

Treaty Application Case Study: Christian World Service

The journey probably began for Christian World Service (CWS) with a workshop in Napier November 1982 when, during the showing of a film on South Africa, a number of Māori participants said, 'That's not just South Africa – that's Aotearoa New Zealand'. The ensuing discussion led to a lot of soul searching and quite a critical decision within the Methodist Church in 1983 to move towards becoming a bicultural church. It was seen at the time, unfortunately, as a first step to towards becoming a multicultural church.

During this period most of the traditional churches began working on improving their understanding of the Treaty, and in doing so gained new awareness of what had been happening

for Māori. The importance of the Treaty as part of our shared history started to take root in the Christian community, particularly through ecumenical inter-church forums. The Māori section of the National Council of Churches, Te Rūnanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi o Aotearoa (Te Rūnanga) had always carried this knowledge as part of their journey within individual churches. The settler churches had largely ignored their stories. At about this time a number of church people got involved in a related project providing social analysis training which helped people understand the systems that oppress people. We stopped talking about the bicultural journey and started instead to talk about responsibilities within the Treaty journey.

Concerned Māori, who at that stage invested almost too much in helping sort out tauwiwi, issued some strong challenges, including to churches. The anti-racism programme of the then National Council of Churches (NCC), under the leadership of Mitzi Nairn, Bob Scott and others, undertook the hard Treaty journey work that evolved out of the Church and Society Commission of the NCC. The Programme on Racism informed our thinking and helped us develop strategies and responses, especially through workshops. Together we developed resource programmes for teachers when schools needed to include the Treaty in their charters. A resource person from CWS ran workshops with teachers. The 1981 Tour was a critical period for those of us who recognised what was happening.

CWS was open to the strong Treaty focus because the organisation was primarily

relating to overseas partners, many of whom were dealing with historic injustices and oppression. Central to these relationships was honest communication and an expectation that CWS would be involved in local issues of justice. 'How can you be partners with us,' they said, 'if you're not partners with tangata whenua and those who are marginalised in any way in your own situation?' This was a compelling rationale for CWS to become more deeply involved 'in our own backyard'.

At a critical meeting at Turangawaewae in 1984, Te Rūnanga said the Treaty was a covenant, in the sense of a Biblical covenant. There were very strong links, quite controversial at times, with Māori activists in this period. The Catholic Church was probably more innovative than the NCC and CWS. Father John Curnow was quite fearless in supporting the groups that arose out of the Bastion Point protests, for example.

In 1990 CWS and key church people promoted the tino rangatiratanga register among members as an alternative to voting in the national elections that year. The register was developed as a public strategy to highlight the Crown's inability to fulfil its Treaty obligations in the previous 150 years and as a political tool that raised the failure of the electoral process to deliver justice under the Treaty. We made it available to Pākehā, explaining the background and encouraging people to sign. Many signed and also boycotted the national election in the interests of promoting Māori tino rangitiratanga – thereby acknowledging that voting would not establish 'right' relations.

We sent stacks of signed registers to the originators.

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CWS has continued to build relationships with tangata whenua and to speak for Treaty justice. CWS has supported activists and

organisations and engaged in issues where we had common ground; for example, opposing the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and international trade agreements, promoting the Mataatua Declaration and opposing the Foreshore and Seabed Bill. CWS has provided financial support and assisted people, especially Māori, working on issues related to the Treaty and the rights of indigenous peoples, made submissions and written letters in support of Māori aspirations.

We had quite a strong relationship with Te Rūnanga until recent years. All requests from Māori were referred to Te Rūnanga who verified and ratified the grants CWS made. For funding in Aotearoa they were our primary reference point.

CWS made a very significant donation to the Ngāi Tahu claim process, probably the most practical thing we have done in terms of local Māori. It was our recognition of having been based in Christchurch since 1945 and having some responsibility towards the empowerment of local Māori. We funded the Kia Mohio Kia Marama Trust which provided basic education on national and international issues for Māori over many years.

Māori representatives have participated in the appointment of all recent CWS directors. Occasionally we have met with representatives of Te Rūnanga or the Māori sections of the church, but most of the time we get on and do our work keeping them informed. This understanding has guided our work for the last 12 to 15 years.

After an unsuccessful new fundraising initiative in 1993 we had to write to most

of our partners to say, 'The guaranteed funding was not guaranteed this year. We'd do our best but at this stage it looked like it could be less than you were anticipating'. When we told Te Rūnanga, they sent a cheque saying, 'You have supported us all these years in the work that we have been doing, why would we not return it'. In fact we got more from Te Rūnanga than we got from any other part of the church. This significant gift from Te Rūnanga during a difficult period was a very important step in the relationship. On a day-to-day basis we would not have put our hand out for money and they wouldn't have offered.

Liberation theology, which originally came out of the oppression expressed by the peoples of South and Central America, was influential on CWS's work, especially the notion that God had a preferential option for the poor. In 1993, after extensive consultation, CWS produced the first draft of *Partnership and Letting Go*, the rationale for its work. The last section deals with responding to our context in Aotearoa New Zealand, including our responsibilities under the Treaty and the struggle of Māori for self-determination. One of the key principles of the document was that struggles overseas are related to the struggles here, and the two cannot be separated.

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CWS remains concerned about how the economy has developed, who loses out and how the profits are distributed. During 1987 there were two separate consultations on aid for Māori and Pākehā. One of the concerns of CWS was the fact that the asset base of tauwiwi, especially Pākehā, was built on the unjust acquisition of land and resources. It raised the question of who had the primary right to decide what happened to the economic surplus produced from the dominant economic model. It was a highly contentious period as people, including those in the churches, insisted that 'We have a right to what we've got'. In Hamilton the Methodist Church had been the recipient of incredibly valuable town land that was apportioned to those who'd served in the 4th Waikato militia, including Methodists. People were in an uproar over the suggestion that the Church had been a recipient of stolen property.

In 1987 the National Council of Churches formally reconstituted itself as the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ). In Canberra in 1991, the World Council of Churches Assembly, which only accepted one ecumenical church body into associate membership per country, allowed Te Rūnanga and the CCANZ to become joint associate members. They were represented at the Assembly by about seventy Māori and tauwiwi who managed to get themselves into the plenary floor by swapping tickets. We all walked up and sang the waiata, blowing the minds of the Europeans by singing in Māori. That was a symbol of what we were reaching towards and it was seen as a very powerful symbol by churches around the world. Unfortunately, although they keep trying, the churches have fallen short of this dream of partnership.

When CCANZ decided to close the Auckland and Christchurch offices and concentrate on Wellington they did not refer to Te Rūnanga, who learnt about it through the minutes. Te Rūnanga challenged the decision-making process on the basis that they thought they should have been engaged in the discussion earlier. Some of us met with a delegation of Māori to discuss the decision. Their issue wasn't, 'We're standing on our dignity, you didn't tell us'. It was, 'If this is evidence of a weakening of the churches ecumenically then you must realise that this will impact on us also. We're in the same churches, so what is affecting you is also affecting us, we need to talk to each other about this.' That was the nature of relationship at this time.

A dirtier piece of laundry is what happened in 1990, when CWS received a request from

someone who belonged to Te Rūnanga but was not part of the leadership. He recommended that CWS fund a Pākehā man to make a film about the Treaty Sesquicentennial of 1990 to which we agreed. Looking back on that decision, part of it came from the notion, 'We've been so awful to Māori that whatever they say goes'. The proposal was backed by Māori. As it was 1990 we needed to make some sort of contribution to the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty, so against our better judgement we gave a substantial amount, intended as a loan, to the venture. I think that's the worst side of it, that we abdicated responsibility because of our awareness of the level of injustice that tangata whenua have suffered. This does not make for good relationships, partnerships, or wise judgement. We lost a substantial amount of money and the film did not eventuate. We wrote lots of letters, and made many telephone calls to the man, who wriggled out of taking responsibility for the project. We went back to the person who had recommended him and he washed his hands of the whole affair. The

end result was that we felt angry, blaming ourselves for what we had done.

We are marking sixty years of this organisation's work under various names.

We continue to learn about the history of this country, the realities for Māori and how to respond effectively to what we know about the world. CWS tries to deal with the ambiguity of the colonisation process for the churches. In our work we seek to support Māori rights and aspirations and to advocate for the Crown to fulfil its responsibilities under the Treaty.

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(CWS)

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NOTE: The views expressed here are the participants' own, at the time of the interview, and do not necessarily represent their current views or those of their agencies.