

The First Marist Missionaries and French Colonial Policy in the Pacific (1836-42)

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The members of the Society of Mary, known as Marists, aimed to be *ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo* (hidden, and as if unknown in this world). They had taken vows of celibacy, poverty and humility. Their focus was spiritual and reflective. Temporal matters such as commerce and politics were to be avoided. Yet when the Marists came to the Pacific in the 1830s to convert indigenous peoples to Catholicism, they found themselves accused of being spies and agitators for France at the vanguard of a wave of French settlers about to invade the Antipodes. This paper seeks to explain how the first Marist missionaries came to be caught up in the colonial policies of two empires while professing complete disinterest in temporal matters. Were they indeed French agents, or was it all just British slander?

Founded in Lyon in 1816, the order was a part of France's post-Revolutionary Catholic revival. The revival had a Romantic tinge to it, influenced by Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme* (1802). Praise for the exotic and sympathy for the noble savage would later feature prominently in the Marists' correspondence to and from the Pacific. In 1836, as a condition of their order's official approval by the Vatican, the Marists were assigned the vicariate of Western Oceania, a vast swathe of the Pacific that included Melanesia, Micronesia and most of Polynesia, including New Zealand. The contemplative priests, whose missionary work had consisted of reawakening Catholicism in Lyon, now found themselves responsible for converting the inhabitants of one-eighth of the planet.¹

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¹ For more on the first Marists in New Zealand, see E.R. Simmons' *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in New Zealand* (Auckland, 1978) and *Pompallier: Prince of Bishops* (Auckland, 1984). M. O'Meehan,

It would be a costly venture; just getting to the Pacific would be expensive. The charismatic Bishop Jean-Baptiste-François Pompallier, who would lead the mission, was asked by one of its organisers to enquire whether the Minister of Marine could arrange free passage on naval or merchant navy vessels.² In October 1836, he met members of the government and royal family, coming away with gifts and letters of protection.

J'ai eu à Paris toute les faveurs de la cour et du ministre relatif à ma position. 5 ou 6 lettres de protection du ministre des affaires étrangères auprès des consuls de Val-paraiso et des chargés d'affaires pour la France sur le littoral de l'Amérique méridionale à l'occident, lettres idem du ministre de la marine pour les capitaines de vaisseau en station sur la mer du sud ou de l'Océanie, lettre de mr le directeur des colonies (de St Hilaire) pour un français qui est comme roi dans la Nouvelle Zélande. On peut dire ici que l'état français s'est montré docile au st siège en donnant non seulement bienveillance à la mission mais encore coopération.³

I enjoyed in Paris all the favour of the Court and the Minister relative to my position. Five or six letters of protection from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Consuls of *Val-paraiso* and to Envoys for France on the West coast of South America, letters likewise from the Minister of Marine for the ships' captains stationed in the South Seas or Oceania, a letter from Monsieur de Saint Hilaire, Director of Colonies, for a Frenchman who is like a King in New Zealand. One can say here that the French State acquiesced to the Holy See, giving not only good will to the mission but also cooperation.

The government however was not helping the bishop out of charity. The Revolution had severely dented France's overseas empire. Saint-Domingue was independent and the other Caribbean colonies had been weakened economically. Napoleon's navy had been crushed twice by Britain. French colonial expansion since then had been limited to the Mediterranean. Missions were a stealthy form of colonisation for a government. They were also cheap and low-risk. A successful mission might attract

"The French Marist Maori Mission," in *The French and the Maori*, ed. John Dunmore (Waikanae, 1992) is also a useful source. Recent work on Father Garin, one of the pioneer missionaries, can be found in Hélène Serabian, "Le journal du Père Antoine Garin, 1844-1846: une édition critique présentée avec commentaire, transcription et annotations" (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2005); and Giselle Larcombe, "Antoine Marie Garin: a biographical study of the intercultural dynamic in nineteenth-century New Zealand authors" (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2009). The most comprehensive study of the early Marist Māori mission is Sandy Harman, "The Struggle for Success: a socio-cultural perspective of the French Marist Priests and their Māori Mission, 1838-1867" (PhD thesis, University of Waikato, 2010).

² Cholleton to Pompallier, 24 June 1836, in *Colin Sup: documents pour l'étude du généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-54)*, ed. Gaston Lessard (Rome 2007), document 3, paragraph 7. Subsequent extracts from this work will be referenced as e.g. *Colin Sup*, doc. 3 [7]. All quotations retain the original orthography.

³Pompallier to Colin, 5 November 1836, in *Lettres reçues d'Océanie par l'administration générale des pères maristes pendant le généralat de Jean-Claude Colin (1836-1854): Édition critique* ed. Charles Girard (Paris, 2009), document 4, paragraph 13. Subsequent extracts from this work will be referenced as e.g. LRO, doc. 4 [13]. The supposed king was Baron de Thierry (1793-1864), a Frenchman who claimed to have purchased a large part of the Hokianga in the North Island. The author thanks Kirsty Carpenter and Glynnis Cropp for assistance.

settlers; an endangered one would either fade away at no cost to the government or provide an opportunity for the navy to intervene, ostensibly to protect the missionaries.

Where missionaries were concerned, “the activities of men of religion both legitimized conquest and gave a structural identity to the new colonial society.”⁴ Links between missionary activities and empire-building, particularly for Britain, have been established by a number of scholars.⁵ The links were often involuntary, however; As Andrew Porter asserts, “although missions could not avoid empire, they were determined to put it in its place.”⁶ The director of a mission was usually an important figure who liaised with the colonial authorities, so even where missionaries opposed imperialism, indigenous peoples might associate them with colonial rulers. Popular opinion in Europe did the same. Nineteenth-century fiction reinforced the association; as Anna Johnston puts it, “Whether missionary work was regarded with approbation or opprobrium, it is undeniable that it was central to the representation of imperial expansion.”⁷ There is no reason to suppose things were any different for the Marists. After all, they believed that the Protestant missionaries in New Zealand “...avoient été envoyés long-temps d’avance pour deux fins, gagner ce peuple à la croyance des Anglais, puis le soumettre plus tard à leur autorité, en un mot, le faire anglais autant que possible” (...had been sent a long time in advance for two reasons, to win this people over to the religion of the English, then later to subject them to their authority, in a word, to make them as English as possible).⁸ Was it not therefore reasonable that the British would believe the Marists were the advance guard of the French colonial empire?

The Marists did not seem to realise how much the French government might profit from those gifts and letters of protection. Despite their desire to avoid temporal matters, they were now a part of French colonial policy. That statement rang out clearly in New Zealand’s Bay of Islands in May 1838, when a visiting French warship greeted Pompallier with a nine-gun salute. The Marists had by then been in New Zealand for five months. They were only three in number and would not be reinforced for over a year. Eight had set out, one had died, and Pompallier had left a pair on Wallis and another on Futuna. Shortly after their arrival in New Zealand, the three were threatened by an angry mob of Māori, who later shamefacedly admitted that a Methodist missionary had incited them. Pompallier’s charisma and status as the only bishop in New Zealand earned him respect. His personal safety was not at risk. His real fear was that the influential Protestant missionaries would arrange to have the Catholic mission expelled, as had happened in Tahiti in 1836. The warship’s salute in the Bay of Islands made it clear that banishing the bishop would have significant diplomatic consequences. “L’apparition de la corvette ‘l’Héroïne’ a produit un bon effet ; sa seule présence en ces parages a montré

⁴ Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Futility in the New World: narratives of travel in sixteenth-century America”, in *Voyages & Visions: towards a cultural history of Travel*, ed. Jas’ Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés (London, 1999), 94.

⁵ See for example Anna Johnston, “‘Tahiti, the desire of our eyes’: Missionary Travel Narratives and Imperial Surveillance,” in *In Transit: Travel, Text, Empire*, ed. Helen Gilbert and Anna Johnston (New York, 2002), 65-83.

⁶ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire?: British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 2004), 330.

⁷ Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (Cambridge, 2003), 20.

⁸“ Petit-Jean to Paillason, 18 mars 1840, *LRO*, doc. 53 [5].

l'efficacité de la protection du gouvernement français à mon égard," wrote Pompallier (The arrival of the corvette *l'Héroïne* has had good effect; its presence alone on these shores had showed the efficacy of the protection of the French government regarding me).⁹ At the same time, however, the *Héroïne* established a link between the bishop and the French government. He knew the settlers believed he was "un agent secret du gouvernement français" (a secret agent of the French government) but had worked hard to convince them otherwise.¹⁰ The warship's salute must have undone some of that work.

Pompallier's presence undoubtedly spurred British efforts to regulate the colonisation of New Zealand before France took a more prominent role. In February 1840, the British and Māori signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which effectively made New Zealand a British colony. During treaty negotiations Pompallier occupied a privileged place as the sole bishop in New Zealand but said little and was careful to be absent from the actual signing. Fr Servant wrote soon afterwards, "nous laissons la politique à laquelle nous sommes tout-à-fait étrangers" (we avoid politics to which we are complete strangers).¹¹ The bishop did request religious freedom, to prevent the Catholic mission's potential exclusion.¹² The Protestant missionaries believed he also advised Māori not to sign the Treaty. Pompallier explained:

Notre position a été fort critique en ce pays durant quelques semaines. Les naturels venoient me demander ce qu'ils devoient faire, ou signer ou ne pas signer; ici j'éclairois les chefs sur ce dont il s'agissoit pour eux et les abandonnois ensuite à eux-mêmes, me tenant dans la neutralité hors de la politique, leur disant que j'étois ici en ce pays avec les miens pour travailler au salut et de ceux qui ne signeroient pas et de ceux qui signeroient.

Our position has been critical in this country for several weeks. The natives came to ask me what they ought to do, whether to sign or not to sign, here; I enlightened the chiefs about what it meant for them and following that, left them to themselves keeping myself neutral outside of politics saying to them that I was in this country with my followers to work for the salvation of those who would not sign, and of those who would.¹³

Whether he could be entirely neutral is debatable, given the links between the Protestant missionaries of the Church Missionary Society and the new colonial administration.¹⁴ He believed in any case that "la demande des signatures n'étoit qu'un prétexte, la prise de possession étoit résolue." (asking for signatures was only a pretext, the taking of

⁹ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1838, *LRO*, doc. 24 [4].

¹⁰ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1838, *LRO*, doc. 24 [3].

¹¹ Servant to Colin, 5 March 1840, *LRO*, doc. 52 [17].

¹² William Colenso, *The authentic and genuine history of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand, February 5 and 6 1840* (Wellington, 1890).

¹³ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1840, *LRO*, Doc 59 [13].

¹⁴ See Peter Low, "French Bishop, Māori Chiefs, British Treaty" in *The French and the Maori*, ed. John Dunmore (Waikanae: Heritage Press, 1992), pp. 97-106.

possession was resolved.)¹⁵ Ironically, given how he had been saluted by the French warship, the reason for his belief was that

avant même que les naturels ou du moins les chefs de chaque tribu eussent été invités à signer le traité présenté par le gouverneur, le drapeau anglais a été arboré à la Baie des îles, et des coups de canon ont été tirés comme signe de prise de possession.¹⁶

Before even the natives or at least even the chiefs of each tribe had been invited to sign the Treaty presented by the Governor, the English flag had been put up over the Bay of Islands, and cannon shots fired as a sign of taking possession.

Despite the fact that the Marists were now Frenchmen in a British colony, they reacted positively to the Treaty. For one thing, the Protestant missionaries could no longer tell Māori that Pompallier had come to steal their land. Moreover, a colonial government would bring order to the anarchic European population. It would be easier to establish schools and hospitals, which would lead to the mission's financial security. At the moment they depended entirely on grants from the Catholic missionary organisation Propagation de la Foi. Fr Petit-Jean wrote of the Treaty:

Cet état de chose accélérera nos établissemens quelconques et leur donnera plus de garantie surtout à ceux des femmes. Les autorités, le gouverneur en particulier, est loin de se montrer hostile envers monseigneur qui a reçu sa visite.¹⁷

This state of affairs will accelerate our settlements of all kinds and give them more security, especially those of the nuns. The authorities, the governor in particular, is far from showing himself hostile towards the Bishop who received his visit.

Pompallier found the colonial authorities “*impartiales*” and took care to appear neutral as well.¹⁸ The mission schooner flew a religious flag, for example—a blue cross on a white background—not a French one. The authorities were not as impartial towards the CMS missionaries, however, who often travelled gratis on government ships while the Marists paid their passage around the country. It was not difficult for the Catholic missionaries to conclude that an English government would at best be neutral towards them, but a French one would have favoured the Marists. Unfortunately for the Marists, the Treaty of Waitangi meant that it was now too late to establish a French colonial administration in New Zealand. In France, however, the government was still unaware of the fact; a warship, a consul and a colonial expedition left for New Zealand just weeks after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, and the Society of Mary was now a key part of France's colonial policy.

¹⁵ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1840, *LRO*, Doc 59 [13].

¹⁶ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1840, *LRO*, Doc 59 [14].

¹⁷ Petit-Jean to Paillason, 18 March 1840, *LRO*, doc. 53 [5].

¹⁸ Pompallier to Colin, 14 May 1840, *LRO*, doc. 59 [14].

In late 1839, the mild and contemplative superior-general of the Marists, Fr Jean-Claude Colin, had found himself at the centre of French imperial strategy. The prime minister, Maréchal Soult, had a clear aim for the Pacific: “faire des établissements et réprimer un peu l’envahissement des Anglais” (form settlements and repress a little the English invasion).¹⁹ A first step to checking British expansion in the South Pacific was the creation of a French consulate based in New Zealand. The warship *Aube*, shortly to be despatched to the region to oversee the French whaling fleet, would support the consul. In addition, a French company was about to send a group of settlers to establish a colony at Akaroa in the South Island. Soult required as much information as possible about New Zealand. Pompallier’s letters from the Pacific, intended to inform the Marist administration of the mission’s progress and to raise funds, now became a key source of intelligence. The prime minister himself requested summaries, which Colin hastened to provide. The superior-general was aligning the Marists with France’s colonial policy but believed it was necessary to give the Catholic missionaries a fair chance to work in the Pacific.²⁰ Colin wrote to Pompallier:

Le gouvernement français est fort bien disposé en faveur de toutes les missions catholiques, partic. de l’Océanie [...] [Les ministres] disent eux mêmes que si l’on catholicise ces îles, on les francisera.²¹

The French government is very well disposed in favour of all the Catholic missions particularly in Oceania [...] The ministers say themselves that if we catholicise these islands, we will frenchify them.

There was no recent news from Pompallier; his letters had been delayed, but Colin feared that they had been intercepted. Recalling the incident with the angry Māori mob, Colin told the marine minister that the devious Methodists must have taken over the New Zealand Post Office.²² Plans for the consulate went ahead regardless. Emmanuel Eveillard, an ambitious Catholic convert, was keen to become consul and had the support of the Society of Mary.²³ He suggested the Marists try to secure his appointment by working covertly through the Queen’s confessor because of “la haute, l’immense influence que possède à la cour, dans l’esprit du roi et de la reine, mr Olivier, curé de St Roch” (the great, the immense influence that Monsieur Olivier *curé* of St Roch possesses

¹⁹ Colin to Pompallier, 9 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 97 [13].

²⁰ “Les missionnaires catholiques puissamment aidés de la France, feront de grands progrès. Les Méthodistes les contrecarrent ; mais s’il y avait à Sandwich, à O’Taïti, à la Nouvelle-Zélande et ailleurs des agents français pour protéger le commerce, on n’oserait pas insulter ni chasser les missionnaires qui, après les intérêts de la religion, n’en ont point de plus chers que leur mère-patrie, et qui feront tout pour faire aimer le nom français dans ces îles” (The Catholic Missionaries, strongly helped by France, will make much progress. The Methodists thwart them; but if there were in Sandwich, in O’Taïti, in New Zealand and elsewhere French agents to protect trade, we would not dare to insult or pursue the missionaries who, after the interests of religion, do not hold anything more dearly than their motherland, and who will do everything to have the name of France loved in these islands). Colin to Soult, 22 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 100 [8].

²¹ Colin to Pompallier, 9 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 97 [4].

²² Colin to Duperré (marine minister), 13 December 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 115 [3].

²³ Colin to Pompallier, 9 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 97 [6].

at Court over the mind of the King and Queen).²⁴ Perhaps wondering how a humble spiritual order was now involved in intrigues at court, Colin duly appealed to this *éminence grise*.²⁵ He was unsuccessful; Captain Lavaud of the *Aube* was appointed consul. It was perhaps for the best. The somewhat grandiose Eveillard was convinced that the remote Chatham Islands, 700 kilometres to the east of New Zealand, would be a perfect base for the Marists in the Pacific.

The *Aube* and its captain consul left for New Zealand in early 1840. On board were four Marists travelling free of charge. The Society of Mary had spent immense sums getting its first missionaries to the far side of the world. Thanks to the French navy it was making considerable savings but at the risk of fuelling Protestant attacks. The British in New Zealand would be sceptical of the Marists' indifference to worldly matters after seeing them disembark from a French warship. Now the Society wanted to be *ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo* for a different reason. Marist headquarters had already asked Eveillard to not mention the Society of Mary in newspaper articles about New Zealand.²⁶ Another request went to the papal internuncio in Paris. Could he please inform the missionaries "comment ils devaient se conduire dans les circonstances présents, afin que leur ministère n'eût pas un air de politique?" (... how they should conduct themselves in the present circumstances, so that their ministry would not seem political).²⁷

Colin was treading a fine line. He told the queen's confessor that "une protection trop ouverte de la part de notre gouvernement pourrait être dangereuse au progrès de la religion à cause des méthodistes anglais qui inondent l'Océanie" (a too open protection on the part of our government could endanger the progress of religion because of the English Methodists who flood Oceania).²⁸ Then, repeating almost verbatim what Soult had told him, he informed Pompallier that the missionaries "doivent se conformer à tout ce que le commissaire du roi jugera propre à l'ordre, la police et l'administration des établissements qui se formeront en Nouvelle-Zélande" (ought to conform to everything that the King's commissioner deems appropriate regarding order, the police and administration of the settlements, being formed in New Zealand).²⁹ In other words, to keep the government happy he told the Marists to obey the consul's orders, and to avoid accusations that the Marists were agents, he wanted the consul to not give the Marists orders.

Lavaud arrived on 11 July 1840, calling first at the Bay of Islands to land his passengers and gather information from Pompallier.³⁰ After the free passage for the four missionaries, Pompallier would have felt obliged to provide one of his men to Lavaud, who needed an interpreter. The bishop wrote diplomatically to Colin:

²⁴ Eveillard to Poupinel, 26 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 104 [2]

²⁵ Colin to Olivier, 4 December 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 108.

²⁶ Poupinel to Eveillard, 11 November 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 102 [2].

²⁷ Colin to Garibaldi (papal internuncio), 7 January 1840, *Colin Sup*, doc. 128 [1].

²⁸ Colin to Olivier, 4 December 1839, *Colin Sup*, doc. 109 [2].

²⁹ Colin to Pompallier, 6 January 1840, *Colin Sup*, doc. 126 [4].

³⁰ Peter Tremewan, *French Akaroa* (Christchurch, 2010), 99-101.

De mon côté je correspondrai d'autant plus volontiers aux projets qui m'ont été exposés que cela développe ma mission précisément dans des endroits où je désirois depuis plusieurs mois envoyer des missionnaires.³¹

For my part, I will cooperate all the more willingly with projects that have been outlined to me if they develop my mission precisely in areas where for some months I had been wishing to send missionaries.

Pompallier had in fact just spent two months in the densely-populated central North Island, not too far from mission headquarters, and needed to send priests there rather than to the small Māori population of the South Island. The mission was already stretched by delays in funding from Europe and by Pompallier's poor financial management. But when the *Aube* left for Akaroa on 30 July to await the French colonial expedition, two Marist priests – Frs Pezant and Comte – and a brother (lay missionary) were on board. The rules of the Society of Mary stated that priests should never be sent alone to a station; it was also reasonable to have a brother there to help them. However, Pompallier was extremely short of missionaries. He had already left some of his priests isolated in an attempt to cover as much ground as possible. Sending three men away with the *Aube* suggests he was doing all he could to help Lavaud, despite knowing that the Treaty of Waitangi made a French colony impossible. It did not seem a wise policy given Pompallier's hitherto careful neutrality in the British colony.

The Marist missionaries had an unhappy time in Akaroa. The few French settlers were largely indifferent to Catholicism, the small local Māori population leaned towards Protestantism and the indebted Pompallier had given them almost no money for food or shelter. The French government had promised to help the Akaroa missionaries, but Lavaud ignored them. In addition to religious differences (he was a freemason),³² he had no incentive to support them. The colony had no future as a French possession; he would never be the governor of a French South Island and might be held responsible in France for this failed venture. A month after their arrival in Akaroa, a desperate Pezant appealed to the prime minister of France via Colin:

Je vous envoie une lettre pour m le Maréchal Soult, qui nous avait engagé avec une vraie cordialité à lui écrire d'ici. Nous connaissons son énergie contre l'Angleterre et en faveur de la colonisation de ce pays [...] Toutes les personnes attachées au gouvernement que nous avons vues à Paris nous ont montré tant de bienveillance, qu'il est à espérer que cette lettre ne déplaira pas et nous sera utile dans l'état où est la colonie en ce moment.³³

I am sending you a letter for Marshal Soult, who had advised us with true cordiality to write to him from here. We know his energy against the English and in favour of the colonisation of this country. [...] All the persons attached to the government that we have seen in Paris have showed us so much consideration that

³¹ Pompallier to Colin, 22 July 1840, *LRO*, doc. 64 [1].

³² See Tremewan, *French Akaroa*, chap. 14.

³³ Pezant to Colin, 17 September 1840, *LRO*, doc 74 [2].

it is to be hoped that this letter will not displease, and will help us be useful in the situation that the colony is in at the moment.

As well as showing the importance of Akaroa to the French government, Pezant's letter also implicitly criticised Pompallier. The missionaries had to let Pompallier read all their correspondence to France, but Pezant's letter bypassed the bishop and went directly from Akaroa on a French whaler. By breaking this rule of the mission, Pezant was in effect telling Colin that Pompallier would censor negative comments about Akaroa and Lavaud.

The bishop's link to the French expedition and therefore French colonial policy became clear to all in New Zealand when he went to Akaroa just two months after the French settlers and Lavaud landed there. He arrived in October 1840 and stayed for five months, despite having few Māori to visit in the South Island. "Un si long séjour," wrote Comte, "une visite si prématurée aux Français d'Akaroa n'aura pas fait du bien à la mission du nord sous le rapport politique" (So long a stay, ... so early a visit to the French at Akaroa will not have done any good from a political angle for the mission in the North).³⁴ After a brief return to his headquarters in the Bay of Islands, where debts and criticism were piling up, Pompallier went back to Akaroa. His men were puzzled. His close association with the consul did not benefit the mission but, instead, harmed the Marists' insistent neutrality. It seemed to confirm that they were agents of the French government, and it played into the hands of anti-French and anti-Catholic critics. One of the missionaries wrote, "il me semble qu'on s'appuie un peu trop sur la protection du gouvernement et qu'on fait pour lui trop de sacrifices" (It seems to me that we rely a bit too much on the protection of the government and that we make too many sacrifices for it).³⁵ Another described Akaroa as "cette station qui a nuit beaucoup à tout le reste de la mission" (this station that has done a lot of harm to the rest of the mission).³⁶

From the beginning the bishop had personalised the Marist mission. His dignified bearing, purple robes and largesse with gifts quite overshadowed the impoverished and ragged priests on short allowances who followed him. Pompallier incarnated the mission to the point that the Māori word for "Catholic" was *epikopo*, from the Latin word for bishop. Now his reputation suffered because of Akaroa. "Monseigneur Pompallier y a été traîné dans la boue (si je puis me servir de cette expression) autant qu'on peut l'être. Mais, dit on, c'étoit bien sa faute" (Pompallier had been dragged in the mud – if I can use that expression – as much as can be possible. But it is said it was his own fault),³⁷ wrote Fr Forest, who had been sent by Colin to inspect the mission. "Ce séjour prolongé parmi les Français a même indisposé contre lui les Anglais, qui ont écrits contre lui" (This prolonged stay among the French has set the English against him and they have written against him).³⁸

The bishop was not a French agent. His devotion to Akaroa was personal, not political. He doubtless thought the mission was bound to fail; how could a French

³⁴ Comte to Colin, 15 April 1841, *LRO*, doc 89 [7].

³⁵ Tripe to Colin, 18 November 1841, *LRO*, doc 117 [5].

³⁶ Forest to Colin, 22 May 1842, *LRO*, doc 166 [7].

³⁷ Forest to Colin, 22 May 1842, *LRO*, doc 166 [7].

³⁸ Forest to Colin, 2 June 1842, *LRO*, doc 174 [3].

organisation survive in what was now a British colony? He was responsible for the mission's immense debts and was becoming increasingly desperate about the dearth of communication, funds and priests from France. He could sense the growing disapproval of his men and diminishing confidence in the mission in Europe. Akaroa offered him two means of escape, both involving free passage to France. First, he would go to Lyon and Rome to argue his case, raise funds and recruit missionaries. If that failed, then he could count on a bishopric in France as a reward for loyal service to the government. Lavaud had assured him of as much and repeated it to one of the Akaroa missionaries.³⁹ Pompallier would either return empowered in several years' time to New Zealand or else enjoy a diocese much less troublesome and tiring than in the South Pacific. A cabin fit for a bishop had been prepared on a naval corvette, and Pompallier was about to sail to Europe when an urgent message arrived in November 1841 from the Bay of Islands: Fr Pierre Chanel had been murdered on Futuna. His situation in New Zealand and the crisis in the mission was suddenly much less important. Pompallier abandoned the trip to France and instead went to Futuna with a French warship as escort.

By the time he returned to the Bay of Islands in August 1842, the French threat to New Zealand had greatly abated. British and Irish settlers were flooding the colony; Auckland and Port Nicholson (Wellington) were growing rapidly. Akaroa only preserved its French character out of gentlemen's agreements between British officials and Lavaud. On the religious front, the Anglicans now had their bishop, Selwyn, who had arrived in May 1842 with considerable energy and funding. In contrast, the Marist mission had all but failed for want of money, and the missionaries were hungry, despondent and bitter rather than resigned.

Des Français ne feront jamais bien auprès des Anglais, le genre est tout différent. Déjà plusieurs de nos missionnaires ont une telle antipatie contre les Anglais qu'ils ne peuvent les souffrir.⁴⁰

The French will never get on well with the English. They are completely different. Already several of our missionaries show much antipathy towards the English whom they cannot tolerate.

As the threat of French settlement faded, so did the Marists' apparent involvement in politics. The British colonial government would see them as useful educators. Schools were a way for the Marists to support themselves financially. It was also convenient for the government to have priests in the colony to minister to the growing population of Irish Catholic immigrants. There were still tensions. Māori knew they were from a rival European nation and saw that many of the British viewed them "as alien, hostile and suspicious."⁴¹ Pompallier was accused of fomenting Māori rebellion during the Northern War of the mid-1840s, although he was publicly cleared of any involvement by Governor Grey. He devoted three decades of his life to New Zealand and eventually retired to

³⁹ Tripe to Colin, 18 November 1841, *LRO*, doc. 117 [9]; Pompallier to Maîtreperrière, 6 November 1842, *LRO*, doc. 218 [6].

⁴⁰ Forest to Colin, 2 June 1842, *LRO*, doc 174 [13].

⁴¹ Jessie Munro, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert* (Auckland, 1996), 11.

France in 1869. Criticism of Pompallier and the Marists evolved into what could be expected in a Protestant colony: they were no longer seen as agents of France but agents of Rome.

When Pompallier and the Marists arrived in New Zealand in 1838, they found themselves caught up in imperial rivalry between France and Britain. Their links to the French government were tenuous, but in New Zealand they found themselves central to the representation of French colonial policy. They claimed to be neutral and tried to avoid fuelling allegations that they were there to pave the way for French annexation. In France, however, the Society of Mary undoubtedly became closely involved with the French government's plans to colonise the South Island of New Zealand. Colin believed that the Methodists were fighting an underhand war in the race to convert Pacific peoples to Christianity. Bringing the French government in on the side of the Marists would even the balance. Colin also realised that public knowledge of the links between the Marists and the government would work against them, so tried to ensure that those links were not made public. In New Zealand, the most obvious evidence of a link between the Marist missionaries and their government was Pompallier's attitude towards the French consul and settlement in Akaroa. The bishop committed himself heavily for personal reasons rather than political ones, but it was to the detriment of his reputation and that of the mission. But as happened with missionaries of other denominations in other territories, the Marists found that even when they tried to avoid their government's colonial policy, their work "was central to the representation of imperial expansion."⁴²

⁴² Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (Cambridge, 2003), 20.