ourselves about 4 or 5 hundred paces in a straight line from the shore.

During all this time two strong men were throwing overboard armfuls of net which had little stones attached to it at one side which pulled it to the seabed.

Having got this distance from shore we turned left and travelled roughly the same distance. We turned the prow of the canoe for a second time and returned to shore having made a square.

At the place of departure one man held one end of the net by a thick rope and the other end which remained in the canoe came back with it.

This manoeuvre finished, the men involved divided. Half of the fishermen went to one end of the net, the other half to the other end.

Divided like this, the fishermen pulled at the ropes of the net. After 20 or 25 minutes it was entirely brought back to land. The middle of the net which was 10 to 15 times wider than the other Parts came last and a crowd of fish were gathered and imprisoned there.

Where there are only 1,000 to 1,500 kilograms of fish the Maoris say "he toru toru", "only a few"! I say to you without exaggeration imagine the kitchen of your house covered with fish two feet deep you will get some idea of the quantity of the fish I have seen. Often 15 different species are caught at once. Anyway I can guarantee you that I have seen catches of 2,000 to 3,000 kilograms of fish caught in this way."

In addition to these first volumes of the Letters Received from Oceania covering up to 1854, there are literally thousands more letters in the Marist Archives in Rome ranging from 1854 to the present, which have yet to be accessed and translated.

Father Catherin Servant SM

Father Servant was a Māori Mission priest stationed in the Hokianga from 1838 to 1842. A manuscript written by him in French was discovered in the Marist Archives in Rome and translated into English. Fluent in Māori, Father Servant wrote what is described as an "unprejudiced account of the manners and customs of Māori". It was published as the book 'Customs and Habits of the New Zealanders 1838-1842' in 1973. These early reports were recorded during a time of great transition for Māori

and are of great value to historians and ethnographers.

Māori Missions

Initially the Marists established a Mission Station in the Hokianga, later moving to the Bay of Islands.

By the end of 1843 there were about 38 Marist missionaries in New Zealand and, except for a small group in Akaroa, all were based from Rotorua northwards.

By 1846, Bishop Pompallier reported to Rome that the Marists had baptised 5,000 Māori and that 25,000 were receiving instruction.

The Marists' work in the north was seriously affected by the decision in 1850 to move all Marists south into the new Diocese of Wellington. Many Māori communities were left in limbo by this decision. For example, the Rotorua community which boasted 1200 adherents in 1850 was not visited again by a Catholic priest till 1861.

These early missionaries could have had a much greater influence had there been more of them, had they been better resourced and had the Land Wars not occurred. The Land Wars destroyed much of the good will which had been built up between the Marist missionaries and Māori.

Māori missions were established in Hawkes Bay, where the rangatira Puhara loaned the Marists land at Pakowhai.

Puhara was defeated in battle and the Marists moved to Meeanee where they established vineyards. They moved their seminary for training priests to Greenmeadows.

One point that must be remembered is that the Marist presence in New Zealand was a Mission to Māori. It was only later when European settlers and soldiers (many of whom were Irish Catholics) came to New Zealand that the priests started to minister to the spiritual needs of Europeans.

During the Land Wars of the 1860s, some had real qualms of conscience about whether to support their Māori congregations or their fellow Europeans who, after all, were largely English. As might be expected the French clergy had a somewhat different perspective on the British colonisation of New Zealand than the dominant colonisers.

Most of the early French Marists spoke fluent Māori and closely shared in the daily lives of their congregations. Many were keen observers of Māori life and customs and wrote detailed reports of their observations back to France.

The principal Māori Missions on the West Coast of the North Island were at Hiruharama (Jerusalem) and Pukekarakā (Ōtaki).

Father Lampila (Hone Rapira) arrived in Whanganui in 1852 and tradition has it that he was tacitly supported by Te Pehi Turoa, the principal rangatira on the river who had strong links with the Waikato and Taranaki. Together with Brother Elie Regis they built flour mills along the river. There was a suspicion in Government at this time that there was a connection between papists and disloyalty to the British Crown. Father Lampila was even accused of raising the French flag on the river and had to face a Government inquiry. There is ample evidence that there were strong links to the Kingite movement. In August 1862, King Potatau Mautauera became a Catholic but later in 1864 renounced Catholicism in favour of the new prophetic movement.

During the Land Wars, Brother Euloge was killed at the battle of Moutoa Island on the Whanganui River while supporting his congregation. Father Rolland came in for praise for his courage in tending the wounded during a battle and had a bullet hole shot in his hat.

Father Jean Marie Vibaud (Pa Wiripo) was a Marist priest who spent seven years from 1907 to 1914 at Hiruharama on the Whanganui River and another four years in Whanganui itself. Such was the respect that he gained, he was inducted into the Whare Waananga on the river. His writings have been used in several books and in claims by iwi to the Whanganui River. An entry in his notebook reads:

*"Canoes were the only way of access to the Whanganui fastness. And to this day one may see in the soft papa cliffs the holes made by the poles of successive generations of canoe polers. With the advent of European steamers the native canoe was abandoned and the poling holes became the convenient homes of kingfishers and river ducks. And the present day Whanganui Māori still watches the ancient poling holes during the nesting season. Indeed the River-bank nesting birds have an uncanny way of foreseeing the height to be reached by the highest spring flood. Year after year thus flood height varies and year after year, the nests are built accordingly."*⁶

Thus the people of the river were amazingly able to predict the behaviour of the river for the coming winter and spring.

Records in the Marist Archives include correspondence and notebooks from Father Vibaud on aspects of Māori history, language, lore and teachings, Mission history and education. It is understood by the Marists that books containing certain sacred information were consigned to the waters of the Whanganui River by Father Vibaud when he left the river for good.

Pukekaraka/Otaki

Arguably the most successful of the early Catholic Māori Missions was that established in 1842 at Pukekaraka Marae at Otaki. The first church at Pukekaraka (also known as Puke karakia – Hill of Prayer) was built in 1844 by Father Compte (Pa Kometa).

Father Compte, like all Marists, was not interested in acquiring land but in education and evangelisation and worked hard to raise his congregation's standard of living. He introduced flour mills, rope making equipment, and bullock drays and encouraged trade by acquiring a schooner, the *Elizabeth*, for them to convey their produce to Wellington. This vessel made a number of voyages to and from Wellington during 1853-1854 including at least one commanded by a Māori captain named Terawatu.

Lack of personnel and resources to maintain the Mission Station when Father Compte went back to France in 1854, saw a decline in the Māori Mission. Within a few years the church was burned down, and although a new church was built in 1859 there was no resident priest available and Marist priests tried to service it from Thorndon, Wellington.

Pukekaraka's fortunes were not revived until Father Melu (Pa Werahiko) took up residence in Otaki in 1883.

'Roma', the first wharenuī, was built in 1904. The catechists of the time were Te Aomarere, Te Pokaitara, Te Hiakai, Taiaroa, Tutuohe (of Ngapuhi) and Hakaria Rangikura. Hakaria rang the church bell for over 40 years and the bell in the Otaki Church is still named Te Pere O Rangikura in his honour.

The larger wharenuī, 'Hine Nui O Te Ao Katoa', was built in 1905. Hine has no carvings but has a special Ko-whai-whai pattern done for her. Hine has been used for a number of tangi; the Māori Women's Welfare League, the Catholic Women's League and the school whanau all still use her for meetings.

These wharenuī were built during the time of the great hui of Father Delachienne (Pa Hohepa).

The Parepare – Wall of Reconciliation was built by the Muaupoko iwi in 1910. As Muaupoko had a great influence on the development of Pukekaraka it was used by both Ngati Raukawa and Muaupoko.

As a result of the long association with Pukekaraka the Marist Archives hold extensive records of Marist work there including correspondence, photographs, baptism, marriage and burial records dating back to 1844.

A Different Approach

The teachings of the early Marist missionaries reflected a very Western understanding of the Catholic faith and it took some time for calls for the development of a genuine Māori theology, Māori spirituality and Maori liturgy to be developed within the Catholic Church in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Individual Marists recognised the need to blend Māori and Catholic theologies together but it was not the approach of the Marist Order as a whole.

Father Delachienne was a visionary man, well ahead of his time in promoting hui and the marae as the most appropriate environment for the celebration of Catholic Maori faith. He founded a Maori language Catholic newspaper called *Whare Kura* which ran from 1909 to 1927.

The Archives also holds the surviving copies of the Māori language Catholic newspapers *Whare Kura* and *Whiti Ora*.

Hui Aranga

The first recorded instance of a hui organised by the Catholic Church in New Zealand as a means of transmitting the Christian message occurred at Otaki in 1909 but for a variety of reasons they were discontinued after only a few years.

After World War Two several small hui aranga were held in Otaki in successive years. Then in 1948 the first big hui aranga was held at Maungarongo near Ohakune. During this hui the Central Council of the Federation of Catholic Māori Clubs was formed and the means of hui aranga to fill a gap in the Christian approach to Māori was discussed. This first hui away from Otaki was almost washed out by a storm and there were many “I told you so’s” for taking it away from its traditional home in Otaki.

Nevertheless in 1949 it was taken to Ngati Kahungunu at their Takitimu Marae. Students from St Joseph’s Māori Girls College and Hato Paora College, Parorangi, played a major role in the proceedings. In 1950 it moved to Ketemarae in Taranaki, 1951 saw it back at its original home in Otaki and in 1952 it moved to Kaiwhaiki on the Whanganui River – the place where in 1852 Father Lampila had set up the first Catholic Mission Station on the Whanganui River.

Hui aranga were notable for the attendance of Māori of all denominations – not just Catholics. The events of the hui aranga were reported on in the Māori Catholic newspaper *Whiti Ora* and in the national press and they continued to be successful up to today though

the numbers attending has declined.

The Archives hold a full set of *Whiti Ora* (as mentioned) and many items of ephemera relating to hui aranga including photographs, reports etc.

General

As part of the Archives of the Māori Missioners we have a number of miscellaneous Māori documents including:

23 issues of *Te Puke Ki Hikurangi* – the Māori Language newspaper printed at Papawai. Our issues range from 1899 to 1902.

Some copies of *Te Waka O Hato Petera*.

One issue of *Te Manahiri Tuarangi* and *Māori Intelligencier* 15 July 1861.

One issue of *Te Karere Māori* or *Māori Messenger* 1 June 1863.

A number of letters written in Māori.

Numerous waiata, sermons and notes in Māori.

Then there are the bane of every archivist's life – unidentified photographs. We have literally hundreds and often there is just the name of an area, eg Waitara, but no further clues as to who the subjects are.

The Archives

The Marist Archives are being used more and more by researchers for an increasingly broad range of research topics. As mentioned earlier there is a great deal of interest in the diaries and letters of the early Marists with respect to Māori life, culture and customs. As we all know archives which were created for one purpose can often find their greatest informational value in another. Prominent researchers in the past have included Michael King, Judith Binney, Claudia Orange and David Young.

Researchers have also been looking at the papers of early Marists who were stationed in the Hokianga, the Bay of Islands, Hawke's Bay, Pukekarakā/Otaki, Kaikoura and elsewhere.

The Archives have had researchers from the Waitangi Tribunal, the Crown Law Office and other academics visiting our archives as well as Māori doing whakapapa research. Some of the baptismal records have been used to authenticate pension and family benefit applications in cases where there are no birth certificates. Baptismal records have also been used to study the transliteration of names bestowed on Māori (usually Old Testament Biblical names given to Māori children in the

19th and early 20th Century). Some marriage and burial records are also held for certain areas.

There have been a number of university theses (largely from the University of Canterbury and Waikato) based on the writings of the early French Marists, either completed or which are ongoing.

Access

Generally access to the records is open but there are restrictions placed on some records for reasons of privacy and confidentiality. I would not want to give the impression that the Marist Archives hold all records relating to Marists and the Māori. There are many records located in local parish churches around the country and in the archives of the five Catholic Dioceses of New Zealand. Nor, I hope, have I given the impression that we hold records relating to Maori throughout the country. The records we hold very much relate to those areas where the Marist priests and brothers established their missions and were there for reasonable periods of time.

I believe that the history of the Marists is inextricably interwoven through the mainstream history of Aotearoa/New Zealand and that their records can be used to learn more of our country's past.

Endnotes

1. Presentation to ARANZ Māori Archives Seminar, April 2012.
2. Taylor, Nancy M., *Journal of Ensign Best*. Wellington: Government Printing Office 1966. p.382.
3. Girdwood-Morgan, Kerry Bernice. *Instructions for Mission Work 1841 by Bishop J-B Pompallier*. Translated from the French with an introduction. Diploma of Social Studies. Massey University 1985, p.21.
4. *Ibid*, p.37.
5. Fr. Auguste Chouvet SM. Letter to his Father, 28 October 1845, APM 208. Available at: www.mariststudies.org
6. Fr Jean Vibaud SM. *The Society of Mary in the Taranaki Wanganui District*. Unpublished Manuscript. MAW DNM 17/1.