ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF MISSION
1887 - 1987
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN
NEW HEBRIDES - VANUATU
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**The Marist Family in the Pacific**
Marist Father (sm)
Marist Brothers (fms)
Marist Sisters (sm)
Marist Missionary Sisters (smsm)
Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth (csn – Bougainville)
Daughters of Mary Immaculate (dni – Solomon Islands)
Petites Filles de Marie (pfm – New Caledonia)
Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth (soln – Fiji, Tonga, Samoa)
Marist Laity
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF MISSION

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NEW HEBRIDES - VANUATU

1887 - 1987

Easter '89

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Dear Friends,

One Hundred Years of Mission!

A legion of courageous Apostles have preceded us.

They struggled to bring us the Faith: Priests, Brothers, Sisters, and Catechists who lived and in many cases lost their lives on an Island or at sea while at the service of the people of Vanuatu.

How can we forget them?

This little book tells the story of the birth and beginnings of the Catholic Church in the Archipelago of New Hebrides - Vanuatu. And as the brief history of each Mission Station is related we meet each of the heroic Marist Missionaries who faced incredible difficulties in their work of evangelisation and conversion. Their patience and their spirit of sacrifice reveal the intensity of their love for the people. Their fidelity to the Church and their tenacity in the midst of often discouraging circumstances are an inspiration to all who serve the Church today.

I want to thank Father Paul Monnier for this brief but complete history of the Catholic Church in New Hebrides - Vanuatu. We now have in hand the story of each Mission Station and its missionaries from the beginning until now, 1987. A longer and more detailed narrative will not be too difficult to produce in the not too distant future.

I want to thank also all those who helped Father Monnier to edit this Centenary Edition and those who also volunteered their services to translate into English.

May the reading of this book help us all to better appreciate the work of our Missionaries in the Islands of the South Pacific and incite us to pray for the repose of the souls of these past heroes of the Faith, and to help in whatever way we can those who are striving to continue the work that began one hundred years ago.

+ Francis LAMBERT
Bishop of Port Vila
A FAR-AWAY ARCHIPELAGO

LAND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ever since Magellan circumnavigated the globe, explorers have been searching the South Pacific for the Great Southern Continent.

Pedro Fernandez de Queiros, a Portuguese navigator working for the King of Spain, was the first to think he had discovered it. On May 1st 1606 (in the Church's season of Pentecost), sailing directly south, he entered a huge bay. Here without any doubt, he thought, is the Great Southern Continent.

Queiros went ashore, kissed the ground and thanked God. He baptised this new country "Land of the Holy Spirit" in honour of the Spirit of Pentecost: "Australis Del Espiritu Santo", in Spanish.

The Franciscan Fathers who accompanied him celebrated a solemn Mass. The ships' cannons thundered during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Queiros, like a man in a dream, saw himself as founding the New Jerusalem on the banks of the great river Ora, to which he gave the name "the Jordan".

Alas! The new paradise was peopled by savages. Queiros had hoped to baptise them, but a hail of arrows sent the sailors scurrying for safety. They returned a token volley of musket-fire, and sailed out of the great bay. To add to their misfortunes, after eating fish from the bay they suffered the agonies of food poisoning.

The dream evaporated. Queiros was anxious to convey the news of his great discovery to the King of Spain - news, of course, which was false. Espiritu Santo was simply a large island, and the bay was Big-Bay. Before leaving, Queiros captured three children from the land of the Spirit. In all likelihood, they were the very first children of Vanuatu to be baptised.

BOUGAINVILLE * 1768 / COOK * 1774

One was French, the Other British
One was Catholic, the Other Protestant
They ushered two centuries of rivalry

After Queiros, the islands of Vanuatu remained forgotten for 162 years until they were re-discovered by the French Admiral Louis Antoine de Bougainville. On May 22nd, 1768, Pentecost Sunday, he sighted a large mountainous island bathed in sunlight. He named it "Pentecost".
A FAR-AWAY ARCHIPELAGO

However, Bougainville went ashore on one island only: Ambae. At the base of a tree he fixed a wooden plaque bearing the name of the King of France, and left hastily under a hail of stones and arrows. Setting a course south-westwards he sailed between Malekula and Malo (now called the Bougainville Straits) and disappeared.

Six years later, on July 1774, came the famous Captain Cook. Working for the British Crown he charted all the islands, explored Tanna and was almost massacred on Erromango.

Bougainville had re-named the islands "the New Cyclades", but Cook gave them another name: the New Hebrides. For the next two centuries the land of the Holy Spirit would be known as the New Hebrides until, on Independence Day, July 30th, 1980, it became "Vanuatu".

The two great explorers began a long period of rivalry between France and Great Britain in the New Hebrides. In 1887 the two countries agreed to set up a Joint Naval Commission and in 1906 they signed the Protocol which ratified the Anglo-French Condominium already created in 1904.

A CHAIN OF OVER 80 ISLANDS

The Vanuatu archipelago is composed of over 80 islands, with a total land surface of 12,200 sq. km. From north to south, the chain stretches out over 900 km. This geographical dispersion of the islands was going to make evangelisation very difficult.

The islands are still emerging from the sea today and are jolted continually by volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Tanna, Ambrym and Lopevi have active volcanoes. Most of the islands are very mountainous, reaching as high as 1,879 metres on Santo.

The hot, damp climate makes for thick and luxuriant vegetation; it also creates a haven for the Anopheles mosquito, which carries malaria. That too would have made life very arduous for the evangelisers.

The inhabitants of the islands are Melanesians with, in some places, a noticeable Polynesian influence. The population may have been as high as 200,000 when the islands were first discovered. By 1930 that figure had dropped to around 30,000. Today it stands at over 120,000.
A FAR-AWAY ARCHIPELAGO

THE AGE OF ADVENTURES AND FORTUNE-HUNTERS

Yes, France and Great Britain had moved in and each was beginning to watch the other out of the corner of his eye. Adventurers of every hue had invaded the islands too: whale-hunters, sandalwood traders, hunters of "bêche de mer" (biche-la-mar would become the new language of the islands).

Many of these profit seekers came from Australia. Having sold their cargo of food to the convict colony on Norfolk Island, they became the notorious "blackbirders", seeking human cargo for the sugar plantations of Queensland, and later of Fiji and New Caledonia.

The story of their relations with the islanders is a cruel one; a story of whole tribes captured and sold, of ship's crews massacred, of men drowned at the end of an anchor chain, of sailors roasted and eaten. This dark chapter of the country's history is well known.

But there existed another, and more likeable, type of adventurer; he was the survivor of a shipwreck, or a runaway from a passing merchantman, living on his own, usually on good terms with his Melanesian neighbours - he had to be to survive - putting himself at their service, purchasing their coconuts and trocas-shells and supplying in return, iron axes, rum, tobacco. More often than not, he purchased his wife from the local village. He was know as the "copra-maker". He was far from being an angel... yet very often he was the one who made easy the first steps of the missionary. If so many missionaries were allowed ashore without having their heads smashed, it was due to the underfed and ragged copra-maker who had come there before them. It was often the copra-maker who won over the mistrustful villagers, and not the missionary.

THE FIRST MESSENGER OF THE GOOD NEWS

He was born in a London suburb.
His name was John WILLIAMS.

At the age of 18 he was moved by grace and by the reading of Cook's adventures. At the age of 20 he left for Oceania with the London Mission Missionary Society (LMS). Raïatea, Aitutaki, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga: All of these he visited with tireless zeal.

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In 1834, he returned home and travelling through Scotland, seeking to awaken the missionary zeal of the Presbyterian Church. He was able to purchase a stout ship and, with Captain Morgan, brought it to Samoa. From there, with 30 young Polynesian "teachers" aboard, he set sail for the sombre islands of Melanesia.

He approached Vanuatu from the south and put three catechists ashore on the island of Tanna. From there he set sail towards Erromango, or "Traitors' Island", where Cook had almost been killed.

John Williams confidently went ashore. The attack was immediate. The missionaries desperately tried to reach their boats... too late! John Williams stumbled on the rocky beach, fell and was clubbed to death. His body was carried off and, no doubt, cut into pieces and roasted.

The tragic news broke like a thunder-clap in the old country, giving rise to numerous missionary vocations and a desire on the part of many to die as martyrs. John Williams fell on November 20th, 1839 at Dillon's Bay. Although he was killed out of hatred for the white man, he is regarded as the first martyr of Vanuatu.

Catholic Missionaries came to Melanesia in 1843. Their bishop, Monseigneur DOUARRE, set up the centre of the mission in New Caledonia. His responsibilities included the evangelisation of Vanuatu, but this he put off until later.

In 1848, while the Bishop was in France, the Mission was attacked, Brother Blaise was killed and his house was set on fire. The missionaries were saved by the providential arrival of "La Brillante" which took them all on board and set sail for Sydney.

Where should they go now? Father ROUGEYRON decided to try Aneityum. He was already familiar with this small island in the south of the New Hebrides chain, where James Paddon had set up business, collecting sandalwood, preparing whale-oil, logging kauri timber and building small boats.
On May 14th, 1848, Rougeyron and his missionaries landed at Paddon's settlement on Aneityum. On July 29th, 1848 (76 days later) came the first Presbyterian missionary, John Geddie. Choking with rage he saw through his telescope "those black figures marked with the sign of the beast". In his diary he noted: "the enemy had got there before us".

The hospitable Mr Paddon made them at home on the tiny island of Inyeug. Earlier that year he had been visited by the Anglican Bishop Selwyn, making his first tour of Melanesia. So in 1848, the three main churches had all set foot on the same small island. There was no way they could work together then; and alas, we have not made much progress since.

MONSEIGNEUR DOUARRE DECIDED TO RELINQUISH ANEITYUM — SEPTEMBER 1849 —

In spite of the malaria which took a terrible toll of his men, Father Rougeyron remained optimistic. The Brothers built a solid house of iron sheets and girders - it would not go up in flames like the house at Pouébo.

The Fathers cut down trees and planted a vegetable garden: beans, cabbage, lettuce and potatoes. "We have a good site here on Aneityum, and a nice property. A stream flows at the foot of the mission, and on top of the hill there is a superb forest. This island is ideal for situating the Mission Supplies Centre; it's safe and centrally situated."

Father Rougeyron was not over-worried by the presence of the Presbyterians: "Instead of three missionaries there will be six of us. It is quite an undertaking, instructing these savages in the mysteries of religions and trying to instill in them moral virtues. Our adversaries are trying to do all of that as well".

On September 7th, 1849, Bishop Douarre returned. He thought it was a waste of time trying to hold onto Aneityum, and recalled his missionaries to New Caledonia. He agreed at first to leave two Brothers, but in 1851, he brought everybody back and closed the mission.
The time the Santa Cruz group formed part of the New Hebrides. In November 1851, the "Ark of the Covenant" set out from the "Ile des Pins" with Fathers Roudaire and Anliard. They were put ashore, safe and sound, on Tikopia, a small island in Santo Cruz. They were never seen again.

Father Roudaire had been a missionary in Samoa and had difficulty in adapting to Melanesia. Hearing that the Tikopia people spoke a Polynesian language, he persuaded Bishop Douarre to send him there with Father Anliard. Thus they could begin the evangelisation of the New Hebrides from the north, since the Presbyterians were working in the south. The Bishop agreed. The months passed, and he became very worried. There was no news of his two apostles. In June 1852, the "Etoile du Matin" set off to seek news of their whereabouts. On board was Brother Anliard, brother of Father Anliard. He too never returned, and the schooner disappeared without trace.

What became of the three missionaries? It remains a mystery... Some people said they were seen in South West Bay, Malakula! An unfriendly sea-captain boasted that he had thrown them overboard. But one day the mast of the "Etoile du Matin" was found drifting in the sea, not far from "Ile des Pins".

The first assault was led by the Polynesian "Teachers" of the London Mission Society. It's a heroic and almost unbelievable story. These young missionaries from Samoa or Rarotonga, often young married couples, were put ashore in twos and threes on the island beaches. Their mission was to establish contact and win over the islanders. More than a hundred of them came between 1839 and 1861. Many died quickly. Twenty were slaughtered, some simply disappeared, most fell victims to malaria.

As soon as a group of islanders could be easily approached, a missionary would come ashore and build himself a house. The Reverend Geddie was the first, in 1848. Within eleven years he had converted Ancityum. From here, one of the smallest islands in Vanuatu, the conquest began. The march towards the north seemed unstoppable... But in 1861, Tanna began to resist. The Reverend Gordon and his wife were killed. The great Paton himself was obliged to take flight. But he returned
with a gunboat which shelled the villages. He then imposed his law. The kingdom of Christ must advance, by whatever means. And advance it did, through Erromango, Efate, Lelepa, Nguna and the Shepherds. A team of stout-hearted missionaries, aided by an army of "teachers" was ready to impose a new order, with the help of the police and the courts. Traditional customs were abolished. The women must wear long dresses, the men must put on trousers. The church bell would punctuate the day into times of work and times of prayer. Dancing was forbidden.

An extraordinary effort was made to translate the Bible and distribute it, by means of small printing presses. Geddie himself was a printer.

By the time that the Catholic Missionaries came to stay, in 1887, the Presbyterian Church was prospering. It was well supported financially, and at times militarily, but it owed its development to local people who became missionaries in their turn. When he saw the Polynesian "teachers" dying like flies, Geddie began very quickly to train young people from Aneityum and the other islands. Therein lay the secret of the rapid development of the Presbyterian Church.

THE STYLE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

In 1848, Bishop Selwyn called at Aneityum. From then on, he toured the islands annually on the "Southern Cross". As the Bishop of New Zealand, his diocese included the Solomons, the Santa Cruz and the New Hebrides. In the course of his journeys, he gathered young people who were eager to travel, brought them for studies to New Zealand and then brought them back as teachers to their home island. These young teachers had the huge advantage of speaking their own local language.

Bishop Patterson replaced him in 1861. This first bishop of Melanesia, he was an old boy of Eton and a gifted linguist (speaking as many as 24 dialects). He was also a man with a deep knowledge of Melanesia and its islands, which he explored thoroughly.

From the beginning, Patterson was at pains to localise his Church and chose the language of Mota (a small island in the Banks group) as a common language. He was an educator, sending his young leaders for training to Norfolk Islands. With his ship he went everywhere, visiting his young teachers.

On September 16th, 1871, Bishop Patterson was killed as he went ashore, without any suspicions, on a beach of the island of Nukapu, in the Santa Cruz. But his work was by then well under way. By 1900 the Anglican Church had two Melanesian Priests, 420 local teachers and nurses, 210 students on Norfolk and 12,000 (?) members.
The Anglican missionary had a liking for the islander and for his customs. He never sought, as did his "puritan" colleague, to banish customs judged to be pagan and satanic. He never thought that a pair of trousers was an essential part of the Christian life, any more than a long dress or a necktie. He announced the message of salvation with respect, and wanted the Melanesian to feel at home in his Church. Although inevitably pro-English, the Anglican Mission nevertheless called itself the "Melanesian Mission".

1881 - ANGLICANS AND PRESBYTERIANS SHARED OUT THE ISLANDS BETWEEN THEM THE CATHOLICS ARE OVERLOOKED

The Presbyterians continued to grow in the south, and the Anglicans in the north. In order to avoid possible conflict, the two Churches met in 1881 to establish their respective limits. The Anglicans would retain the Solomons, Santa Cruz, Torres, Banks, Maewo, Ambae and Pentecost. The Presbyterians would be responsible for the other islands, the southern half. Obviously no thought was given to the Catholic Church, at that time, nobody thought that Catholic missionaries would ever return. It is worth pointing out that, in 1881, three large islands remained untouched; Espiritu Santo, Malekula and Ambrym. These islands would become the first objectives of the Catholic Mission - three islands in the Presbyterian half.

For the Catholic Church had not completely forgotten the New Hebrides. In 1867, Father Rougeyron sought a recruiting permit from the governor. Following the example of Bishop Selwyn he wished to gather some young New Hebrideans and send them to school at Saint-Louis (outside Noumea), so that they could return home later as catechists.

"It is the only possible way for us to evangelise" he explained.

In 1873, Rougeyron, who had always refused to become bishop, passed on the torch to Monseigneur VITTE. It was at a period of France's history when she was sending thousands of her wayward children away from her shores to the penal colony of New Caledonia. The convicts were like so many new parishioners, and they too needed missionaries.

In Rome, they knew how to wait, and they did not forget. In 1874, Cardinal Barnabe wrote for information, and the Bishop replied: "We must begin the training of local catechists who will prepare the way for the missionaries. But it is not an
A FAR-AWAY ARCHIPELAGO

easy thing to do". Yes, the Bishop had the right idea. To start again in the New Hebrides, he needed catechists, missionaries and money. He had none of these.

A CATEGORICAL "NO" TO MR. HIGGINSON

Higginson, of Irish stock but born in England, a Protestant, came to Australia at the age of 15 and amassed a small fortune in the gold mines.

In 1859, he came to Noumea. He was 20 years of age. He began to make sugar, distilled rum, became a ship-owner, mined for gold at Diahot and for copper at Ballade. At the age of 41, he founded the company known as "Le Nickel". What more did he want?

In 1882, Higginson founded the Caledonian Company of the New Hebrides. He bought up vast tracts of land and tried to recruit settlers for them. But the planters who came first discouraged other candidates. In the New Hebrides, they said, men died like flies. There was malaria, cannibals and Presbyterian Missionaries who stirred up villages against any newcomers.

Higginson's settlers were poor people from "La Réunion" or from the French countryside. The journey swallowed up their meagre savings, but they believed that they would be given a fine piece of land of their own. No sooner had they landed than they began to fear for their lives. And their bitterness was even greater when they realised that the hostility was fuelled by the Protestant Missionaries - "Why aren't there any Catholic Missionaries?"

That was why Higginson went knocking on the door of the Bishop's house in Noumea. But on May 28th, 1884, when Monseigneur Fraysse presented Higginson's demand to his council, the answer was a unanimous "No". - "It is quite clear that Mr. Higginson is seeking simply to promote his Company. Moreover, there are no missionaries available!".

THANKS TO St. PETER CHANEL, THE NEW HEBRIDES HAD THEIR MISSIONARIES

But Higginson had a logical mind. He was English and a Protestant. But he wanted France to occupy the New Hebrides, and he wanted Catholic Missionaries. He hurried to Paris.
A FAR-AWAY ARCHIPELAGO

The French Government of the time was notoriously anti-clerical. But Higginson went from one Ministry to another, seeking help. Again he tried to interest Monseigneur Fraysse (who happened to be in Paris at the time) in the problem of the New Hebrides. And it was the Bishop who suggested the solution; there was only one person who could supply missionaries for the New Hebrides, and that was the Superior General of the Marist Fathers.

The Society of Mary was responsible for seven regions in the South Pacific. The New Hebrides was one of them and the new Superior General, V. Rev. Father Martin, had not forgotten that fact. He had also just heard some wonderful news: Peter Chanel, first martyr of Oceania, was to be beatified. Higginson's visit came just at the right moment. In thanksgiving, Father Martin said: "Yes". The New Hebrides would have their missionaries.

That was why the first missionaries in the New Hebrides had such a great devotion to St. Peter Chanel. The first large church to be built was at Lamap, and they dedicated it to him. They reminded him continually in their prayers that, if they were struggling in a really difficult enterprise, it was thanks to him.

IN GREAT HASTE THE EXPEDITION GOT READY

Higginson was overjoyed, convinced that he had won. He had obtained missionaries, and soldiers too. France was sending two military detachments, one to Port Havannah and the other to Port Sandwich.

This news caused great dismay among the Fathers in New Caledonia. In great haste, in the month of October 1886, Father Pionnier, pro-Vicar, departed with another veteran of Aneityum to recognise possible objectives of the new mission. In Noumea another veteran, Father Montrouzier, very angry, wrote to his brother: "Far be it for me to blame our Superiors, who want very much to start work again in the New Hebrides. But what pains me is the thought that we're going there accompanied by the military and at the behest of political agitators. I'm convinced that the Protestants will shout from the rooftops that our presence was imposed by force, with the backing of gunboats. I'm convinced too that before long we'll be at loggerheads with the Company, whose purpose is clear anyway; they just want to make use of us as an advance guard in places they're finding it difficult to get into. God help us!"

Father Montrouzier was a prophet. The Catholic Mission was about to make its re-entry to the New Hebrides in the worst possible circumstances under the patronage of the Société Française on a French warship, accompanied by French soldiers. The sea was stormy and dangerous, half of the expedition's cargo had to be left behind on the wharf, and nothing was ready at the other end... What would the future hold? But the barque of Peter does not capsize, even in the worst storms.
ON JANUARY 18th, 1887

FIVE MISSIONARIES ON A STORMY SEA

On January 18th, 1887, the French Navy escort vessel "Le Guichen" left the port of Noumea. Father Pionnier, Pro-Vicar, was the leader of the expedition. The weather was appalling. Five priests were on board, and with two families from New Caledonia and twelve young men. There were also a hundred soldiers.

Everybody was soaked through by seaspray and rain. There were no bunks; the Fathers slept on chairs. The ship pitched and rolled, and everyone was sea-sick. What a glorious start... the devil surely had a hand in it! Captain Le Pord, fearing the approach of a cyclone, ordered full steam ahead!

MELE, JANUARY 21st

On January 21st they reached Mele, a tiny off-shore island of Efate (the only corner still resisting the Presbyterians). But the Mele people did not want Catholics any more than Presbyterians. They wanted no missionaries of any sort. "Go away" they cried, "we don't need you. What were they to do? Time was passing. Hurriedly, men and baggage were put ashore on the mainland and the ship withdrew. At that moment the heavens opened and the rain poured down heavier than ever. Everyone ran for cover under the branches of an immense "tamanou".

In the group were:-

Father Charles Le Forestier, 51, the leader of the party, from Normandy. A solid and courageous missionary of 16 years' experience.
Father Xavier Chaboissier, 32, from Auvergne.

Four young New Caledonians: Simon, Casimir, François and Philippe.

All were exhausted after four days at sea. They tried to light a fire, but no dry firewood could be found. Impossible to cook anything... they swallowed some dry bread and washed it down with a little wine. Father Le Forestier thought of François of Assisi telling his brothers: "When we come to a house, cold and wet through and they chase us away instead of taking us in - that's when we'll be really happy!".

BANAM BAY, JANUARY 22nd

Meanwhile, the "Guichen" was making for Port Havannah, where it landed a detachment of soldiers. From there it headed for Malekula, reaching the military post at Port Sandwich at midday, and putting the second group of missionaries ashore at Banam Bay, at a good distance from the military.

Pionnier was the first ashore. The negotiations on the beach were lengthy, and the Captain grew more and more impatient as the state of the sea worsened. Finally Pionnier purchased a piece of land for two rifles. Father François Xavier Gaudet and his young helpers went ashore, the Ave Maria Stella was sung, and the ship sailed away into the night.

The missionary found himself alone on the beach with his little flock. On the horizon they could see the sinister red glow of the Ambrym volcano. The half-naked islanders standing around them did not look too reassuring either...

Father François Xavier Gaudet, 32, from Beaujolais, a man with a hearty laugh, felt a creeping sense of fear. Together they erected the tent, ate a little and tried to sleep. All night they could see lighted torches passing close to the tent. They shook with fear until morning, waiting for the attack which never came. The torches going and coming during the night were simply those of the women going to fish on the reef.
PORT OLRY, JANUARY 23rd

The "Guichen" in the meantime was steaming at full speed for the north of Santo. The wind had risen and the sea was very rough. Eventually the ship reached Port Olry on Sunday evening.

A ship was already there in the anchorage, surrounded by canoes. In one of them Captain Le Pord spotted the tall figure of Chief Péi; he was the one, Father Pionnier was counting on to welcome the missionaries. He waved to him to come, but Péi made off in the heavy rain towards the small off-shore island of Dionne, trying to slip away into the bush. Pionnier jumped into the ship's dinghy and, after some hard rowing by the sailors, caught up with Péi.

After an exchange of banter, the chief agreed to receive the missionaries. "Me very happy" he assured them, in the broken English he had picked up in Noumea. Once again they had to move rapidly because the Captain, now convinced that a cyclone was coming, was more impatient than ever to be on his way. Pionnier shook hands with the little group on the beach and went back to the ship.

The men set up house in a dilapidated hut on tiny Malnet island, close to the shore. For the moment, nothing else was available. In the group were:-

**Father Eugène Barriol**, 64 years old with 32 years of missionary work behind him, a solid countryman from the Haute-Loire, and an experienced builder.

**Edmond**, a devoted New Caledonian, with his wife **Anna**, who had trained as a primary-school teacher at Saint-Louis, and their little boy, Fidèle.

**Josué**, also from New Caledonia, his wife **Pauline** and little Marguerite.

*Father Eugène BARRIOL*
Father Pionnier returned a fortnight later. He sent the elderly Father Barriol to build the mission at Banam Bay. He himself would build Port Olry. Chief Péi gave the magnificent site on which the mission stands today, St. Anne's Point. It was covered then by giant trees and thick undergrowth. But the men quickly got down to clearing the bush and erecting a chapel. People from the hills came to stare in wonder; the men always armed, the women naked as Eve but without a trace of shyness. They were immensely likeable and contact was easy. Then, without warning, the whole mission went down with a raging fever. Josué came close to dying. The group disheartened, morale was low. Pionnier was due to leave, but could not leave his men in the condition they were in. In April, he pulled everyone out of the mission, promising the local people to come back soon.

THE NEW HEBRIDES MISSION WAS DIFFICULT

When Father Pionnier got back to Noumea after that first expedition, everyone realised that the mission in the New Hebrides was going to be tough, very tough. Some said it was already a failure. But its future apostles, as we shall see, were not to be so easily discouraged. Before going any further, let us briefly mention some of the obstacles which the first missionaries were going to meet.

Malaria. The toll was terrible in the first years. Not that many died, but the health of so many robust men was destroyed within the space of a few months. Even when the missionary proved to be physically resistant, he became embittered, and depressed; he felt abandoned, and became aggressive towards those who gave the orders... His Protestant colleague usually fared better: he was better housed, better fed, cared for by his wife. Constantly, having to wear a soutane was an added burden. The life of the missionary in those early years was wretched, miserable...

The savagery of the islanders. It is not a myth, and the truth must be faced, however crude it may appear. Some of the traditional customs were excessively cruel. The law of revenge (well written-about by Father Salomon) was absolute. Nobody could escape it. To satisfy the law, anybody could be killed; whether innocent or not was of no importance.
Despite what Bishop Doucéré says, cannibalism was still rife on all the islands. Not to share in a cannibal meal was an offence. And by sharing in it, one contracted an obligation which had to be returned.

In Santo, widows were hanged. On the small islands of Malekula, the aged were buried alive. Poisoning too was rife everywhere; poisoning by spells and charms, but also real poisoning. Courageous missionaries, who feared neither club nor axe, trembled at the unseen weapon of poison. This was true on Malekula in the nineties, and at ever Namaram twenty-five years later. They simply could not take the risk of eating what was offered!

**The multiplicity of languages.** How many languages in all? Nobody knew for sure, but there were certainly more than one hundred. Father Jamond spoke six languages, Father Chauvel five, Father Suas four. When one had slaved for months to learn a language, one had to start all over again on the next island. Luckily there was bichelamar, the language of the first traders, regarded by all with contempt, yet the only universal means of communication. It was understood everywhere and spoken by all the missionaries, but it did not lend itself easily to the finer details of theology.

**And the sea!** Which meant isolation, and perilous journeys from one island to another. One wonders how the mission survived for forty years without a ship. It was certainly a very severe handicap; the Anglicans and the Presbyterians each had a mission boat. One cannot but admire the journeys undertaken by our pioneers in rowing-boats as flimsy as a cockleshell. In the pages that follow we are going to re-live many of those early dramas and tragedies: Fathers Tayac, Le Fur, Perthuy, Sister Clement, all lost at sea; Sister Marie Ephrem dying on the "Tathra" after trying to save her girls.

**Cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves** were all natural phenomena and one could not do very much against them. But they demolished and destroyed morale. Suas, a man of iron who had weathered many a cyclone, said that one never got used to them. The painstaking work of long years could be destroyed in the space of a couple of hours. It was the last two cyclones which he suffered at Olal that really killed Father Suas.

Sister Marie Gérard, who had experienced the horror of being trapped between a torrent of red-hot lava and the ocean, shook with fear at every rumble from the volcano and never slept properly again. Father Caillon, at the slightest wisp of smoke, saw craters opening at his feet. Earthquakes one could get used to more easily. But they often left a beautiful statue smashed or a water-tank cracked. Father Sacco survived a tidal wave. He lost everything, except his pyjama trousers.
Epidemics. How many missionaries wept at the sight of a little flock, gathered with such labour and care, being decimated by dysentery, ravaged by Spanish flu or cholera, young lives snuffed out like candles. Father André saw more than 500 of his parishioners dying. Father Guillaume claimed that every baby born in '30 and '38 died of whooping cough. The epidemics which ravaged the southern islands in the last century even caused Geddie, the great Presbyterian Missionary, to lose heart.

And worse than anything: The war between the Churches. Let it be said clearly once and for all. The absurd spirit of competition between the Churches was the greatest obstacle of all to conversion. With the Anglicans, relations were good, except perhaps with Father Godfrey in the twenties in North Pentecost. But there were so many quarrels with the Presbyterian Church which often stubbornly placed its missionaries next door to the Catholic Missionaries, despite the fact that the vineyard of the Lord was vast and that so many souls were still waiting in the darkness. The most extreme example occurred at Wala, a tiny island of hardly one kilometer in diameter. Crombie came and built his house right next door to Father Salomon, whose mission had been there for a year already. How could one possibly preach against war and encourage brotherly love!

These were the greatest hurdles barring the road. The missionaries setting off to evangelise were men, with all the traits of men. They knew moments of deep discouragement, and would sometimes rebel against the misery to which they had been abandoned. At the same time, one cannot but admire the way they were able to pull themselves together, the strength of their faith, the depth of their life of prayer and above all, the attachment and genuine affection which bound them to the flock in their care. They were penniless, without any of the material attractions which might have seduced and won new Christians for the mission. And yet, convert people they certainly did.

God sent his Messenger... who came to tell the people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe.

John 1, 7.
THE FIRST THREE MISSION STATIONS

In Noumea, they waited anxiously for mail from the islands. The news, in letter after letter, was not good. Nothing had got off the ground at Mele, Higginson's Company was scoffing at the Mission, and the men were returning one after the other, worn out by continual fever. At Banam Bay, the Presbyterians had moved in to bar the way. At Port Olry the people were receptive, but the team was not working. It looked as if the Mission was headed for failure - and prophets of doom were a-plenty to say so. The failure of the first three stations seemed to prove them right...

1. MELE

FATHERS LE FORESTIER, CHABOISSIER, KAYSER.

After that first night, spent sheltering under a tamanou, Father Le Forestier gathered his men and his material into a tumbledown bamboo hut. Before long, Father Chaboissier was unable to take any more. He went to stay with Mr Klehm, a friendly French Protestant from Alsace. The youngsters, their strength sapped by malaria, remained in bed. They were unable to adapt and would leave, one after the other. The local French settlers felt sorry for Le Forestier. Monsieur Sicard cleared a hectare of bush for him and helped him to construct a temporary lodging. The priest in the meantime started the construction of the main house. But the work was proving difficult, as most of the timber had been unloaded by "La Dives" several miles from the mission, and half of it was missing. As soon as the missionaries had landed, the Company left them to fend for themselves in the rain. Higginson could no longer be counted on for help. The missionaries needed a tarpaulin to build a shelter? Sorry, the Company had not been notified. They needed a plot of land. Perhaps Monsieur Bernier knows workers? Sorry, none available at the moment. Le Forestier got very cross. "All the help they gave us was three children" he raged, "and if ever anyone was useless, these are!"

As far as Le Forestier was concerned, ties with the Company were now at an end. It would do nothing for them. He broke off relations. The suspicions about the Mele people had been well founded. They had been very hostile towards the missionaries at the beginning. In fact, an old witchdoctor prevented them from using the only available drinking-water. He blocked the road and put a spell on the spring. But now the people began to be more helpful. The old chief Tasso became the priest's friend.
But Father Chaboissier's health was in a woeful state. Consumed with fever, he was hardly able to drag himself around. He made efforts to learn the language, and to explore Lelepa and Port Havannah. But after three months he gave up. Le Forestier was now on his own. He was leader of the whole New Hebrides Mission, and the two northern stations waited for him to visit them. He begged Noumea to send another missionary.

Father Louis Kayser was the one they sent. A vigorous and cheerful priest from Alsace. The two priests would get on well together. Kayser quickly began to learn the Mele language. Shortly after his arrival Johnny, the son of the chief who had earlier wanted to send away the missionaries, came to see Father Le Forestier.

He took him out to the small island and showed him the plot of land on which he wanted the Mission to build a school.

Overjoyed, Father Le Forestier began hewing the timber for a classroom and ordered desks for the pupils. Alas, two months after his arrival, Father Kayser lay prostrate with fever. In September '87 he left, never to return. Brother Désiré came to the rescue, but he fell victim to malaria like the others. Again, Le Forestier found himself alone. It was imperative that he visit the other stations. There was no way he could begin the school without another missionary to help him.

In September '88 Noumea spoke out clearly: they had nobody to send; and it was pointless to wait. One of the three New Hebrides stations must therefore be closed down immediately. Le Forestier's reply was immediate: "If one of the stations must be closed, then clearly it should be Mele. I have never understood its importance other than as a favour we were prepared to give the directors of Higginson's Company in Paris".

In January 1889, Le Forestier packed his bags, sold the house and left Mele for Malekula. The buyer re-sold it immediately and left for Paris without paying. But all was not lost, as we shall see...

2. BANAM BAY

The Banam Bay station fared no better than Mele. Nevertheless, as it turned out, it served as a launching pad for most of the future mission stations on the island of Malekula. The reproach is sometimes made to the Catholic Mission that it always arrived too late. Father Gaudet, seeing the Presbyterians following on his heels everywhere, did his best to outstrip them. He relinquished Banam Bay when he saw that the contest was too unevenly matched. But all along the coast he set up little stations which would develop with varying degrees of success. Some were later abandoned: Unua, Uripiv and Pinalum. But others are flourishing today: Lamap, Rano, Wala, Vao. And yet, when Gaudet withdrew in July 1891, many believed that he had failed completely.
FROM ISLAND TO ISLAND

3. PORT OLRY

The third mission station was to pass through great tribulations, as we shall also see. Missionaries would come and go, one after another, prostrated by fever or by sheer discouragement. Just when hope was about to be realised, a white settler was murdered on the Port Olry beach - an event which seemed to dash forever the fruit of so much work and effort. In 1895, this mission station was also closed down, with little hope of it ever opening again.

On the offshore islets of North Malekula, progress was at a standstill. At Lamap, the Namal was blocking all conversions.

The only ones making any progress were Fathers Suas and Jamond on the island of Ambrym - but at what a price! Those who knew, predicted catastrophe. And the worst was yet to come. Despite all of that, the Mission was slowly advancing...

SLOWLY THE MISSION PROGRESSED FROM ISLAND TO ISLAND

Let us now examine, island by island and station by station, the progress which was being slowly and painfully achieved.

From 1887 to 1890, all the stations on the east coast of Malekula were being served by Father Gaudet. From Malekula, the mission spread to Ambrym. Father Suas founded Olal in 1893, Father Barrallon moved into Sesivi in 1894 and Father Jamond began Craig Cove in 1896. In the same year, Father Perthuy began again at Sesivi which by then had been abandoned.

In 1898, there took place the unforgettable beginnings of the Pentecost Island Missions. Father Rougier, from Fiji, founded four stations at one go: Wanour, Melsisi, Namaram and Loltong. He was helped by Jamond, who remained as sole missionary for the whole island.

In 1901, Father Prin, another ex-Fiji Missionary, began the Ambae Mission at Nangire, and in 1903, Father Deniau moved into Lopolopuepue. Still in 1901, Fathers Bancarel and Bochu returned to Espiritu Santo, which had been abandoned since 1895. They set up the mission in Tolomako, in the corner of Big Bay. From there Bochu took over Port Olry again in 1902, before pushing on to the Segond Canal in 1907 and founding Saint-Michel.

Since 1898, there had been a priest again on Efate. It was Father Lambotin, who founded the Port Vila Parish and built another house at Mele in 1901. Montmartre was the precious find of Father Loubière, under the guidance of Father Douceré.
Then came two foundations which would have no future: In February 1904, Father Caillon began a mission station on Epi. In April 1904, Father Niel founded the Lopangalo station at South West Bay, Malekula. Bishop Doucéré was consecrated on July 10th 1904 in Noumea. With a view to consolidating what had already been achieved, he withdrew the missionaries from Lopangalo in 1908 and from Epi in 1913. It was only in 1933 that Father Bochu founded a mission station on Tanna Island, at Lowanatom. And only in the sixties would the missionaries return to the great bay of Espiritu Santo and to the West Coast of Malekula.

It will appear from this brief resume that progress was painfully slow. Reading the story of each station will bring home to us the appalling difficulties which our pioneers faced. It would be very pretentious on our part, arriving after the battle has been fought, to pass judgement on their actions or criticise their methods. They were self-critical long before us, and gave their own answer to the question which must always be asked: If it all had to be done again, what are the mistakes to be avoided?

**PERFECTION HAD TOO HIGH A PRICE**

With the pioneers we will be going from station to station, following their slow advance around the islands. It is a fascinating tale: the extraordinary heroism, the tireless patience... How could they have done more? How could they have done better? They will give us their own answer as we read their story: "We wanted to make Christians who were too perfect!"

1° We waited too long before baptising.

We wanted to be so sure of the perseverance of our Christians that we were only baptising them at the point of death.

"We're peopling heaven" Doucéré liked to say.

"Aye, but where is our Church Militant?" growled Ardouin.

When Doucéré took control in 1900, he permitted baptisms to take place on Ambrym and Pentecost, since the missions had already begun there. Baptisms on Malekula were absolutely forbidden without his express permission.

The holy Father Salomon spent ten years on his islet without baptising a single person. He later regretted this bitterly, and said so. Father Jamond was ready to baptise all the Bétéhul villagers and their chiefs when he was packed off to South West Bay.
On the other hand, baptisms on Pentecost had to be preceded by a rigorous catechism test, supervised by the priest in charge. Thus Father Loubière, working in Namaram but in charge on Pentecost, had to examine candidates for baptism at Wanour, in a language which he did not understand. All were refused. Some came back the following year, others joined a different Church. We would often accuse our Churches-of-Christ and Anglican neighbours of baptising indiscriminately; but we were guilty of the opposite excess. "One would be tempted to see baptism as a reward for an edifying life," said Father Ardouin again, "instead of the door admitting one to God's house."

2° We tried too hard to protect our Christians from contamination by the pagans.

The ideal was to lead the newly-converted flock safely inside the wire fences of the mission.

It was the Gospel vision of the Good Shepherd. The Christian would spend his days in the shadow of the church steeple, his life disturbed only by the mission bell calling him to prayer.

At the beginning, this sort of "protected village" was a necessity. Father Suas created "Nazareth" at Olal and another "Nazareth" at Loloipepue where young families could practise Christian living far from pagan harassment. His idea was for them to return later to their villages. Alas, the boundaries of the mission often became a trap where the new Christians became lazy and lost their initial vigour. At Loltong, Father Gonnet had influence everywhere in the hills, through his catechists working in the villages. But when Father André later brought everybody down to the coast in order to build Latano, he lost some of the higher villages and epidemics decimated the flock now gathered in one place.

On Ambrym, Father Suas was present everywhere along the coast. When he returned thirty years later, the Catholics were all living inside the boundaries of the mission. In villages where he had built chapels and placed catechists, Adventists and Presbyterians had taken their place.

We had taken the yeast out of the dough.

3° Our attitude towards Custom was too harsh

It is said that the Catholics had a very broad-minded approach towards preserving the traditional customs of the country. This is quite true, though it is certainly not true of the directives issued by Bishop Doucéré. The reactions of the missionaries were healthy.
Father Loubière, seeing no more conversions at Namaram although 1200 pagans lived close by in the bush, pondered; "Is it not a grave duty to see what it is stopping God's work? The pagans are in no doubt. They realise full well that, when they become Christians, the real source of their vitality dries up; namely, their pagan feasts. The pagan village appears to be brimming with life, the Christian village seems dead. Are we not too severe?" The Christians, he realised, missed their feasts, which Father Jamond and others had permitted. But His Lordship was unshakeable. "Better to have a small number of solid Christians than a mass of baptised Christians cheerfully heading into an even hotter hell. We’re too severe? Not at all! Reading the directives coming from Rome convinces me that we should lean on the side of severity."

"We must fight against this tendency to go back to Custom... and let there be no giving-in! These feasts and customs reek of paganism, and even if severity in prohibiting them makes conversions more difficult - even makes them impossible - the missionary must not allow himself to be moved or change his line of action".

However, many missionaries believed that they too had the light of the Holy Spirit in guiding their flock. They were closer to the people and understood them better. They were not men to disobey their Bishop, but they closed their eyes to much that went on, and the future would prove that they were right to do so. Those who scrupulously followed orders would sit for years in empty mission stations. It may be said, at the same time, that in many places it was the Catholic Mission which preserved the treasures of Custom and resurrected the sumptuous feasts of the past.

4° We changed the missionaries too frequently at the beginning of the century.

There exists hardly one example of a missionary able to adapt to a new posting in less than three years, the time it took to become familiar with language and people. If by that time he had won the confidence of his parishioners, it was dangerous to move him without a very good reason. Being shifted around was often a severe trial for the apostle, especially if it happened two or three times in a row. It was even more of a trial for young communities, who became disoriented and took a long time to recover.

Later on, we went to the opposite extreme, pinning Fathers down in a mission for twenty or thirty years. But even that was preferable to the leap-frogging which took place in the early years.
MALEKULA

2.043 sq. km.
17,600 inhabitants
5438 Catholics

WALARANO P. 27
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UNMET P. 50
Father Gaudet came to Banam Bay on January 22nd 1887.

News travelled quickly. On June 2nd, 1887, the "John Williams" landed two Presbyterian missionaries right next door to his mission. Without scruple, the two new apostles set up their mission a mere stone's throw from the Catholic missionary: Leggat at Aulua and Morton at Pangumu. Gaudet was very angry. Had not Malekula been chosen precisely in order not to interfere with the Presbyterians? Hundreds of villages were waiting to be evangelised, yet here they were, setting up house within arm's reach of him. What could he do? He was living in destitution and they were well off. The children he had gathered at his mission ran away. Even his cat left to join the household of the pastor, whose wife made fun of Gaudet:

"The Malekulas do not like the French Missionary. He has no boat, no wife, no children. He has nothing."

Father Gaudet did not try to fight. His idea was to out manoeuvre them. In September 1888, he set up a base at Ponaik, not far from Lamap (the soldiers had left in March). Then he hastened northwards. Stepping over Aulua and Pangumu, he joined Barriol at Unua. Old Father Barriol had already built the house at Banam Bay, and Gaudet cursed the indefatigable old warrior who, even when delirious with fever, kept on sawing and hammering. But this time the "old rabbit" (as he called him) nearly died and was saved just in time by the "Fabert" which, providentially, happened to stop there.

The house at Unua was still not finished but Father Gaudet grew very uneasy at the thought of the "Dayspring" prowling continually around the islets of North Malekula. Once again he hastened northwards. Nobody dared to land on these small islands but Gaudet went ashore nevertheless and, on one after the other, set up a base. Unfortunately Banam Bay was, to all intents and purposes, now virtually abandoned.
Father François-Xavier Gaudet, pioneer of the Banam Bay landing (January 22nd 1887) was now caught up in a race against time with the Presbyterians. Despite the fact that his house at Unua was still unfinished, he was already starting new missions on the small islands of North Malekula, whose warriors were famous for their ferocity.

And yet on each islet lived a European. One only, not two! The Presbyterians had tried to gain an entry but had been rebuffed. And yet, in April '89 Gaudet (who was easily scared) succeeded. He bought a tiny plot of land on Rano, and another on Wala. The whole experience had so terrified him that he wrote to the Bishop: "I've roused the hare, but now I don't have the strength to run after it". He begged him to send by the first ship "an experienced missionary", "one not opposed to martyrdom" and even suggested "that old rabbit" Father Barriol.

Bishop Fraysse sent Father Jerome Guitta, a man afraid of nothing and of nobody (he was continually at loggerheads with the local gendarmes). He was 66 years old, a suitable age for martyrdom. When Guitta reached Unua, the bird had already flown. That very morning, May 25th 1889, Father Gaudet, unable to wait any longer, had moved everything to Rano.

François-Xavier Gaudet began the Rano Mission in the warehouse of Mr Harry Hutton, a man with one arm. Father Guitta joined him there and, with the sum of money he had brought, he purchased a site on the small island of Uripiv. Not a single Rano islander would lend a hand to clear the bush at Melsigév. The place was dangerously "tabu". Three young islanders from Ambrym were passing through, and Guitta offered the job to them. But they cleared out very quickly when the local people threatened to roast and eat them. A small hut was built with great difficulty, but the choice of site was a poor one, away from the ocean breezes. Father Gaudet was mere skin and bones, and Father Guitta was racked by fever. "The calm of death hangs over this place", said Gaudet, "Let's move to the other island!"
Rifle in hand, Father Gaudet went to salvage some planks from the hulk of a ship wrecked near Unua. Hurriedly he built a small cabin for his old friend, on the rise of Wala Island. Then he went to Noumea to seek help.

In October, he came back with Father Rosier and his team of builders. He also brought back a Superior, Father Dagod. Dagod had been told to control Gaudet, and stop him from moving around so much. But Dagod immediately fell victim to fever and was unable to control anything.

Father Rosier dismantled the Banam Bay house and re-erected it at Wala, but on stilts this time. "To avoid the fever, put your missionaries up on perches" a doctor had told them. The one-storeyed house at Wala was the first of many to be thus perched... But Rosier left before it was finished, his team all suffering from a bad dose of fever... or fear! The Rano people, jealous of the fine new house on Wala, were furious at Gaudet who had deserted them. They tried to draw him into an ambush and would have killed him, but John from Unua just managed to save him in time. They gave vent to their rage by demolishing his hut and killing his pigs.

Father Gaudet despaired of saving these people who killed and ate each other. He called Rano "a town of cannibals". Even his close and trusted helper Malkere had not long since roasted a bush-dweller from the mainland. In March 1890, the "Elisa Mary" was driven ashore on Unua by a cyclone. Fifty-six blacks and five whites were aboard. There were no survivors. Any who managed to escape were slaughtered and eaten. What an atrocity! Even on Wala the people were quarrelsome and unruly. One day they piled into the ground Ooor of the house, and a scuffle started. A shot was fired and the bullet went through Father Dagod's bed upstairs. In August '90 Dagod finally left, worn out by fever and danger.

Father Gaudet tried everything he could think of to succeed. In September '90, he opened a school on the upstairs verandah. It was a success. At times there were over a hundred pupils. The girls wanted to come too, but there was no room for them. One did not, of course, come naked into the classroom. There were "wrap-arounds" at the door, which were put back on the way out.

In January '91, Father Gaudet was at the end of his tether. He suffered from fever continually and was going blind. He suffered terrible nightmares of black men hiding in the dark to kill him. His old friend Father Guitta nursed him tenderly, quietening his fears. Father Gaudet's sight returned but his legs were no longer steady. In July 1891, he gave up. He had struggled for four years. All Catholics of Malekula owe him a great debt of gratitude. Instead of sleeping away his days in Banam Bay, he had staked out new foundations right up the east coast.
Another priest had been sent to this most difficult of islands, a rugged work-horse of a man, Father Joseph Lambotin. But calls were made on him continually to help out on the various building sites of the mission stations. So, Lambotin was almost never at Wala. For years and years, Jerome Guitta was the sole guardian of the island. But he preferred it that way. He knew that the time for sowing would be long, and he knew how to wait! The stories told about him are endless. He never got upset. They even stole his ciborium and used it as a paintpot. How many times did he see an axe brandished over his head! "Go ahead, kill me" he said to Melkere who, in a tearing rage, came pointing a gun at him one day: "But look out, because God sees you". Malkere turned around and went out.

"One day, something terrible will happen to old Guitta" said his neighbour Father Vidil. "Don't worry about me" Guitta would say, "I'll die in my bed." As if without a care in the world, the old recluse went on making his cheeses from the milk of his pet nanny-goats, and his famous beer (said to cure fever). In February '94 Guitta was moved to Port Olry. And here once again he would find himself alone, after the murder of François Rossi on the beach.

The great apostle of Walarano was Father Salomon, and yet he never performed a single baptism. Nobody knew the language and customs of Wala as well as he did. He considered all the families of the small island to be his own family. He joned in
their feasts, but abhorred their terrible revenges, meals where a neighbour was eaten. He fought particularly against the custom of burying grandfathers and grandmothers before their death. For ten years (1898-1908) he sought to reconcile the people of the two islands, who spent their time shooting at one another across the water.

One day a large meeting was planned to take place on the mainland, above Sandwir, in order to bring about a reconciliation between the bush people and the Wala Islanders. Salomon, thinking that his dream was at last being realised, was determined to attend the meeting. He crossed to the mainland very early in the morning, in order to avoid the Rano bullets. The bush people were late, and Salomon moved around chatting with Wala people who had already begun to arrive. Finally at around 11 o'clock the hill people from Dumelas and Bweterum began to arrive. They were unarmed.

One group headed for Father Salomon, who was sitting among some Wala People. They were no more than a few yards away when, suddenly, a man from Wala stood up, took aim, and fired at one of the bush people. That was the signal, and immediately rifle-shots rang out from all sides. Father Salomon dived into the undergrowth and tore his soutane. There was a general stampede, and when the dust had cleared, three victims lay crumpled on the ground. They were sliced up and shared out, portions being sent to Atchin, Vao and Lalemb. Father Salomon was not given a piece, but he received a chicken on account of his soutane getting torn. That wretched ambush was one of Salomon’s great disappointments.

But how often he had to stand by helplessly as someone was buried alive! Sometimes the old person was strangled first; but more often, bound hand and foot and rolled up in a bush mat, he was still talking when they began to toss in the clay. At last the day came when he thought he had finally won. But that same day, a man came to borrow Father’s spade to bury a neighbour, who was still alive.
CONVERSIONS AT LAST WITH FATHER ANTOINE GENEVET

Father Salomon left Wala in 1908. He never returned, and died suddenly at Montmartre on September 25th 1910. It was then that his successor, Father Genevet, began to baptise. Salomon had sown in tears. Genevet, who was to remain for 39 years on Wala, would reap with joy. He would baptise them all.

WALARANO TODAY

Father Bertrand Soucy was to bring Wala and Rano people together in a single mission station on the mainland, known today as Walarano. The move began around 1960 and, within a few years, a modern mission had emerged from the ground. The school building, over 80 metres long, would have filled Bishop Douceré with fright. But it was necessary to build; and even more would be built later. The church building is imposing and seems ready to challenge the centuries.

The out-stations of Norsup and Maé are growing in size. The deportation of many Wallisians and Gilbertese working in Norsup was a great loss to the mission there; their liturgies were beautiful, and they filled the fine Norsup chapel. But the local people are coming in ever greater numbers.

Father Noel Molvis, from Melsisi, is trying to cement that unity of Wala and Rano, sorely tested today by political rivalries. The same old problem, ever since the time of Father Salomon!

THE VAO MISSION
Father Jean André Vidil

Father Jean André Vidil was, with Father Jean-Baptiste Suas, perhaps the strongest personality of all the pioneers. Jamond Father presented him thus: "A man
always eager for work, full of health, strength and zeal. Taller than average, he has a fine appearance and seems not to fear."

On November 6th, 1890, Vidil landed for the first time on Vao. He was welcomed by the young chief Ta'ilong, on the beach at Nonoure. That was where he built his first hut, before moving to Kobu, where the mission is today. He was accompanied by Benoît, a New Caledonian from Puébo, a brave man who had been tortured by a brutal gendarme to force him to work on Easter Sunday. He had tied him to a coconut tree and left him there, naked, all day in the sun. Benoît had not given in. When his missionary, Vidil, was chosen for the New Hebrides, Benoît asked to go with him.

Vidil travelled a great deal by sea. On December 31st 1890 he went to Malo to wish a Happy New Year to old Father Deniau. The wind fell on the journey back to Vao, and he was forced to row for the whole day in the sun. Suffering from sunstroke and shaking with fever, he thought he was going to die... It was then that Benoît offered his life so that the priest would get back his health. Benoît fell into a coma. Eight days later, on January 17th, 1891, Benoît died peacefully on Wala Island. Old Father Guitta was unable to save him. Father Vidil, like a man risen from the grave, grew stronger and became a tireless apostle, a true "man Vao".

He very quickly learned the language and spoke it like a chief. They obeyed him. He fought mercilessly against war and cannibalism. Cannibalism was still rampant, and he had vowed to put an end to it. And what good were warships, he asked, if they were unable to put a stop to this plague? Father Vidil did not mince his words and went around trying to arouse interest among naval officers, some of whom thought it might be beneficial to show the flag to the natives once in a while, others of whom were quite capable of covering themselves in ridicule by carrying out idiotic repressions. Whenever Father Vidil himself came upon one of his parishioners chewing on a piece of someone from the mainland, he insisted that the chiefs thrash the culprit severely with a big stick. Which they were usually quite happy to do!
THE STRUGGLE WITH THE PRESBYTERIANS

In fairness it must be said of our pioneers that they never went into Presbyterian territory in order to oppose them. By the same token, they would never allow the Presbyterians into places where they were working. Father Vidil led a stubborn struggle against the "puritans" who tried to gain a foothold on the small islands of North Malekula. He would not go interfering with their work, so why should they come to sow division on the small islands where Catholic Missionaries had landed first at the peril of their lives? He chased them away from Vao, from Atchin, from Wala. He was everywhere at once, racing up and down in his canoe.

On Rano a burly pastor, who had formerly been a Queen's Dragoon, tried to tip little Father Chapelle into the well. That was just going a bit too far! On June 8th, 1897, Father Vidil landed on Uripiv, right next door to Minister Gillan's cottage. So Gillan promised never to set foot again on the small islands. (He waited until Vidil was dead before breaking his promise!) He it was who installed Doctor Crombie on Wala, on April 26th, 1902, a few steps from Father Salomon's house. Thus the foreign missionaries displayed, for the pagans to see, the lamentable spectacle of their divisions. How could they possibly preach against war?

ALL THEY WANTED WAS PIGS AND MORE PIGS...

The people of Vao came in great numbers to Father Vidil's catechism lessons. But they just would not be converted. They were always getting ready for another pig-killing ceremony, known as "namangi". As soon as namangi was finished, preparations for another would start. Father Vidil saw them setting off in their great canoes to seek pigs as far away as Ambae. In March 1895, they had collected 700, but it still wasn't enough. They needed more, and still more. "All they think of is pigs, pigs and more pigs" said Father Gaudet. Father Vidil discovered little by little that the people were caught up in a system impossible to get out of, a complex system of exchanges to which they were virtually enslaved. They called it the "vchilo".

Some of them saw this clearly. They realised that something would have to be done to end this ruinous custom. But no chief would ever dare to say: "Halt!" Many thought that Father Vidil alone could do it. He hesitated for a long time. But at the start of 1896, he imposed his "tabu" on the "vchilo". In doing so, he signed his death warrant.
APRIL 10th, 1898:
FATHER JEAN-ANDRE VIDIL DIED IN TERRIBLE AGONY

He had eaten prawns (a delicacy he was fond of) and they were poisoned. "There was nothing else we could do" confessed an old chief; "otherwise, it was he who would have become the chief of Vao".

In order to be forgiven, the Vao welcomed with open arms Father Antoine Tayac. But there were still no conversions, any more than before. When Tayac learned how they had done away with Father Vidil, he was horrified. He felt that they were fooling him all the time, and he was happy to leave for Melsisi two years later, in September 1900.

FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE JAMOND

After Father Romeuf had blown his hand off with dynamite, Father Jamond came to Vao. That was in October 1900. What a let-down after the enthusiastic crowds on Pentecost. "These people do not want to be converted," he wrote. "They are just not interested. You have only to live with them for a week to realise that". What was he to do? "I pray a great deal, sowing my Ave Maria's in every corner of Vao... often at night I say the rosary".

One day in February 1902, Father Jamond paid a visit to an old man called Molkaru, who was paralysed. Meltek Tineat announced that he was going to bury him! Food had been wasted on him for three years already! So the priest began to come every day to nurse him, to light his fire and grill his yam. Then on May 14th some people raced to tell Jamond that Meltek was getting ready to throttle the old fellow. Jamond took his wheelbarrow, loaded the paralytic onto it and brought him to his home. With the old man installed in his house, more people came around. They came to chat, the women came...
to gossip, the children stayed to play and then asked if they could stay... That was the beginning of the school, and the priest felt that the people were growing more friendly towards him.

The chief of Lambarang was the first to ask for baptism. He was ready to come with his whole clan. He knew his religion and had always diligently attended Father Vidil's catechism classes. Only one thing, though: he could not eat with the women - it would be an offence to the chiefly tradition. For Father Jamond, the time had come to baptise. By waiting too long, one could lose everything... Alas, as a gift for the New Year 1905, Jamond received orders to leave Vao and go to South West Bay which Father Niel, deeply discouraged, had abandoned. It was a great pity for Vao.

In October 1906, Father Jamond came back again to the small island. But the momentum had been lost. With infinite patience and in the greatest poverty, Jamond tried to show that religion has a loving face: "We must be loved by the people, otherwise we can do nothing. I think that, here in Vao, I have done what I could for that." Some families began to gather around him (11 baptisms in 1912).

Father Jamond believed in his school, but he was alone. South West Bay was again without a priest, and Jamond was obliged to make the long boat trip regularly to visit the people there, and he was simply unable to keep a close eye on his pupils. When Henri Tetesun, first native catechist from Vao, returned at last from Montmartre, Father Jamond went to Wala.

FATHER JEAN GODEFROY:
THE CONVERSION OF THE VAO PEOPLE

In May 1925, Father Jean Godefroy arrived. Vao had been without a priest for six years. The people were happy to have a missionary again. The time of grace had come. On Easter Sunday 1926, the chief of Tokvanu, Melesinale, was baptised and took the name Etienne. Conversions would continue, not in large groups but family by family. It is only today that the last adults are being baptised in Vao.

VAO TODAY

It was from Vao that the offensive to the west coast was launched (among other reasons because Vao had a good boat, and good sailors). On the small island, a large school project was started by Father Joseph Louppe (Father Massard had built the first school in 1954). It was a very ambitious plan for a little island with no resources; the construction, all at once, of six classrooms. Before long, they would
need twice that number. The young people of Vao wanted to go to school. There was a very large population of young people, and all in good health, thanks to the dispensary started by lay missionaries and then taken over by SMSM Sisters.

All of these efforts were rewarded. The movement towards conversion began again, and it would continue. The struggle against alcoholism was long and hard. For years it was a terrible evil; today, it has almost disappeared. The large church, nicely decorated with local motifs, is full every Sunday.

The population was already beginning to spill over onto the mainland in the time of Fathers Gianni Morlini and Blaise Buleban. But all remained faithful to the Church brought to them by Father Vidić.
THE ATCHIN MISSION

FATHER JEAN-PIERRE ROMEUF

It was Father Vidil who started the Atchin Mission, but Father Jean-Pierre Romeuf was the first to take up residence on the island, in July 1895. They both came from the same region of France, the Haute-Loire, and Romeuf was a great admirer of Vidil. Romeuf was a very hard worker. The well that he dug and cemented is still there, close to the church. He built a solid house and a church of unusual design. Despite the difficulty he experienced in trying to learn the language, he had gathered a sizeable group of sympathisers around him when word came from Vidil: "Come to see me quickly! I'm on the point of death". Despite the rough sea, Father Romeuf set off in his canoe. The canoe filled with water and went under. Romeuf dived to rescue his things, lost his shoes but saved the medicine. Alas, no medicine could save his friend Vidil who died on the feast of the Resurrection, after a passion that lasted for three days. Vidil's death was a terrible ordeal for Romeuf. Along with other confreres, he regarded him as a martyr. He was the first to discover the truth about his death. But the Reverend Father Douceré forbade them to speak of the poisoning of Father Vidil, perhaps out of respect for the people of Vao...

AN ACCIDENT WITH DYNAMITE

A stupid accident was to ruin Father Romeuf's missionary career. On September 26th, 1900, dynamite blew up in his hand while he was fishing on the reef. He lost an arm, and remained infirm for the rest of his life. His little group of catechumens persevered, but with many tribulations. In 1904, two young men shot the wife of Mr Germain, the local trader, bringing tragedy on their clan. All fled to the mainland to escape the reprisals of the navy gunboats. Many remained hiding in the bush for a long time, and died there. The group was reduced to almost nothing when the behaviour of another trader (a clumsy blunderer called Farrell) brought the mission into disrepute. Bishop Douceré, in his goodness, had lent the priest's house to Farrell, for himself and his family. In 1913, the little group of faithful began to look towards the Adventists. Yet all was not lost.

The Adventists, in fact, were able to turn these troubles to their advantage. True, they were extremely severe towards the customs, and would have nothing at all to do with whatever smelled of pig. But they had the power which wealth confers, and knew
how to instil in their members a certain ambition and a drive for development. They would be the first local ship-owners, and the first modern stores on the island would be theirs.

It was, however, a 15-year old Adventist who went to Wala and asked Father Genevet if he could attend his school. The young man was to become the catechist Cyprien. In February 1929, Father Genevet brought him back to Atchin with his wife Cécile. By dint of patience and will-power, Cyprien was to become the real father of the Atchin Mission.

**ATCHIN TODAY**

Here too the name of Father Joseph Louppe must be mentioned, along with that of school-teacher Pierre Betsesaï, who was still young when he died. It was he who started the first classes, living in the greatest poverty. Catechist Cyprien continued for many years to watch over his little flock, which in later years began to spill over onto the mainland and recently built a small chapel at Wormet.

Atchin is different from Vao in one worrying respect, namely the proliferation of sects which destroy the island's unity. The day when the Good Shepherds will gather together the flock is still distant, but it is the Catholic vocation to work towards it.

*Father Jean Godefroy, having converted the people of Olal and then the people of Vao, planned to convert the people of Atchin when he came back cured from Lourdes in 1933. But His Lordship posted him to Tanna, and he died suddenly just before going there.*
THE LAMAP MISSION

Father François-Xavier Gaudet was the real founder of the Lamap Mission. If he bypassed Lamap on January 22nd, 1887 and went ashore at Banam bay, it was in order to avoid the military post at Port Sandwich. But as soon as the soldiers had gone, Gaudet set up his first base at Ponaïk (September 21st, 1888). It was Father Lambotin who built the first house.

In February 1892, Father Charles Le Forestier, leader of the New Hebrides Mission, decided to relinquish Mele in order to strengthen the team on Malekula. He came to live at Pénap, not far from Ponaïk.

IN PLACE OF FATHER LE FORESTIER, BISHOP FRAYSSE SENT A MAN OF TRUST, FATHER VICTOR DOUCERE

At Port Sandwich, Father Le Forestier was at the end of his tether. The valiant missionary had pulled out of Mele, and he complained bitterly about how the authorities had forsaken and forgotten the New Hebrides Mission. He shook with fever in his cabin, open to every wind. "Try to manage as best as you can" they wrote to him from Noumea. To which Le Forestier replied: "I've tried that, and it doesn't work! Now let somebody come who can do better! I've had enough!" His strength exhausted, Le Forestier left on July 22nd, 1889.

The Bishop was weighed down with worries. In New Caledonia, the Church was being persecuted by the anti-clericals. The New Hebrides Mission, despite all the sacrifices made on its behalf, sent back only bad news. Not only did malaria wreck the men's health, it turned them into grumblers and complainers. Bishop Fraysse decided to send a man in whom he had the greatest confidence: Father Doucéré. He would be the one to re-organise the Mission, base it solidly at Lamap and from there strike out in a new direction, towards the island of Ambrym, and try to save on expense as much as possible. For the early vision had been too broad, and had swallowed up the limited resources of the Vicariate with no results.

As far as saving on expense was concerned, Victor Doucéré would set himself to do just that. If the early vision had been too broad, it would now become narrow, and would get even narrower. Over the coming years, financial considerations would play an exorbitant part in Church Administration, and paralyse the most urgent undertakings. The Catholic Church would be a poor Church, and the unfortunate missionaries would often be at the limits of destitution.
FATHER VIGOUROUX, 76 YEARS OLD, A VETERAN OF ANEITYUM, BUILT THE ONE STOREYED HOUSE AT LAMAP "LET US BE IN NO HURRY !"

On October 15th, 1889, Father Victor Doucéré landed at Port Sandwich. He was the Mission's new leader. He certainly did not look like a bush missionary. Yet this fragile-looking man would rule for 50 years over the Church in the New Hebrides. He was a Breton, 32 years old, with his mind made up to change things.

Doucéré chose the Lamap site. It was a good choice; a pleasant place, and it got the breeze. To construct the main house he wanted to bring a builder, Father Rosier. But Rosier, who had taken down the Banam Bay house and put it again on stilts on Wala Island, had already gone back to Noumea with his team, all of them fever victims.

A veteran from Aneityum days, Father Vigouroux, now aged 76, was called in to build the large house, planned to have one storey. He followed his own rhythm. "My friend" he would say, "we are in a hurry today, we were in a hurry yesterday, and we'll still be in a hurry tomorrow. Well, let us not lose time, but let us not hurry either. That's the only way to go quickly". Father Doucéré was content to do the cooking with Onésime, a youngster who had run away from a neighbouring plantation. He bewailed the construction-work, which seemed to be going on forever, "It always seems to me that our projects are too big !" No, that project was not too big. For sixty years that house would be a home for worn-out missionaries and for the annual retreat.
FATHER DOUCERE, FRIEND OF THE NAMAL.
ENDLESS WAR AROUND LAMAP

The village of Bangarére was next-door to the mission. Its chief, known as the Namal, was also the high chief of the region. Doucère knew how to win friends and had a gift for languages. Quickly, the two became friends. But all around Lamap, there was never-ending war between the villages. In July 1890, the Rovaro, son of the Namal, was killed. Vengeance called for vengeance in a never-ending circle. It was to a background of rifle-fire that the first Father's retreat took place in the new house, in August '91, bullets whistling occasionally over their heads.

In such a climate, how could Father Doucère win conversions? And how could he leave his flock untended, and visit the islands?

CAPTAIN WITHOUT A SHIP FATHER DOUCERE COULD NOT VISIT THE ISLANDS

The Anglican had their "Southern Cross" and the Presbyterians their "John Williams". They knew the islands and were close to their people. Father Doucère, leader of the Catholic Mission in the archipelago, did not have a ship. He was obliged to make use of ships of war and ships of trade. He would make rapid visits to his confreres, meeting them hastily on the beach and then leaving quickly with the ship. That was all he knew of the islands.

He did, at one stage, buy a cumbersome launch taken from a German cargo ship which had gone aground. But he was unable to find a crew, and quickly sold it again. Bishop Fraysse kept warning him not to risk his life on the small inter-island vessels. So what was he to do? Father Doucère should have been keeping Noumea informed with his reports, but he lacked an over-all view. He planned a great expedition to set up a base at Pallicolo, a place with no population. And he thought that Pentecost was a deserted island, whereas it swarmed with people.

MURDER OF THREE WHITE SETTLERS. FEAR OF REPRISALS BROUGHT CROWDS TO THE MISSION.
WHEN THE GUNBOATS LEFT, THE CROWDS LEFT.

Three settlers were killed, one after another, in the neighbourhood of Lamap. The first was Bichain, a bricklayer. Then there was a planter, Parent, and then the caretaker of one of the plantations, a man from Madagascar. There was terror first
among the whites, and then terror in the villages when gunboats were seen on the horizon. The villages of Meriver, Dravaï and Pénap all moved up close to the mission. A hundred men came to the catechism class. On August 24th, 1891, acts of repression were carried out by both naval services against the Assouk villages. Four villages were burned to the ground, and eight men taken prisoner. But as soon as the ships had left, shooting broke out again. The son of the Namal was ready to shoot at anything that moved. His own brother shot him dead. People were shooting wildly from all sides. The settlers, fearing for their lives had their rifles always at the ready. The beat of the tam-tam could be heard everywhere, as pagan feasts were once again prepared. In July 1892, nobody was taking religious instruction any more.

Father Victor Douceré spent three years and five months at Lamap. As a missionary, he experienced the terrible resistance of paganism. As leader of the Mission, he came across missionaries who were hard to manage; each one a man of spirit, albeit in very different ways. The older ones, like Guitta, did whatever they pleased. The younger ones, like Vidil, never minced their words. Douceré would be back, six years later, determined to make them submit, since discipline was the main strength of armies.

Malaria had dealt harshly with him during those years, often nailing him to his bunk for days at a time. He got to be like a skeleton and his thinness worried visitors, who told the Bishop. His Lordship recalled him to Noumea in April '93. But just before leaving he was able to carry out the special mission for which he had come: the founding of the Ambrym Mission. (Suas landed at Olal on January 3rd 1893).

The New Leader, Father Jean-Nestor Pionnier. A Likeable Personality But Powerless

Father Jean Pionnier, 52 years old, a stocky priest from Lorraine with a magnificent beard, came to Lamap on January 26th 1893, a picture of strength and good health. It made quite a change from the sickly figure of Douceré, and the missionaries were delighted to see him. Here at last, they thought, is the leader we need to further the New Hebridean cause. In fact, so imposing was his bearing that some saw him already as bishop!
Father Pionnier, however, had no illusions. He knew that he would never be the real leader of the Mission. For now His Lordship had Father Douceré near him, and he trusted him completely in every matter that concerned the New Hebrides. They would make plans without consulting Pionnier, and make decisions often without even notifying him.

And yet, Father Pionnier had a much more comprehensive vision than the authorities in Noumea. He wanted to expand the mission and found new bases while there was still time. He wanted to tackle the west coast of Malekula, starting with South West Bay. He wanted to make another attempt at Unua on the east coast, where there was a big population. He wanted the mission to have a foothold in the Maskelynes and in the Shepherds. He wanted to tackle Santo via Big Bay, where the people were asking for the mission. He kept asking Noumea for help, but in vain. The reply was always: "No." He beseeched them to purchase a boat for the mission; but the answer was "No." But without a boat, how could one visit a group of islands scattered over the ocean? Before long, Pionnier would need the express permission of Noumea even to go on tour! There was a Procure at Lamap, but they closed it. Everything was centralised in Noumea - the decisions, the funds.

Visitors passing through were always shocked at the pitiful living-conditions of the missionaries. Father Pionnier was a man with a great heart, and suffered to see his confreres so wretched. He would have done anything to ease their burden. He always made them as welcome as possible in the big house at Lamap. He bought a machine for making ice, but he was obliged to sell it again. The obligation of wearing the black cassock was, he felt, a useless cross and an obstacle to effective apostolic work. Douceré on the other hand felt that "the cassock so becomes an ecclesiastic that whatever inconvenience it presents, it can only facilitate our efforts and strengthen zeal!"

THE FATHERS' RETREAT IN PIONNIER'S TIME

All of the early Fathers remembered that first retreat held in Father Pionnier's house in Lamap.

There was the fearless Father Vidil, Father Lambotin, the glutton for work, Father Perthuy, who was never more enthusiastic than when setting out on a raging sea, little Father Chapelle, always good for an argument, Father Suas, the stubborn Breton who wrote humorous songs about the hardships of his confreres, Father Jamond, the "father of mercy" who told the most unlikely stories, and finally that tough old nut Father Guitta, celebrating his 71st birthday.
Together they prayed and sang in the words of the psalm: "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to come together!"

Father Gaudet, who had suffered those terrible nightmares in the North Malekula islands, sent a few bottles of Beaujolais from Noumea to raise the spiritual fervour at the close of the retreat. The great banyan-tree which sheltered the Madonna was decked with lights for the closing celebration and the local villagers, wide-eyed with wonder, shared in the communal joy. The Church in the New Hebrides, it could clearly be seen, was a place of joy. That night old Guitta began to sing the Preface in his sleep. Vidil answered him through the partition, but without waking the celebrant. The following morning, the apostles set off again with courage renewed.

**FATHER PIONNIER AND HIS YOUNGSTERS**

Lamap was empty when Pionnier came. Apart from the large house and the fine timber fence which surrounded it, there was nothing. The first thing he built was a small hut to serve as a chapel. Then he built a boys' dormitory. They began to come, timidly at first, and then in greater numbers.

Father Pionnier was very active, and he knew how to manage his youngsters. He taught them in the classroom, and worked with them, undertaking new projects all the time: one month they would open a new road down to the landing-point or to Draval, another month they would plant a big vegetable garden, dig a well, or build a bread-oven. He was reputed to be harsh, but it was not so. He was demanding, but his boys loved him. With them he built the magnificent church and crypt which served Lamap for so long (Pionnier had built the Noumea Cathedral). His successors would try to handle these young people differently, with an excess of gentleness, demanding no effort of them, but this would only result in their leaving the mission for good.

**THE NAMAL SHOT DEAD ON MAY 14TH, 1896. AN EVENT OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE**

The school was a success, and yet conversions were slow to come. The Namal held the youth of Lamap in the palm of his hand. If he wanted them present at a feast, he had only to get the old men to beat the tam-tams. The youth would come running, as if summoned by the voice of their ancestors!

The namal was determined to show that he was still master. He strode proudly everywhere, holding his bow and arrows, with his war-club over his shoulders. He
tried deliberately to provoke the local white settlers. Monsieur de Castlejan threatened him with his Winchester and got an arrow in the back. Just a warning! The Namal was dangerous. Everybody now knew that he had given the order to kill the white settlers in Douceré's time. The Company eventually lodged a complaint against him, and the Joint Naval Commission decided to send him for three years to New Caledonia, to cool his heels. There was no mention of an execution.

On May 14th, 1896, in the early morning, sailors from the "Scorff" went to the men's house in the village of Bangarere. There was a single rifle-shot, followed by five or six more. The Namal lay dead. The sound of that rifle-fire would echo for years around the islands... It was one of the major events in the history of the Mission.

Consternation reigned in the Lamap villages, because everyone knew that revenge would be sought for this crime. Many sought refuge at the mission, which shows their confidence in Pionnier. It must be said too that many rejoiced that the Namal was no more. People were terrified of him. He was a hardened cannibal, and they showed Father Pionnier the heaped-up skulls of his victims; usually children or travellers who had been passing that way.

For the young people, it was a liberation. The school was full. All the boys and girls began to prepare for baptism. Every Sunday, four hundred adults came for instruction. The Namal had been the real obstacle, and Pionnier rejoiced at what he saw. But the guardians of Custom never forget. The Namal would have to be avenged!

THE PLOT AGAINST FATHER PIONNIER : FEBRUARY '97

The old men held a council and decided: the priest must die, along with Brother Désiré and all the whites of the peninsula, all on the same day and at the same hour.

On the evening of February 22nd, 1897 Pionnier was informed of the plot by a child and the following day he prepared to celebrate the last Mass of his life. With a Brother he made an offering of his life, and was about to consume the hosts remaining in the tabernacle when he heard shouts coming from the sea. It was Father Perthuy arriving from Ambrym with eighteen men, all armed. A "teacher" from Baïap passing through Lamap, had learned of the conspiracy. On reaching Ambrym he had raced to tell Father Jamond, who immediately sent help to Father Pionnier. Realising that the game was up, the conspirators surrendered their rifles (over a hundred) and made peace. Only the people of Pénàp had not taken part in the plot. Pionnier had been saved. But his life was still in danger.
THE FIRST SISTERS: 1898 - A DAY OF TRIUMPH AS THE CHURCH IN HONOUR OF ST. PETER CHANEL WAS BLESSED. A PAINFUL LEAVE-TAKING.

On March 13th 1898, the first missionary Sisters arrived: Sister Marie du Sacré Cœur and Sister Marie Gabriel, with their two companions Angélique and Agripina. It was a new sign of hope! Sister Marie Gabriel and Angélique went to Ambrym.

The new church had been placed under the protection of the martyr of Futuna, Saint Peter Chanel. It was blessed on September 18th and people came to the celebration from all over the islands. For the first time, the Catholic Church stood revealed as a family that was alive and asked only to grow. The celebrations concluded with a grand finale around the Madonna of the banyan-tree bedecked with lights. At last, it seemed to say, the light has conquered the darkness. The Bishop himself came for the occasion, and could not praise Pionnier enough. "But six months later" said Jamond, "he was only good to be thrown out on the rubbish heap, all because of fifteen youngsters who had run away".

It was a fact that, ever since the conspiracy, the school had not been working too well. The old men were still seeking revenge, and the whites of Lamap also were against Father Pionnier. The Company bore him a grudge since he had publicly denounced some abuses and taken the side of workers ill-treated by a stupid overseer. All of this was reported to Father Doucéré, who arrived from Nouméa to see what was going on and then penned a crushing report. Pionnier, he decided, was in grave danger, and it would be better for him to leave and not return. On August 16th, 1899 at 10 o’clock in the evening Pionnier, heart-broken, left Lamap. The night hid his tears. But his youngsters would never forget him.

THE CONVERSION OF THE LAMAP PEOPLE

After the departure of Father Pionnier in August 1899, nothing else happened at Lamap. The mission was deserted. The children all ran away. Not a single one remained and, more than ever, the tam-tams of pagan feasts could be heard throbbing in the distance. Father Chapelle poured out treasures of kindness, but in vain!

Bishop Doucéré suffered to see his old mission thus deserted, and he tried everything to bring people back. He opened a nursery-school, which was to last for twenty years (1904-1924). He brought children from South West Bay. He held onto the people from Craig Cove and Sesivi who fled to Lamap in 1913 when the Ambrym Volcano erupted. It was all a waste of time. The mission was still empty.
In 1908, Father Chapelle went to Pentecost. He remained there for nine years. During that time, the one-armed Father Romeuf bred his goats and planted his lettuce and looked after a dozen orphans.

In 1918 Father Chapelle came back from Pentecost, where the cruel revenge of a slighted chief had re-awakened war between the Christians. He was forced to leave at a moment of high drama when the mission, the most flourishing one in the whole Vicariate, seemed to be ruined forever. After the turbulent world of Melsisi, Lamap seemed emptier than ever.

What should I do? Wondered Bishop Douceré, who had been waiting twenty years for a miracle. He decided to summon old Father Eugène Chapelle, who was then reaching the end of his career. He came in 1921, and the miracle took place. "I began to learn the language" he wrote, "just a little every day... the children began to get interested (that was Jamond's charism with his marvellous stories)... the women started to come... the people began to come in big numbers to Sunday Mass, from all the villages...

On December 16th, 1923, there were 80 baptisms.

On May 18th, 1924, there were 83 baptisms.

Father Jamond received an enthusiastic letter form Father Prin: "Obviously, it's God who converts, but he has clearly decided to make use of you. You deserve it. It's wonderful, and I'm so happy for you".

But Jamond wrote: "The Church's work had already been done when they killed the Namal. We can say without the slightest doubt that, if Father Pionnier didn't convert them all, he certainly gave them the faith".

**LAMAP TODAY**

It was with Father Jean Zerger (who was aptly nicknamed "Dynamite") that Father Pionnier's station really took off. Under his management Lamap became once again the centre of joyful life it had been sixty years earlier. It is a pity that the station never extended to the Maskelynes or to the north of Banam Bay. And yet
one is surprised by its vibrant life. The long occupancy of Father Alain Luquet enabled the finer details to be filled in of what, up to then, had been but a rough sketch. It is a pleasant experience to assist at Sunday Mass in the prayerful atmosphere of the Lamap church, where one cannot help admiring the quality of the craftsmanship and the sober ornamentation.

At Lamap, alcohol was, as elsewhere in the past, a plague. The idea of coming together in the evening over a shell of kava has drawn the population away from imported drinks, and they are all much better off for it.

**SOUTH WEST BAY**

**LOPANGALO OR LAWAL**

The story of this station, opened in April 1904, is a sad one. Once again, we arrived too late. The place was free when Father Pionnier wanted to open a mission there in 1893. But very quickly a Presbyterian Minister moved in. Father Niel arrived alone in a place about which he knew nothing. Three months later, a local white settler was murdered. Father Niel lost his courage and gave up.

To re-start the station, Father Jamond was taken out of Vao. He became friends with the Buliès tribe from the mountains, who were notorious for having slaughtered the whole crew of a whaling vessel. Jamond agreed to act as their intermediary, and gave them good advice when the navy gunboats came to punish the wrong-doers. To thank him, they allowed him to start a mission. Unfortunately, Jamond was prematurely withdrawn from South West Bay, and none of his successors would have any success there. Fathers Strock, Chauvel and Genevet were unable to start a movement of conversion.
Bishop Doucéré closed the station in June 1908 and asked Father Jamond, now based in Vao, to visit its small group of Christians from there. To do so meant an endless sea-journey. Father Jamond would have been happy to go back there and re-open the mission, but his wish was not taken into consideration. When he left Vao, South West Bay was more or less abandoned. But it would come alive again one day, in the little mission of Dixon.

THE RETURN TO THE WEST COAST

Since 1908, when Father Chauvel left Lopangalo with his few school-children, the whole west coast of Malekula was virtually abandoned, despite the heroic efforts of Jamond to visit it from Vao and the few rapid visits made by Father Durand aboard the "Saint Joseph".

DIXON

It was Father Francis Lambert who re-kindled a little flame early in the fifties, just to the north of Lawa, at Dixon Reef. A catechist, trained in haste, said the prayers every evening. There were a few visits by Father Soucy... but it was so far! Then in the sixties Father Joseph Louppe re-discovered the faithful little group which had persevered. Paule Weber began to take care of the sick people. It was a marshy place, infested with mosquitoes. But over the years a vibrant little mission would grow up here and spread into neighbouring Bamboo Bay.

WILAK

It was Father Joseph Louppe again who discovered, on the Big Nambas coast, a little group which had come down from around Névenala. They felt their lives threatened by the Amok people and asked the priest for protection. In 1960, Father Paul Monnier arrived, sorry to leave his Melsisi Mission. But it was Melsisi which provided the catechists he needed to start the mission among the Big Nambas. Wilak would be a first base; a tiny dispensary, a classroom and a delightful little chapel of woven bamboo.

It was clear that the vast majority of the Big Nambas population, living on the plateau, would never come down to Wilak. That is why a second base was started in 1962 at Unmet, with the agreement of Virhambat, chief of the Amok people.
Leaving the catechist, Rogatien, in charge of Wilak, Father Monnier set about the creation of the new centre, helped by Catechist Thomas. The place was occupied by a single warrior and his family. He was called Röli and would be baptised André. But he was then also known as "Melin Manko" which means "chief of the slaughterers" and this was, in fact, his function! He it was who welcomed the missionary and would support him in the face of persecution.

Father Monnier landed there on March 20th, 1962. A week later, his house-dispensary was already standing. That set off a violent reaction on the part of the Presbyterian missionary based in South West Bay. He declared the whole of the west coast to be Presbyterian territory and stirred up the people. Curiously, the first opponents became the first converts, and their chief, Christophe Tulili, became the most ardent defender of the mission. We must add that Catechist Thomas would remain faithful to his post and become the real pillar of Unmet.

The tiny station, begun so laboriously in 1962, is today unrecognisable thanks to Father Jean Rodet, who made it grow and prosper. A school, a hospital, a road, a water-supply; it has everything. Jealous of this success, his neighbours managed to get the missionary and many of his parishioners put in prison in August 1980 as dangerous rebels. But this only served as a new boost to the community, and they built themselves one of the most beautiful churches in the whole country.

What is very striking is the great interest which everybody takes in the development of their mission. Catechist Thomas is still there, and Rogatien is now there too. Quite different from Okoro, a station founded at the same time but which never developed, Unmet very quickly had a school (the work of Father Joseph Louppe again). "Don't open a school until you've got 300 recruits' they used to say. But a mission without a school never develops.

Unmet continues to look after its outposts: Wilak, now moving back to Pikaier on the central plateau where the soil is richer and the rainfall more abundant. And Dixon in the south-west, which is being developed at the moment, with classrooms, a dispensary and so on. A bit further south, the growth of Bamboo Bay has been hindered by the sect of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
AMBRYM

CRAIG'S COVE
SESIVI
PAAML
OLAL

ILE PAAMA

665 S.Q. KM
6,900 INHABITANTS
1,891 CATHOLICS

OLAL P. 53
CRAIG COVE P. 62
SESIVI P. 65
PAAML P. 68

— 51 —
"Mother of darkness" was the name the early missionaries gave to this fire-spitting island, when they first approached it. For a very long time, this island of black stones was considered to be closed to outsiders. In 1865, the "Dayspring" was afraid to put "teachers" ashore on it. In 1875, Watt, a more daring Anglican, tried to start a mission on the island but got nowhere. In 1883, the Presbyterian Murray did not last a year and left the island more dead than alive.

In 1890 the island was still untouched. From Noumea, Bishop Fraysse was urging Father Douceré to move onto Ambrym as soon as possible. A young man from Sesivi, Kaynas, was also urging Douceré to come over (Kaynas had worked in Noumea, spoke French, and had been taught to read and write by an ex-convict; on returning home, he wanted his village to progress).

In April 1890, Father Douceré waded ashore in the thermal springs that flow into the sea at Sesivi, and then explored the coast from Sanesup to Baïap. A year later the planter Rossi invited him to explore his own area, around Magam. In the meantime, Father Lambotin was looking at the region of Craig Cove, where there was a big population. Douceré was still undecided when a new missionary arrived, destined for Ambrym. His name was Father Jacques Roussel. Douceré was unsure where to send him and asked him to stay for a while at Lamap and help him saw timber for the new chapel. Jacques Roussel would never see Ambrym. He died on May 6th, 1892, twenty-six days after his arrival.

They waited for so long that eventually a Presbyterian Minister (the excellent Doctor Lamb) came and set up his headquarters at Deep Point. Douceré began to think that there would never be a Catholic Mission on Ambrym. But Bishop Fraysse was equally determined that there would be! Very soon afterwards he sent another missionary, and what a missionary! Father Jean-Baptiste Suas, a Breton from the Côtes du Nord, as was Douceré himself, a stubborn and determined character who, to his own misfortune and our good fortune, never knew how to back down.
On January 3rd, 1893, Father Jean-Baptiste Suas came to Olal. He quickly built himself a house, a tiny and fragile cabin which completely disappeared in a cyclone on March 4th. Suas lost everything.

In July a large insect pricked him during the night, leaving its sting so deeply embedded in his eye that he had to go to Noumea to have it removed! Was Suas discouraged? Not a bit. "It's only the devil stirring" he would say. Around the same time, the devil stirred himself again to incommode his Presbyterian neighbour, Doctor Lamb, whose house went up in flames.

But better days were in store. Firstly, the "old rabbit" Father Barriol (who had acquired a reputation as a first-class maker of armchairs, came to the rescue. Barriol built a house so solid that it is still standing today. Then came Father Jean-Baptiste Jamond, equally famous for his many adventures and for his endless fund of stories. What a magnificent duo they would make, Fathers Suas and Jamond! Jamond, an ex-Fiji missionary, went seeking in the bush for people who had been converted in the sugar-plantations of Fiji. These became his first catechists. Kaynas, who had been waiting three years for Father Douceré at Sesivi, came to Olal. They baptised him Jean-Baptiste. He was the first adult to be baptised, the forerunner of the West Ambrym Catholics.

A great celebration was planned for Easter '94. The two comrades went to Lamap to get supplies, picking up their friends in Sesivi on the way back. They hoped to make it back to Olal before nightfall, but they got caught in a storm and were pushed
off course onto a beach. The boat was a write-off and the provisions all at the bottom of the sea. They survived, but spent the night in a freezing cave, shaking with fever. The devil was still stirring, but the feast on August 15th would be even bigger. The islander loved his feasts, with the frenzied beat of the tam-tam. Fathers Suas and Jamond knew it. Why deprive the islander of what made him happy?

**CHAPELS ALL ALONG THE COST...**

The two missionaries pushed forward. They dotted the coast with small chapels, and in them the first groups of sympathisers came together. In November '94, Father Suas was building the chapel at Limbul when a new crater opened in the centre of the island. The ground rocked and shook, the island was on fire, and men ran in all directions. Suas, who was afraid of nothing, went on with his building.

Doctor Lamb left for Australia. He was so discouraged, they said, that he would not return. Father Suas took the change to move forward in the West, pushing as far as Baiap and Sanesup. In September 1895, Suas installed Father Régis Barrallon in Sesivi, to the great joy of Kaynas, who had prepared the ground well. But Barrallon would not last six months, a victim of malaria. In January '96 a passing ship took him to Lamap, half-dead...

**AND A SCHOOL**

It was certainly talked about, that school! Maybe because it ran so well. What a happy place it must have been, with Father Jamond and "Thomas the Fijian"! The youngsters worked, prayed, wrote, read and sang. To build the school, Suas went cutting guaiac timber as far as Deep Point. The boys rowed for ten hours on a bamboo raft to bring it all back to Olal. To find natangoura leaves to make the roof, they crossed over to Wanour. All the small boys of Pentecost wanted to go back with them!

What an appetite these youngsters had! But because ash was falling all the time, vegetables were hard to grow. Suas bought rice. He also needed bush-knives, copybooks, clothes. The school cost money. Yet Suas knew how to manage. The children brought coconuts. He made copra, and sold it.

Everything seemed to be going very well. There were eighty pupils already, and more were arriving all the time. Then the old men began to get restless. It was
rumoured that children would be poisoned if they attended the school. A child died, and there was panic. To crown the misfortune, the old men wanted Father Suas to pay for the child's life by giving a pig. Little did they know Suas! He turned the tables on them, and they ended up paying a fine. Then they threatened him with their rifles.

Father Suas was not one to be easily thwarted. He went to Rhanon, bought rifles, handed them out to his boys and began to drill them in the use of arms. Soon he had a battalion of shock troops and nobody dared to rub him the wrong way. He was not overly tender-hearted, Suas. But if he appeared hard at times, Father Jamond was there to pour oil on the troubled waters...

ONE DAY AT FANLA

This is a story which must be told, because it was talked about throughout the length and breadth of the islands. One day, the Fanla people stole a superb pig belonging to the catechist he had placed at Magam. Father Suas heard of it and, rifle over his shoulder, he strode with some men up to the Fanla nakamal: "I've come for the stolen pig".

Surprised, the men held a brief meeting, then came back: "We've decided to eat your pig, and you along with it!" There was a roll of tam-tams, and Suas found himself in the middle of a circle of men armed with clubs and axes. This time, Suas was really afraid. He emptied his pockets of whatever was in them, trying to buy his life. But they laughed at him, and insulted his men. One savage was sharpening a knife on the stone he was sitting on: "to carve you up more quickly" he said, leering at Suas.

Suas boiled with rage and humiliation. So the great apostle of Ambrym was about to end his days in a native oven! Suddenly there were loud howls. The unexpected arrival of Malkon, chief of Limbul and great friend of Suas, took the Fanla by surprise... With one bound, Suas was off, his long legs carrying him as fast as they could to safety. But he had not swallowed the indignity.

On May 9th 1896, the seamen from the "Scorff" went up to Fanla and burnt down the houses, causing mighty scandal, whose echoes reached Noumea. The Bishop heard about it, and wrote a scolding letter. "If I did not notify Your Excellency before the event" replied Father Suas, very respectfully, "it was because I feared you might oppose such corrective measures, which were nevertheless of the most absolute necessity. From now on it will clearly be known that one cannot, with impunity, insult a missionary by holding him prisoner from 11 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, sharpening before his eyes the instrument which will be used to carve him into pieces when the sun sets!"
You have to be present, explained Father Suas, to judge these things correctly. With these people, you may not allow yourself to lose face. And it seemed that Suas was right because now the school was working better than ever, and children were coming from everywhere. Only one problem was worrying Suas, and it was the future for his boys?

THE GIRLS' SCHOOL

Father Jamond tells the story of the first girl. She was called Bernadette, a little orphan aged 10 or 12 who lived at the mission. One afternoon, Fathers Suas and Jamond dressed in old clothes were building a wall. Suddenly there was the sound of weeping. It was Bernadette being carried away by force to marry an old man from Fona.

"Oh, the pigs!" said Suas, throwing down his trowel. He lit his pipe and said: "Jamond, isn't it our duty to do something?" "Just what I was thinking" said Jamond, and the two of them hastened in pursuit of the cortege. Suas, with his long legs, quickly caught up with them. He shot his hands, grabbed the girl who was being carried on her uncle's back, and galloped back to the mission, pulling the little girl who ran as fast as she could to keep up. Everybody was astounded by such audacity!

Obviously they would take the girl back. But she ran away before that could happen. What can we do? Wondered Suas. "It's simple" an old sage told him. "If you have pigs, you buy her".

Yes it was, in effect simple, and Suas became a pig-breeder. He bought back Bernadette, who later became a catechist at Wanour, and purchased fiancées for each of his boys. He had to buy them young, because other wise they were sold already. But they quickly grew up, and soon Suas found himself mightily, encumbered by his regiment of Amazons. He asked for Sisters...

This created another fine scandal at Noumea, when they heard that Father Suas was buying girls and, what was worse, with pigs! Was he off his head? "Your surprise surprises me," said Suas. "Didn't the Church ransom slaves in the past? Here a woman is treated as less than a slave and if she doesn't agree, they beat her black and blue until she sees reason!... And another thing: it seems that you're refusing to send Sisters for fear they'll see naked men on the beach when they arrive! Really, you're putting the cart before the horse!"
THE SISTERS : 1889
"NAZARETH"

Once again Father Suas won. Sister Marie Gabriel landed at Olal with her charming companion Angélique on April 1st 1898. From now on, all would be well. There would be good Christian families. The previous year, Suas had founded the village of Nazareth. It was there, far from the pestering of pagans, that young families could grow in the Christian life, before returning, solid in the faith, to their villages. They would be the yeast within the dough. Later, alas, Nazareth would become a trap very hard to get out of...

Sister Marie CELESTINA

THE GREAT FEAST OF PENTECOST '98

On May 27th, 1898, Pentecost Sunday, Reverend Father Doucéré came to give Confirmation in Olal in place of the Bishop. That day there were 40 baptisms, 79 confirmations, and over 80 First Communions. Doucéré was impressed by the atmosphere, the dances, the joy. Father Suas was certain that Doucéré would send in a good report to Noumea. There would be no more spokes put in his wheel. "Thunder and lightning will no longer fall on my head", he wrote happily to his friend Father Pionnier. "I was becoming the lightning conductor for the Fathers in the New Hebrides."

Father Suas rejoiced too soon! Doucéré had spent almost four years at Lamap without a single conversion. Now here is Suas, after five years, with over a hundred baptisms already! Is it serious? Are his Christians really solid? On top of that, Doucéré had heard some malicious reports from the Rhanon neighbours, on the subject of copra! Was it fitting for a missionary to be thus engaging in trade?
DARK DAYS AT OLAL,
BECAUSE OF A FEW BAGS OF COPRA...

Clerics are forbidden to be involved in business! Father Suas knew this perfectly well. He also knew that his Presbyterian neighbours received thousands of pounds from Australia, whereas the Procure no longer gave him a penny. The copra he sold was the fruit of his work and that of the school children. The profits he drew from it went to feed his growing band of boys and girls. "There can be no question of stopping the copra; otherwise it means the death of this mission, which is so beautiful and so full of hope!"

To calm the worriers, Father Suas made an arrangement with a sympathetic trader, Goussard, who looked after the business side and secretly channelled the profits to the mission. But the Rhanon neighbours fixed things for Goussard to be put in jail. It was the last straw! Suas said he would prefer to leave rather than stand by and watch the ruin of his school. He was taken at his word and sent to Wanour.

Father Suas left Olal on January 21st, 1902. A worse moment could not have been chosen. A terrible epidemic of dysentery spread panic through the school, and the whole flock disappeared back to the villages. Sister Marie Gabriel was still there and she was able to recover all the girls. Suas would have been able to bring back the boys, but he was now far away. Some of the boys who had been baptised never came back. And this, of course, was noticed. It was the proof that his conversions were not solid! It would be necessary, in future, to be more severe before admitting to baptism.

But the Christians of Father Suas were solid indeed! All of the first catechists of Vanuatu came out of that school. Victor, catechist at Wala, Jean-Baptiste, catechist at Rano, Isidore at Baie-Barrier, Martin at Namaram, Anatole at Loluopuepue... all of them baptised by Father Suas.

SHOULD WE STAY INSIDE THE FENCE?

When Father Suas left, the great offensive was over. The likeable Father Vazeille, who came for a short period, remained for ten years (1902-1912). Too old for long trips in the bush, he fitted in perfectly with the new style of Reverend Father Douceré: namely, to gather all the new Christians within the narrow confines of Nazareth in order to save them from contamination by the pagans. Moreover, as the sale of copra was now absolutely and completely forbidden, the school had no
resources. Henceforth it would be reserved for the children of Christians only. Young pagans would not be admitted.

**Father Jean Godefroy** arrive in 1912, bringing a breath of fresh air. A famous sermon which he preached about the first Pentecost gave a new impetus to volunteers who were willing to tackle the bush again. Suddenly there was a new missionary spirit blowing, and chapels appeared in the villages: Néha, Melbülbul, fanla, Willit, mélué, Lonré, Fontengro, Harrimal. People were sceptical when Brother Timothée marked out the foundations for a large church, but even before it was finished, it was full. Father Godefroy performed over a hundred baptisms. Alas! he was getting throbbing pains in his right leg, which swelled up; he had filariasis. In 1917, he had to leave. (In 1925, he would go to convert the Vao).

**Father Casimir Bancarel**, for seven years (1917-1924) would again keep his flock "inside the fence". "Outside of the fence, no salvation". Dutifully following the directives he was given, he waged merciless war against pagan dancing and rejoicing. The Christians living within the mission (since one must keep oneself amused somehow) discovered games of dice... or the bottle. Or they ran away on passing ships. The fold got gradually emptier...

The mission was simply marking time. In 1923, Father Louis Clenet began to visit the pagan villages again, but he only stayed for two years. It was far too short! Old Father Jamond came back to his mission after an absence of 30 years. But he was now an old man, dragging himself around with difficulty. He made use of the time to write his Memoirs before he became paralysed and died.

In 1926, Father Bancarel, the good shepherd, returned. The pagans seeing themselves hotly pursued by Presbyterians and Adventists, seemed to be turning to the Mission. But the mission perimeters were no shelter against Spanish flu. It ravaged the flock in 1927, and everybody wanted to flee this place of death.

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*Father Louis CLenet*

in Vila on May 22nd, 1926.

In 1926, Father Bancarel, the good shepherd, returned. The pagans seeing themselves hotly pursued by Presbyterians and Adventists, seemed to be turning to the Mission. But the mission perimeters were no shelter against Spanish flu. It ravaged the flock in 1927, and everybody wanted to flee this place of death.
When Father Jean-Baptiste Suas came back in July 1931, he did not recognise the mission he had left 38 years before. There were now fewer Christians than when the mission began! Two cyclones, one after the other, were too much for the old warrior, and he died in Norsup on January 12th, 1933.

Confidence was born again with the arrival of a young Belgian giant, Father Camille André (1933-1937). The old people believe that, had he stayed, everyone would have been converted. Alas! Struck by some mysterious illness, he died in Vila on February 16th at the age of 33. Many believe he was poisoned.

Then Father Louis Clenet came back, a missionary who was to spend 49 years on Ambrym. Clenet kept all of Bancarel's prohibitions, but he was a gentler and more sociable type of man. He spoke three Ambrym languages perfectly, was a gifted story-teller, and people liked him. He did not visit the pagans, but the pagans came to gossip with him. He and his catechist Anatole fought long and hard for the pig to be no longer "king of Ambrym". He was of the 19th Century and his ideas never budged an inch, but people loved old Father Clenet. The pagans were still in no hurry to be baptised. But they would come eventually, all of them, one after the other.

OLAL TODAY

The gates of the mission are wide open, and the birds have all flown out to start new nests in many other places. Fathers Joseph Clementi, Joseph Foucher, Antoine Verbraken all paid regular visits to the pagans. The centres which Father Godefroy served are all being served again. On Sundays and feast-days the large population fills the big church built in the time of Father Maurice Linossier. Father Suas would have been so happy to see it. He who was present not only in all of these places, but in Limbul and Magam as well.
Today it is a community which is very alive, where the village catechists play their full part. It is good that they do so because, since Father Bordiga left in 1986, Father Blaise Buleban is responsible not only for Olal, but for the whole of South Pentecost as well.

In 1987, the Sisters left Olal, and were not replaced...

Sister Marie Gabriel, the first Sister to come to Olal, with her girls.
THE CRAIG COVE (OR FALLI) MISSION

BEGUN ON APRIL 28th, 1896 BY
FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE JAMOND

In 1896, Noumea decided to found a station at Craig Cove in West Ambrym. The idea came from Father Barrallon. He never saw a ship stopping at Sesivi and wanted a new base, somewhere between Sesivi and Olal, where ships could work in safety. Craig Cove seemed the ideal place. (Mr George Craig, who used to live in the little bay, had been murdered in 1885. One should really call it "Craig's Cove").

On April 28th, 1896, Father Jamond gathered all his belongings together and put them in a bag. In tears, he said goodbye to Olal and went to start the new station at Craig Cove. He found it very hard to leave Olal, but it was the feast of the martyrdom of St. Peter Chanel.

Father Jean-Baptiste Jamond was accompanied by Father Henry Perthuy, the unlucky missionary from Port Olry. Father Perthuy was to settle in Sesivi and would be a Sesivi man until the end of his life.

Father Jamond stayed for a few days in the house of a local Chinaman. Then, with the eager assistance of the whole population, he built his house at Sulol. Jamond was no stranger, and Jean-Baptiste Kaynas had prepared the ground well. Two children from Olal came with Jamond, and they began to recruit for the school. Jamond could have had fifty school-children straight away, but for the moment he set a limit of sixteen.

In the bush, which was at that time full of people, the chief of Boho, Mweleun Toktok, declared himself to be in favour of religion. This was quite a revolution in the graded chiefly society, for it was highly unusual for the secret society of the Luan to let one of their members go. But Kaynas also had chiefly rank, and he helped him to free himself. All the youth of the region thereupon came out in favour of the mission and Father Jamond was full of optimism.

Jamond was always full of optimism. This hospitable man had a gift for languages. The people found him approachable, and this made the first contacts easy. His house at Sulol was God's house and visitors were always amazed to find boys and girls frolicking on his veranda as if they were at home, and smoking his tobacco...
Everything was going well when, on April 19th, 1898, Father Emmanuel Rougier came and plucked him out of Craig Cove. Together, they were going to found the Pentecost Mission.

AFTER FATHER JAMOND, SOME SHOOTING STARS...

Craig Cove would not recover from this sudden departure. When Father Morel tried to restore a bit of discipline in the school, the children took flight. Morel, to cheer himself up, went to the island of Paama and started a mission station at Liro, which Bishop Fraysse ordered him to close immediately. Morel, discouraged, packed his bags.

Father Passant who took his place was, as his name indicates, simply passing through. He lasted for six months, and only one child remained in the school.

Then came Father François Rougé. A man bursting with talent, he began to train young apprentices, wore himself out building the Sesivi church, dismantled the house at Sulol and put it up again at Fali, where it was cooler. Before the house was finished, they took him out of there and put him in charge of the Procure in Vila.

In June 1902, it was the turn of Father Pierre Chauvel, who tried to finish the house, although he did not know one end of a hammer from the other. On the other hand, he bravely set himself to learn the language and had managed to gather together a few boys when he was suddenly sent to South West Bay... How could the people possibly be converted? (It was during Chauvel's time that Presbyterians came back from Queensland and gathered in the village of Uro, which is back-to-back with Fali).

And then, at last, a long reign! Father Casimir Bancarel stayed for eight years (1905-1913) ! Bancarel alone seemed happy in the grey ash of this lonely outpost at the end of the world. With great care and patience he prepared people for baptisms which he would never perform for on December 3rd, 1913, the island blew up. It was a massive eruption,
and he had to flee with his flock. When the flock returned to Craig Cove, he was told to remain in Lamap.

**THE TIME OF CONVERSION IN CRAIG COVE**

After the eruption of 1913 which nearly swallowed him up, Father Bancarel took refuge in Lamap. But when his people went back to start their lives again under the falling ash of Craig Cove, Father Bancarel was anxious to be with them. The Bishop, however, who hoped to re-populate his beloved Lamap with Ambrym refugees, would not allow him to leave. When the danger was over, the Craig Cove people went home despite the showers of hot ash, which were still frequent. Bancarel, wondering how they could possibly survive, knew that his place was with them. He went to visit them. There were 237 people around Fali and they were still not baptised, because the Mission had waited too long.

When it became evident that the Ambrym people were not going to stay in Lamap, the Bishop sent Father Bancarel first to Big Bay, and then to Olal. Only in 1923 was he allowed to return to Craig Cove, to prevent a Presbyterian Minister from moving in there. Father Bancarel began to teach catechism again, but the baptisms would be performed by Father Clenet.

Father Clenet remained for thirteen years. What extraordinary patience he had! His good humour made the place seem not so gloomy. "The most beautiful scenery in the world!" he exclaimed to an English lady tourist, who retorted: "I prefer London".

On June 28th, 1929, he was awakened by an underground rumbling, which then became a roar. A torrent of red-hot lava began to unfurl towards the mission. Father Clenet piled his community onto their little boat and took to the sea. When they returned, they found the little station miraculously preserved. The streams of lava had branched off to either side of the village.

Craig Cove escaped other eruptions. There remains today a very congenial little group of Christians where Father Clenet's memory has not been forgotten.

**CRAIG COVE TODAY**

Craig Cove was to remain a small mission. Father Cyriaque Adeng joined in those flights from the volcano's anger in the legendary days of Father Clenet, and he is there now as the guardian of the modest but immensely likeable flock. Leaving
their village in large numbers is now second nature to them, and so one finds lots of "Craig Coves" in Vila. The little church, the work of a lay missionary, Gerard Fiorani, was built to resist natural disasters and yet has an intimate atmosphere, with its fine altar made of lava.

THE SESIVI MISSION

ONE SINGLE MAN: FATHER HENRY PERTHUY

We noted that Father Regis Barrallon was the first missionary to come to Sesivi and lend support to Kaynas. He built his house in a place which was airless and stuffy, where fever took hold and quickly ruined his health. He suffered from loneliness, and often spoke of the "desert" of Sesivi. He left in January '96.

There was one man free at the time to relieve him: Father Henry Perthuy. He was a man who felt completely lost once he had given up hope of ever returning to Port Olry, and he was happy to find a new apostolate for himself. Father Perthuy did not have the personality of a Suas. But he had the same fierce desire to win conversions and despite continual bouts of ill-health he would still be there, faithful to his post, until the very end....

Kaynas, as we have said, had prepared the ground well. When Perthuy arrived, he found 33 little urchins in the school. He started baptising on August 15th, 1897. Like Suas, he became a pig-farmer, and bought fiancées for his boys. In 1900 he had so many girls that the young pagans were forced to come to school if they wanted to find a wife. Fortunately for him, Sister Marie Gabriel's companion, Angélique, agreed to come from Olal and be the first shepherdess of the flock. The first Sister, Sister Marie Constancia, came in September 1902. Angélique, whom the girls loved dearly, had to leave for Lamap consumed by illness, and she died there on February 2nd, 1904.

The perennial problem facing Father Perthuy was the volcano which overshadows the mission. The ash which rained down continually destroyed his vegetable garden time after time, creating a famine in the school. Forced to buy rice in order to survive, he plunged himself into debt and was scolded for this regularly by his
bishop, which mortified him. He himself often went without eating, and denied himself so much that he became badly affected with scurvy.

On April 21st, 1902, the new church was blessed. It was Father Rouge's masterpiece. Father Perthuy should have been happy, but he was not. He saw so much that he could do, but his poverty forced him to wait. He wanted to give more attention to Baïap and Sanesup, and go to the South-East. But he had no catechists, whereas the Presbyterians surrounded him with "teachers". When the catechists' school began at Mele, Perthuy was full of enthusiasm and immediately sent the best candidates he could find. His disappointment was great when the first ones came back. He was expecting bright young men. But they came back empty-handed, ignorant fellows without a book, without notes, without a scrap of a hymnal. His keen disappointment was shared by all the other missionaries.

A drunken tragedy was to darken even more the last days of Father Perthuy. A young fellow called Gregory went to buy drink from Prunet who had a licence to sell alcohol at Sanesup. In a drunken stupor he took his rifle, went to the church and shot dead two of his friends who were at prayer. The people wanted to kill Prunet, the cause of the tragedy. Father Perthuy saved his life. But they shot him as soon as Perthuy was dead.

FATHER HENRY PERTHUY,
DROWNED AT SEA WITH
SISTER MARIE CLEMENT ON
OCTOBER 11th, 1908

Father Perthuy put the final touches to the catechism he had translated into the Sesivi language. He wanted to have it printed, as now all the Sesivi children could read. He was carrying the precious manuscript when he got on a boat with Sister Marie Clement on October 11th, 1908, to go to Lamap. The sea was very rough. Heading out of the channel into the open sea, the small vessel turned over and the ocean swallowed up the two valiant missionaries. To the last, Father Perthuy was holding the precious manuscript tightly pressed to him.

To carry the good news, that was his whole life.
THE "TATHRA" SHIPWRECK. SISTER MARIE EPHREM AND HER GIRLS FOUNDER IN A CYCLONE, JANUARY 3rd, 1912.

Four years later, almost in the same spot, another tragic sea-drama was enacted. Sister Marie Ephrem was coming back from a tour of Pentecost, bringing girls for the school at Montmartre.

Off the Ambrym coast, the "Tathra" was caught in a cyclone. The Sister was sheltering on the deck, and the girls were below. She could have saved herself, but as she went down into the ship's hold to find the children, the "Tathra" was engulfed by the sea...

HANGING ON BRAVELY UNDER THE ASH OF THE VOLCANO

At the time of Father Perthuy's tragic death, the whole of the Sesivi group was converted. But for a very long time it would not develop.

In 1913, Father François Caillon lived through many hours of anguish when the crater erupted. It showed great bravery on his part to go back there so quickly afterwards. But it is hard to know who was the more frightened, at every fresh rumble from the volcano, he or Sister Marie Gerard. Life was unbearable; ashes falling like rain, explosions, rivers of lava at times... Father Chauvel was the next to brave the place. He was spitting blood, but the Bishop had nobody to replace him and asked him to stick it out as long as he could, otherwise Ambrym would be abandoned. The volcanic ash corroded the roofing iron and the water tanks. Soon there was no drinking water.

At last, in 1915, Father Louis Clenet arrived. It was none too soon for Father Chauvel, who was consumed by tuberculosis and could do no more. Father Clenet remained for eight years. He got used to his volcano, which regularly destroyed his gardens of vegetables and cotton. He lived in extreme poverty. He attracted the few pagans who were in nearby villages, but went no further afield. He could not leave the school, as he had no Sisters to mind the girls. It was life "within the fence", closed in on itself. Bāiap and Sanesup were progressively abandoned. There was no longer any question of going to the South-East. How could he go, without catechists?

In any case, catechists were no longer left on their own. It was thought that they would not persevere. Father Clenet would not even let his catechist Pierre go back alone to his own village of Craig Cove.
When Father Clenet was shifted to Craig Cove, he continued to look after Sesivi up until 1938. He certainly formed solid Christians. That is what his bishop wanted.

**SESIVI TODAY**

All of these stories conjure up a land of grey ash. But when the showers sent by the volcano cease and everything grows green again, it is a place of sumptuous vegetation. Here, more than anywhere, one has the impression of being in the hands of God... a crater has merely to open.... At times Father Perthuy's little station was left a bit neglected, but Father Jean Zerger gave it the last ounce of his strength. It was in his time that Mr Montgomery, in record time, built the fine church on the foundations of the old one, keeping the majestic front steps designed by Father Rouge.

**SOUTH-EAST AMBRYM : PAAMAL**

The Catholic Mission had still not gone into the South-East, though Father Perthuy had planned to do so. Father Caillon, growing weary of the narrow confines of his mission, insisted on being allowed to start a mission there. There were still no Presbyterians then, although the Reverend Frater came from Paama once a year. The population of the area was around 2000 souls. In 1923 an Irish planter begged the missionary to come while there was still time. But Bishop Doucere would not give the green light for a foundation in the South-East.

It was Father François Groetz who began the first little station at Paamal in the sixties. The area was by then dominated by the Presbyterian Church. But it must be said the Church of the majority was losing the gloss of its years of glory and, in the South-East, was in a period of stagnation. Its members were casting envious glances at Churches which appeared to be more dynamic, and which did more for education and health.

The incursion of Catholics into its domain was a salutary influence.

In fact, this little station was very hard to get to. Father Groetz went there because the people asked him to. Once begun, the work had to be continued. Regrets were expressed, once or twice, that this mission had been started. It was a very long walk, either for the priest from Olal, across the Great Ash Plain, or for the priest from Sesivi, along the rocky cliffs of the coast. Here again it was the devotion of catechists which saved the situation, and mention must be made of Donatien from Sesivi grandson of Jean-Baptiste Kaynas, Pascal Nalesabang from Wala and Jonas Bulegalibo from Melsisi.
PENTECOST

LOLTONG

NAMARAM

BATNAVNI

MELISICI

TSINDBWEGE

RANGUSUSU

SAINT HENRI

BAIE-BARRIER

WANOUR

BAIE-MARTELLI

439 KM2
10,500 INHABITANTS
3,892 CATHOLICS

MELSISI P. 71
NAMARAM P. 78
LOLTONG P. 81
BAIE BARRIER P. 84
"Pentecost Missionaries must be chosen for their feet" Father Suas used to say. Hill-climbers with sturdy legs are needed on this mountainous island which is indeed all "hills and slopes" ("pentes et côtes" in French = Pentecôte). Bougainville gave the island a very apt name! And the mission itself was founded with lightning speed, reminiscent of the rush of the Spirit on that first Pentecost. The story is a unique one, and well worth telling.

In November 1884, Father Pionnier was going on a pilgrimage to Futuna. He stopped off in Suva, where a major surprise awaited him: one evening in the church he found 150 New Hebridean workers praying and singing Fr. Emmanuel ROUGIER their heart out in Fijian. 150 baptised Christians! Whereas in the New Hebrides, after seven years of missionary endeavour, not a single person had been baptised!

After prayers, Father Pionnier went to drink kava with them, and told them: "One day, you will all come back to convert your brothers." Pionnier planted a seed in their minds, and it bore fruit. On May 17th, 1898 the "Rotumah" reached Pentecost Island with 51 ex-Fiji workers aboard, all coming home to convert their brothers.

A Fiji Missionary arranged everything: Father Emmanuel Rougier, better known as Manuele, an organising genius. One day he would win fame as a business man, ship-owner and king of Christmas Island. But for the moment, his whole attention was concentrated on getting these Pentecost islanders home, and his organisation was masterful.

Manuele began by visiting Noumea. He wanted to tell off his friend, Bishop Fraysse, who had nothing prepared because, according to the Bishop's advisor Douceré, Pentecost was practically a desert island. "A desert island is it?" protested Manuele, waving a detailed map which he had drawn himself, dotted all over with villages. Father Rougier knew exactly where he was going. He had divided his men into four teams which would work in four clearly-defined areas, and each man knew
exactly what he had to do. He had divided his map from north to south into squares, like a grid...

Seeking forgiveness for his state of unreadiness, the bishop gave a completely free hand to Father Rougier, who immediately asked for two missionaries: Father Vidil from Vao, one of the most dynamic of them all, and Father Jamond from Craig-Cove, who spoke Fijian. Rougier was on his way to pick up Jamond at Craig-Cove when he learned the terrible news: Father Vidil had just died, poisoned. It was a cruel blow, putting the whole enterprise in jeopardy. But it was too late now to pull back. The whole of Pentecost would have to be borne by Father Jamond alone...

And this is how it happened. Father Manuele made a rapid exploration of Pentecost, and then went to Wanour to wait for his troops.

He bought the Martelli house as a first base. The "Rotumah" arrived on May 17th. The men were briskly put ashore at their pre-determined stations: five at Wanour, sixteen at Melsisi, twenty-one at Namaram and nine at Lolotong. Every day during the trip the men had been briefed until they knew their instructions by heart. They knew exactly what to do upon going ashore. The church of Pentecost was under way!

THE MELSISI MISSION (MAY 17th, 1898)

Father Jamond's catechists. Many of them were workers brought home from Fiji. Starting from the left, No.3 is Enoki, Head of Melsisi Catechists, No.4 is Stefano, Head of the Pentecost Catechists, and No.5 is Bonifacio, the School Headmaster.
The great strength of Father Jean-Baptiste Jamond, sole missionary for the whole of Pentecost, was the battalion of catechists which Father Rougier left for him. Father Manuele himself immediately returned to Fiji.

At Melsisi, close to the river, the sixteen-returned exiles immediately built themselves a chapel. Very quickly they put up bamboo huts for the school and gathered the first pupils. Setefano Teviri, chief of the Pentecost catechists, directed operations. Inoki, area leader, began to visit the bush. Bonifacio, was the schoolmaster and the real pillar of the mission. His wife, Verona, taught the girls.

The other messengers of the Good News set off up the steep cliffs and the precipitous bush tracks of their island, into the villages, inviting the warriors of the hills to come down to the Sunday gathering. They came in crowds. An extraordinary photo taken by Father Romeuf shows the open area next to the church packed with men and women, all sitting on the grass, listening to the preaching.

Every village would have a special hut built to serve as a chapel. The Anglicans were already working in the same area. Father Jamond arranged a meeting with their missionary, William Edgell, who was looking after Ambae, Maewo and Pentecost. The two men agreed not to try to compete with each other. But Stefano was without scruples of that sort; he began to pester three Anglican "teachers" who were working in the neighbourhood (who all later became Catholics).

Father Jamond spent most of his time in the boat, going up and down the 60 kms of Pentecost coastline and visiting his friend Father Suas on Ambrym. A colourful character called Grelier usually captained the boat. He was a sailor from Noirmoutier who had been shipwrecked on Pentecost; a man impossible to live with, a perpetual grumbler, but he knew the sea better than anyone. Father Jamond spent his days going from one anchorage to another, visiting his men, encouraging them and rekindling their enthusiasm... for persecution was soon to begin.

In the Melsisi bush, a youth who seemed to be in too much of a hurry to go to church was hacked to death with an axe. At Namaram, the Omalfa people shot at the catechist. At Loltong, the high chief Viratuku shot Carolo's brother. Father Jamond patched up these things as best he could, and his presence calmed the desire for revenge.

Two years after his arrival, Father Jamond performed the first baptisms: 59 at Melsisi, 40 at Namaram and 11 at Loltong. (Father Le Fur was already in charge of Wanour). Hundreds of baptisms were being prepared in the other stations. The Church was young, and generated enthusiasm.
PENTECOST

Alas, in July, Reverend Father Douceré came to see what was happening. He reprimanded Father Jamond for having baptised too quickly. Spiteful tales told by Stefano acted like a match set to tinder, and Father Jamond was told to pack his bags and go to repair the big house in Lamap.

The one who felt really miserable about the whole affair was Stefano himself, who loved Father Jamond as he confesses in a letter which he wrote: "I told lies against the Father, because I was angry about land which was mine. O Father Jamond, please forgive me, help me by your prayers, Father so dear to me......".

FATHER ANTOINE TAYAC LOST AT SEA

Father Tayac, who came to take Father Jamond's place in September 1900, was a true saint. But the burden placed on his shoulders seemed too heavy to bear. He reckoned that there were now 3000 catechumens, and he felt that the catechists, especially at Namaram, were very bitter over Jamond's departure.

No sooner had he arrived than persecution broke out worse than ever around Loltong. The terrible Viratuku shot the mother of his catechist, Carolo. Father Tayac urged forgiveness and Carolo agreed to a meeting with the murderer. But it was an ambush, and Viratuku fell under the bullets of the newly-baptised Christians! The news went around that Tayac himself had organised the killing: a venomous-tongued French woman living on the coast, Madame Fullet, spread the story.

Father Tayac's devotion to his people is still remembered today. When an outbreak of dysentery hit the school, everybody was panic-stricken. Father Tayac made a shelter on the beach for the children who were suffering, and slept with them at night so that they would not be afraid. The children voided their bowels on the beach, which was washed clean by the tide. With all his heart, Father Tayac prayed to Saint Peter Chanel. When his feast-day came, on April 28th, all the children were on their feet again. That story would not be forgotten!
Father Tayac did not venture very much into the villages, but he sent his men, and told them: "Go, and don't be afraid. I am going to pray, so it's the same as if we were going together." Nobody knew when he slept; his oil-lamp remained alight for most of the night; he was learning the language. He visited Namaram every week, travelling by boat at night. It was then that he composed his hymns and practised them with his rowers: "Star of the sailor, when I'm in the dark night..." was composed in that way (wamsonan atsi walan...)

Father Tayac begged Father Doucéré: "It is absolutely necessary that a priest reside at Namaram. At present I'm trying to go there every week. It's not sufficient... Fire can only heat what is close to it, and the missionary has influence only where he is present. When he's not there, the catechists grow careless and get discouraged."

Alas, the decision was not the one he was expecting. Father Suas, the heroic missionary from Ambrym, came to replace him and he, Father Tayac was sent to Namaram. It was an enormous sacrifice for him to have to leave Melsisi. He began to move his things to Namaram, and was returning by night to Melsisi. The canoe was over-loaded. At Sada Point, a large wave lifted the canoe out of the water and it turned over. Tayac safely swam ashore. But he dived in again to save some non-swimmers who were struggling in the water, and was never seen again. It was September 22nd, 1902.

FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE SUAS, APOSTLE AND FIGHTING MAN

The appointment of Father Suas to Melsisi (he arrived on September 11th, 1902) gave the stubborn Breton Missionary a chance to rekindle the old fire of his Olal days. For the first six months he learned the language, and had time to observe that the mission, after its dynamic and rapid beginnings, was getting bogged down and losing its pioneering zeal. He decided to wake it up again.

This began with a clash between himself and Stefano, the head catechist. "You may expect anything from that man, both good and bad", Father Rougier had written. "He can stir up the whole countryside in your favour, or he can make trouble for you of the worst kind." The time for making the worst kind of trouble had now come.

We must try to understand the situation. Father Suas knew that he could count on no financial help. The lean years had arrived! What this meant was that the multiple kindnesses of Father Jamond, the little girls of Tayac - pipes, matches, tobacco, clothes - were now finished... and Stefano rose in revolt! "You ask the catechists for everything, and what do you give them? Nothing!" It was all too true, but what could Suas do?
But that was not all. Up until now, the catechists had been using only the Fijian language for prayers, catechism and singing. It was high time to start putting everything into the local language. Stefano, however, did not agree. Furthermore, Suas was now sending his youngsters to Montmartre for training; they would come back well-instructed and speaking French. So what would become of the older catechists, those who had pioneered the mission?

Father Suas selected catechists to visit the pagan villages, but Stefano refused to accept this. He claimed that seven catechists had already been killed or poisoned. From now on, he insisted, catechists would work only in their own village, where they were safe.

Father Suas spoke to Stefano about his behaviour towards the Protestants, which was quite unacceptable (Stefano went so far as to pull out the crosses planted over their graves!) Stefano called Suas a heretic.

Stefano was ready to wage war on the pagan chiefs who were obstinately refusing baptism. As soon as Suas had his back turned, he mobilised his troops. "The Fathers know nothing about war" announced Stefano: "War is the business of the catechists".

Stefano was quite unafraid. He had obtained the departure of Father Jamond and the submission of Father Tayac. But Father Suas would not submit. At first Stefano was supported by a faction but soon found himself to be alone. Then he began to mend his ways and sought reconciliation with the mission. He took charge of the men who were starting work on the big church, translated the Fiji Catechism into the language of Melsisi and composed many hymns. Father Suas stayed no more than two years and four months at Melsisi, but he prepared the way for the great movement of conversion which was to follow. In January 1905, he was moved to Namaram where he immediately found himself plunged into a deadly feud with the "mariak" of Likabwe, high chief of the region. Father Niel replaced him.

THE ISLAND TORN APART BY WHARFARE, YET CONVERSIONS CONTINUED

Melsisi was the station which developed the quickest. It owed its rapid development to the three remarkable missionaries who were there at the very beginning: the friendly Father Jamond, the saintly Father Tayac and the energetic Father Suas. It owed its rapid rise also to the solid team of catechists placed there by Father Rougier. But, more than anything else, Melsisi was the only station where the new converts were not put into a pen close to the mission; for the very simple reason that Melsisi is built on a steep hillside dropping abruptly to the sea, with no possibility of planting gardens. Families came to stay for a whole year, to get ready
for baptism. Then they went back home to their own village. The life of the village thus continued without interruption, and the yeast continued its slow work in the dough.

There was, of course, another side to the picture: living in daily proximity to the pagans led, inevitably, to serious clashes. Melsisi lived through some terrible wars. Father Neil soon found out that, to slake their thirst for vengeance, pagans preferred to kill a Catholic since these were not supposed to seek revenge. At one stage, even the best of the Christians thought it was high time to teach the pagans a well-deserved lesson, and Father Neil had a hard time holding them back! He worried so much that eventually his nerves gave way. When the first Sisters arrived they found themselves, to their consternation, with a nervous wreck on their hands. He left in 1908.

Father Chapelle, who succeeded him in the same year, had a terrible experience with the high chief of Lalda which almost destroyed the mission. Ligeri, a young wife of the chief, sought refuge at the mission. To prevent an attack by the chief's warriors, the missionary thought it best to give the full number of pigs demanded in payment for her. In return the chief allowed her to be baptised, but he would not allow her to re-marry.

Father Chapelle was determined to show that, at the mission, he was the chief. There were now lots of converts, and pagan chiefs could not be allowed to twist them forever around their little fingers. When Inoki said that he wanted to marry Ligeri (now christened Clotilde) Chapelle agreed, and blessed the marriage. The chief, enraged by this slight, immediately sent his assassins to execute the newly-weds. But the couple went into hiding. So they started killing wildly, anybody and everybody. The Christians took sides and began to shoot each other. Father Chapelle had no choice but to disappear.

His place was taken in 1917 by Father Gonnet, who had been so successful in Loltong. He spoke the language perfectly, understood the customs, knew how to read the language of the leaves and of the slit-gongs. Yet he also found himself with a war on his hands.

One day in 1932, his catechist at Sélé beat the drum for evening prayers. It was at a time of the year when custom demanded that tam-tams remain silent. The chief from the next village, in a rage, came and smashed the tam-tam to splinters with his axe. It was a declaration of war. Terrified, the Sélé people sought help from the mission. Father Gonnet sent his men, and in the melee the chief's son was killed. That led to total war, which lasted for a full year. The Christian villages backed each other up, and after a major battle in which a famous killer called Kaula was slain, peace was at last restored.
Father Gonnet died at Melsisi on June 28th, 1935. His successor, Father Guillaume, lived through the last of the wars, which was a terrible one. Guillaume realised that, in all of these appalling conflicts, it was the innocent who suffered whereas the really guilty covered themselves in glory. Suppose we were to rid ourselves of the real killers...? Guillaume set in motion something equally terrible. It was to be the last of the wars. But the game was too dangerous... In 1940, Guillaume was deported to New Caledonia.

MELSISI TODAY

The Mission, torn apart by war, was put in the hands of the young Father Louis Julliard, who came there from Port Olry. Louis Julliard put a small chapel in each of the villages of the high bush. He knew everybody by name, chatted for hours in the "nakamals" about the events of the past - that was his style. He spent thirteen years at Melsisi (from 1940 to 1953) and sowed the seeds of peace there. The warmongers from the hills eventually laid aside their arms and the pagans came in crowds to be baptised.

With these generous and enthusiastic Christians, Father Paul Monnier (who came in 1951) was able to build the mission and construct the church, which holds 1000 people. He was able to bring back too some of the magnificent feasts of the past...

On the evening of the feast celebrating the opening of the church, May 24th, 1959, he handed over the mission to Father François Lambert, who would later take charge of the Port Vila Diocese.

The school got going seriously with Father Erminio de Stephanis, an Italian. Brother Roland Bernier built the large boarding section and Father René du Rumain created new schools closer to the larger villages: Ubiku, Lalzadet, Tsingbwege. He also founded the station at Lik on the east coast. Father Jean-Yves Caillon began to put local colour into the liturgy.

Bishop Lambert, who spent six years as a missionary in Melsisi, had the great joy of ordaining to the priesthood two young men from the Mission: Blaise Buleban, son of the catechist Apoli, on December 12th, 1979, and Noël Molvis on...
December 8th, 1983. In charge of this large Mission, he appointed another local priest in 1986, Father Michel Visi from Ambae. While Father Visi is studying overseas, Father Christian Andraud will have the job of rebuilding the Lik Church, destroyed by Cyclone Nigel in 1985.

THE NAMARAM MISSION 1898

FATHER JAMOND, HIS CATECHISTS AND THE MARIAK

Of the four Pentecost foundations, Namaram seemed to get off to the best start. The high chief of the region, the "Mariak" of Likabwe, was honoured to have the head-catechist Manuele based at Namaram. In 1898, Father Jamond held the first catechists’ meeting there. To dazzle his guests, the chief gave a great feast in their honour. The people from all of the villages came to dance. As a gift, Father Jamond received a superb pig whose tusks did a double turn, which is very rare.

But the chief’s benevolence was short-lived. He was determined to remain master in his own house. He had many wives, and was quite opposed to the Christian laws of marriage. From being a good friend, he became evasive. The head-catechist, who was based in his village, was terrified of him and could do nothing but obey him. Some deaths occurred in suspicious circumstances. Rafaele, a schoolmaster, died on his way back from Likabwe. He was replaced by Paolo Lebati, a good lad but too young. Then Father Jamond, who loved the Namaram people, was posted elsewhere... And then, Father Tayac, whose visits to Namaram left him dispirited, was drowned at sea just as he was taking up his new appointment there...

FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE PRIN

Father Jean-Baptiste Prin came to Namaram in October 1902, a few days after the tragedy. He found a dejected and discouraged community, their resilience at a low ebb. He had been a missionary in Fiji, which made communications with the catechists easier, and he was determined to put new life into the mission.

Father Prin began by shifting the mission to the left bank of the river. He built himself a house which looked like a fortress; the notorious Mme Fullet (mentioned earlier) was supplying arms and ammunition to the bush people, who often fired...
shots at the mission during the night. The new head-catechist, Leone, was a brave man, and never complained. But Leone died quite suddenly one evening, an hour or two after returning from a visit to the bush. Mariak was blamed: Mariak had by now become a real enemy. Then came another stroke of bad luck! Litare, Mariak’s third wife, ran away and hid at the mission.

The missionary tried to smooth things over by giving a large number of pigs. He was even able to baptise the runaway, who became Susana. Then Mariak’s tribal warriors attacked the mission, trying to take her back. They were met with rifle-fire, and the chief’s brother was mortally wounded. Things were going really badly when Father Prin was told to switch places with Father Suas at Melsisi. Father Suas arrived in the middle of a great free-for-all (which it must be noted, he took calmly in his stride).

Then Susana ran away again, to hide at Melsisi this time. Mariak’s troops went in pursuit, terrifying poor Father Niel who had just arrived. It was hardly an atmosphere, favourable to winning conversions...

Father Suas was not present for the end of this tale of adventure. Struck down by a lung ailment he went to Vila, seriously ill. They kept him there to train the catechists, to the great satisfaction of the other missionaries.

Young Father Edouard Loubiere came to Namaram at the end of 1905. He was prepared to make whatever sacrifice was necessary to bring about peace. However, Mariak was not asking for pigs: he wanted a boy from the school "even if he’s thin"!! It seemed that troubles would never end. Then an event occurred which changed everything; another of Mariak’s wives ran away and jumped on a ship bound for Santo.....

The old chief went crazy with rage. He took his rifle and, at point-blank range, shot the mother of his faithless spouse. But now he had gone too far. Her family threatened to summon the government troops. Mariak had no desire to end his days in prison. He was prepared to conciliate. On November 20th, 1906, Father Loubiere made peace with Mariak. They exchanged pigs. The catechists, overjoyed that all was now finished, each gave a pig.

THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGE NO LONGER ATTRACTED ANYBODY!

After Father Loubiere had made peace with Mariak, he moved his station to the small hill known as Loretto. It was a beautiful place. But the pagans were not coming any more. Father Loubiere envied the Melsisi situation. There, the Christians had not cut themselves off and they continued to take part in the common festivities. He tried, in vain, to convince his bishop; too much severity was
hindering conversions. In 1913 there were still 1200 pagans in the bush, ten times more than the Christians.

In 1918, the model village of Loretto was blown away in a cyclone. Father Caillon spent three years re-building it. Just when everything was finished, an even more violent cyclone destroyed it. Everything was ruined. In October 1922, Father Boisdron arrived. He rebuilt the station more solidly than before, close to the shore. He began to visit the pagans again. By 1928, his visits included all the villages facing Batnavni, as far as Vanwel.

Progress was astonishing during those years. However, one thing was lacking; the missionary had no catechists to put into these newly-Christianised villages. He had to make do with young boys trained in a hurry. By the '40's, he was already an old man. The war in the region during Father Guillaume's time, plus the activities of a prophet called Daniel who created a new sect in North Pentecost, added to a violent outbreak of dysentery, and then the Spanish flu... all of these thing, in the years that followed, would slowly destroy the fine recovery that had been achieved at the Namaram Mission.

Before, the region had been densely populated. Now it became deserted. When Father Boisdron died on July 20th, 1950, the Christians had dwindled to the numbers they had been in the early years; around one hundred.

**NAMARAM TODAY**

It 1951, Namaram was attached to Melsisi. The fall in the population was halted, and the "resurrection" of the mission began. The labours of a nursing Sister, Sr. Marie Renata, began to bear fruit. The youth became more open, more full of life. An extraordinary change took place within the space of twenty years! With the help of Noël Cyske, a builder from Melsisi, Father Jean-Yves Caillon erected a fine church, which was blessed in 1986. Today, young catechists have their community well in hand, although responsibility for it tends to swing between Melsisi and Loltong.
THE LOLTONG MISSION

THE FIRST CATECHISTS AND THE PAGAN CHIEFS

When the first catechist came from Fiji, they set up their base at Saola, in Loltong Bay. They built a chapel and a school, and began to bring children together. Old Adriano, who was unable to read, was the pillar of the mission. Carolo taught the children. He was the area leader, young and dynamic. On Sunday, he visited the pagan villages, seeking to draw the youth. But he drew the anger of the high chief Viratuku who, with relentless hatred, began to seek out Carolo.

Christians forgive, and do not seek revenge. And so the pagans went on harassing them; they had nothing but contempt for these men who had forgotten the implacable law of revenge. So the pagan tribes were utterly stupefied when Carolo's men ambushed and shot Viratuku.

The young Christians too were surprised at what they had done. Everyone congratulated them for their good deed; they had rid the island of an evil man who made everybody tremble. In return, the pagans did nothing; suddenly, the Christians had won their respect.

Then one of the other catechists, Alfonso, thought that the job should be finished once and for all. There were still a few stubborn old chiefs around and, if they could be got rid of, there would be nothing more to fear and peace would reign. Now it was Alfonso who began to spread terror in the region, and he became the man who must be shot at all costs.

Alfonso was tracked and captured. They tied him to a tree and shot him. A great shining cross, says the legend, appeared on his body when the bullets hit him. His body was cut into pieces and distributed, and his head was offered in sacrifice during a pig-killing ceremony. The Christians, horrified and humiliated by the fate that had overtaken their catechist, began to prepare an even more terrible revenge. (Among older people, even today, Alfonso is considered to be a martyr).

Then came Father Prin, in 1904. His base was Namaram, but he visited Loltong. He understood their feelings, but his message was uncompromising: "No, you will not wage war. We are no longer living in the times of Viratuku. Times have changed. And moreover, have you forgotten that Alfonso was responsible for the death of four men? There will be no revenge; you will make peace." The Christians obeyed and made peace. But the catechists were very discouraged. This cannot last, thought Father Prin. They need a missionary here with them - I'm too far away.

FATHER GONNET, THE FATHER OF LOLTONG

Father Pierre Gonnet came to Loltong in January 1905. He was an intelligent and cultured man, with a solid background of study in Theology and Sacred Scripture.
He quickly learned the language and the meaning of the customs. The Loltong people were very happy to have him and, within a short space of time, he gave an extraordinary fresh impetus to the mission.

His first objective was to put a catechist in each of the major villages of North Pentecost. Very quickly, he had chapels built as far as the east coast and all the way to the extreme north. But it is not enough to have men who simply mind a chapel and recite the daily prayers; you need real catechists.

Father Gonnet's second objective would be the training of catechists. He sent children to Montmartre, and he sent five married couples to be trained as quickly as possible by his friend Father Suas. He even managed to drag the Bishop to the east coast to see for himself how all the villages were joining together to prepare a great feast which his catechist Alekesio was organising at Aliku.

The harvest seemed to be so abundant that a lively and likeable young missionary, Father Eugène Bertreux, was sent to help Father Gonnet. Father Bertreux had already proved himself to be a good missionary to young people. Alas, no soon had he arrived than he died, on January 15th, 1908. Shortly afterwards, Father Gonnet was obliged to go to Sydney for a couple of months. He was very eager to return to Loltong. But when he arrived back in Vila, he was told that Father Salomon had just died and that he would be replacing him as head of the catechists' school at Montmartre. It was fortunate for the school, but very unfortunate for the Loltong Mission.

It is said that, if Father Gonnet had remained, the whole of North Pentecost would have become Catholic!

THE MISSION CLOSED IN ON ITSELF AT LATANO

It is a great pity that Father Gonnet's catechists did not remain where he had placed them, spread throughout all the northern villages. Father André, who came in 1910, succumbed to the obsession of gathering the flock in one place, under the shadow of the church steeple. It was the building of the Latano Station that brought this about. Saola was too far from the harbour, so André left it and re-built his school, a boys' and girls' dormitory, a house for himself and one for the Sisters, all at Latano. For this vast project he
needed all the help he could muster; and so he brought back to Latano all the village catechists.

The church was blessed on January 1st, 1917. When the catechists tried to go back to the villages, they found their places taken by Anglicans. The missionary tried afterwards to win back the ground he had lost, at Alange in particular, but to no avail. Father André often regretted his fatal error. It must also be said that the terrible epidemics of '23 to '27 killed far more people than they might have otherwise done, simply because so many were herded together in one small place. And the last straw: the Sisters, who had been at Loltong since 1922, were withdrawn. Resources were, even then, beginning to be concentrated in Vila.

When Father Joseph André left Loltong in 1929, there were fewer Christians than when he arrived. And yet, he had performed 500 baptisms. He had "peopled heaven".

LOLTONG TODAY

Like Namaram, the little station of Loltong is in what may be called a "period of resurrection". Its good fortune was to be chosen as the site for the catechists' Formation Centre.

Montmartre had always been the catechists' school. But with the rapid expansion of primary education, the great need was for teachers. Montmartre became the Training Centre for future primary-school teachers, and for a number of years there was a lack of trained catechists. The missionaries fell back on men of good will who were not really trained for the task.

Then Bishop Julliard had the excellent idea of putting the training of future catechists into the hands of Father Joseph Foucher. Most of them knew little or no French, so instruction would be given in Bichelamar. The Training Centre would have a village lifestyle, with a get-together every evening in the "nakamal". On Sundays the trainee catechist preached to a congregation by now familiar with beautiful liturgies and fine singing.

After twelve years of this very demanding work, Father Foucher was deported by the Vanuatu Government the day after the opening of the beautiful new church, built by Noël Cyske from Melsisi. Despite the ban imposed by a tiny racist minority, the Anglican neighbours came in great numbers that day to share in the Catholics' joy over their new church. Father Maurice Linossier is now in charge of the catechists' training. He has also begun to publish some useful liturgical booklets.
THE WANOUR AND BAIE BARRIER MISSION
1898

WITH FATHERS JAMOND AND FRANCIS ROUGE

The progress of the Pentecost pioneers brought us all the way to the north of the Island. But the South was not forgotten. Another great missionary spent himself there for eight years, before losing his life in tragic circumstances.

When Father Rougier went ashore for the first time on the Wanour beach, he was surprised to meet a white man: Captain Martelli. He bought Martelli’s house, his dinghy and a plot of land, and the five ex-Fiji exiles moved in there on May 17th, 1898. Father Jean-Baptiste Jamond, the only missionary for the whole of Pentecost, could do no more than pay fleeting visits. Then in February 1899 came a young missionary, Father Francis Rouge.

Alas, Father Rouge was terribly disappointed by Wanour! He discovered that his two catechists had leprosy, the place had an unhealthy climate, the heat was unbearable, he was eaten alive by millions of insects, and he was on his own. Heartily sick of the place, Father Rouge upped and left after a month.

A BRAVE MAN:
FATHER FRANCOIS LE FUR

The Breton who came next, in May 1899, was made of different stuff altogether. Father François Le Fur was not worried by the lack of comfort. A man of dogged courage, this intrepid hiker quickly became familiar with the tracks and paths of the hills. He discovered that the east coast swarmed with people; that’s where our centre should be! To the last, that would be his dream: to build himself a little house at Baie Barrier, beside the "savage sea" as he called it. Tragically, on the day he was going to realise his dream, the savage sea would take his life.

Reverend Father Douceré wanted the central station to be at Wanour, not next to the unhealthy beach which had put Father Rouge to flight, but on the hill, where there was a continual breeze. For Douceré, this
hilltop was a strategic site which must be occupied at all costs. It required a major earth-moving operation. With pick-axe, crowbar and dynamite, Father Le Fur hacked out a pathway. In March 1900, he reached the top: a coral ridge which would require four years to level. He was working on this Herculean task when his Superior gave him the added responsibility of Olal, on the north coast of Ambrym.

How could he continue to work on Pentecost if he had to continually risk his life crossing back and forward on the notorious Selwyn Channel, which separates the two islands and is justly famous for its dangerous currents? He took Father Doucéré out in the boat one day when the sea was very rough, so that he could see for himself. The waves pounded, the ship's frame shuddered, but the worm-eaten hull would not advance an inch. Doucéré was not one to be easily scared, yet he realised that they must turn back... and for three weeks it was impossible to cross over to Ambrym. "It's Providence trying to open your eyes" said Father Le Fur. Father Doucéré would not go against Providence. He appointed old Father Vazeille in charge of Olal and freed Le Fur to devote himself completely to Pentecost.

But that was not all. Father Le Fur had other plans up his sleeve. He took Father Doucéré into the hills, into villages swarming with half-wild children... It was here that the catechist Lino had been killed. They came upon men preparing the Gol Jump, the famous Pentecost land-dive now known throughout the world. From the top of a tower built of branches lashed together, young men leaped into space, jumping from higher and higher; twenty meters, thirty meters. It was a test of courage, where the young warrior could prove his bravery.

Father Doucéré continued his visit, with eyes wide open. Suddenly, turning a corner on a track high above the sea, there was Baie Barrier, an immense sandy beach, a great white crescent beside the blue waters of the ocean. Did it not look ready to receive a mission? Father Doucéré was won over. For twelve rifles Father Le Fur purchased the land at the end of the bay in May 1903. He built a hut, installed his catechist Petro and found him a buxom wife from Ambrym. But he, Le Fur, had to remain on the rocky outcrop of Wanour, now almost deserted after an outbreak of dysentery. It meant that he had to travel endlessly, back and forward, between Wanour and Baie Barrier. Father Le Fur was a great walker, and he enjoyed it. But the chief of Lonlibli threatened to kill him, and now nobody dared to accompany him. So he decided to travel again by sea, using his own small boat at first, and then the larger launch which old Father Vazeille was not using. Time after time, Father Le Fur came close to drowning! He was not afraid, or not afraid enough... He already had sixty
catechumens ready for baptism at Baie Barrier. But he would baptise them only when he was allowed to go there to stay, not before.

Finally, the Bishop heard his plea. He sent Father Durand to occupy the hilltop at Wanour. Father Le Fur, headstrong Le Fur, was now free to go to the place of his dreams......

DROWNED AT WANOUR : JULY 23rd, 1907

On July 23rd, 1907, Father Le Fur left Wanour, a happy man. In order to avoid making two journeys, he decided to tow the planks of his new house behind the boat, lashed together to form a sort of raft. A tragic error, because this unwieldy structure caused him to miss the narrow channel through the reef and tumbled him into the surf. Father Le Fur was carried away by a wave... Father Durand was watching, and this is what he wrote:

"Father realised too late that he was heading onto the reef. The men didn't jump in to save him, they were all too terrified! Only the brave little cook Molsul jumped in to help him... he was really devoted to Father, like a little pet dog! He managed to reach him and grabbed his arm. He shouted: "Put your hand on my shoulder, I'm going to swim back to the boat". Father put his hand on his shoulder and Molsul who was a strong swimmer, kept shouting for help. But nobody made a move to help them, and they were a good distance from the boat. Molsul went on swimming, but Father was swallowing water, and Molsul too. He was still crying out for help. Nobody moved! Father let go of Molsul's shoulder and held onto his vest, which broke and was carried away in Father's hand. Molsul looked back and saw Father's head between two waves, being borne away by the current. He shouted again, but he was now too exhausted to swim after him. He finally got back to the boat. They held out an oar and pulled him aboard. Of Father there was no more sign".

FATHER ALPHONSE ARDOUIN : "MY CHILDREN ARE REAL DARLINGS".

It was on August 21st, 1907, that the first baptisms took place in Baie Barrier: fifty-nine in all. Father Bertreux came from Melsisi to prepare the people, and the whole of Pentecost turned out to share in the joy.

His Lordship entrusted the station to young Father Ardouin. This man from the Vendée, grandson of Chouan rebels, was afraid of no hardship. Under his leadership,
the mission made rapid progress. He opened a station at Saltas with a catechist from Olal, Martin Bongelan. He mapped out a route to link Baie Barrier with Wanour.

What a place of war and slaughter it was! Father Le Fur had won a promise of peace from the warring factions, but this promise died with him. When Father Ardoüin spoke about what went on in South Pentecost: - the skirmishes in the bush, the treachery, the cannibal feasts; Bishop Douceré asked him to desist. It was one of Douceré's dogmas that cannibalism had disappeared. He kept telling people: "My little children are real darlings". But just to be sure, he questioned Father Durand on the subject one day. Father Durand replied with his typical pointed humour: "No, my Lord, nothing happened. Only eight men were killed, and only four of these were eaten by the little darlings of Panwas. It seems that the Catholics didn't even join in!"

For all of this time, the worthy Father Durand (Durand-Vaugaron was his real name, which drew a pun from the bishop who was often stung to the quick by his biting wit: de ce veau garons-nous = we must give this calf a wide berth) kept watch over the empty Wanour hill-top, where Brother Timothée Le Bourhis had built him a house and a chapel. Despite his sense of humour, Father Durand was very bored. To occupy himself, he founded a little station on the west coast: St Michel Ranarby (near Truchy). Later it was abandoned, but would begin again not far from there, at Rangusuksu.

**THE LONG REIGN OF FATHER TATTEVIN:**
**NO CONVERSIONS DURING WAR**

Father Elie Tattevin came to Baie Barrier in March 1910. He remained for nineteen years. On his arrival he found a community of one hundred souls. When he left in 1929, there were no more than eighty-six! The epidemics were, of course, the main reason. But during his very long stay, Tattevin came up against too major obstacles: the first was war, and the other was the continual and unprovoked attacks of the Protestants.

From the very moment, he arrived, Father Tattevin found himself living in a climate of revenge and counter-revenge. One of his flock, Isidore, was killed in his garden. A man from Panwas lay in ambush among the taros, and shot Isidore at point-blank range, in the back! That's the way it was, one treacherous ambush after another, a cowardly and pitiless war, every killing calling for another revenge in a permanent climate of insecurity. It was not really a war, in the sense of the Melsisi wars between pagans and Christians, for the simple reason that the Christians built their houses on the mission and never went outside of it. They let the pagans tear themselves apart: Rantas against Pornowol in '14, Lon Whari against Lon Bubut in
'20, Ranwas against Rantas in '23, Saltas against Rebusis in '24. The disputes usually began over pigs or women. And the people seemed to enjoy war, and tried to make it last as long as possible. They explained to Father Tattevin that wars were necessary every so often. They were part of life.

Father Tattevin was an excellent linguist and ethnologist. He wrote articles for the review "Anthropos". He had a thorough knowledge of the people and their custom, and was often able to skilfully negotiate peace between adversaries. Like his friend Father Gonnet, he "knew where he was putting his feet".

Father Tattevin was also a good sailor. A native of Pornic, he loved the sea. With his little cutter, the "Saint-Anne" this man who was grumpy by nature was always ready to give a helping hand wherever he was needed.

In the South, the Church of Christ was also developing, with its centre at Banmatmat. The missionaries were full of zeal, but without much theological formation, often quite sectarian. Father Tattevin disliked them. He saw them as fishing in troubled waters, and exploiting the hostility between villages to win new adherents.

In 1929, Father Caillon took Tattevin's place. He preferred to live at Wanour. Father Louis Schir, who came in 1940, began a new offensive on the east coast. He converted the Rantas people and founded the little station of Saint-Henri. The Panwas people, traditional enemies of Rantas, turned to the Church of Christ.

**BAIE BARRIER TODAY**

Wanour is now completely overgrown by the bush. The hill-top on which Father Le Fur exhausted his energies is a lifeless ruin. But at Baie Barrier, new out-stations proliferate. A very courageous missionary was responsible for Baie Barrier's growth: Father Joseph Clementi. What an extraordinary story of back-breaking work, of hours on horseback, of perilous sea-journeys to bring life back into all these little outposts! Father Antoine Verbraeken was able to consolidate what Father Clementi had begun during the sixteen years he spent by the "savage sea". At Baie
Barrier, a fine school complex and a large church; at Baie Martelli (which replaced Wanour) a nice little chapel built by Father Moïse Duenas. Saint-Henri, founded by Father Schir, has given one of its sons to the church, Father Jules Bir, who was ordained at Baie Barrier on May 8th, 1986. These are all signs of the dynamism of the Baie Barrier Mission.

The old mission founded by Father Durand known as Saint Michel Renarby has come back to life at Rangusuksu; not far from its original site, through the efforts of Father Finlay.

Today, Father Blaise Buleban, himself a Pentecost islander, divides his time between South Pentecost and North Ambrym.

*The Land Diving at Baie Barrier*
AMBAE

LOLOPUEPUE
WALURIKI
NANGIRE
LONE
DUINDUI
WALABA
LOLOKARO
LOLOWAI
LONGANA

450 SQ. KM
8,600 INHABITANTS
578 CATHOLICS

NANGIRE P. 91
LOLOPUEPUE P. 95
THE MISSION TO AMBAE

When Louis de Bougainville came to Ambae, he believed in the noble savage; but he left with this belief shattered. The famous Anglican Missionary Patteson was almost killed there too when he visited the island for the first time in 1864. Later they welcomed him as a friend and a missionary. Charles Bice sent the first schoolboys to Norfolk in 1868. Ten years later he opened two schools, at Waluriki and Tavolavola. In 1880, five of his schoolchildren were massacred. Catholic Missionaries did not arrive until 1901.

After the highly successful beginning on Pentecost, all the missionaries had high hopes that the same sort of operation could be carried out on other islands. In 1899, Father Pionnier, after his eviction from Lamap, went to Fiji and began to prepare an Ambae group with Father Rougier. Everything was ready for their return to their native land, and all had paid for their passage, when orders came from Noumea putting a halt to the expedition. It was a very great pity.

The converts came home, but in a disorganised way. There was no plan of action. One after another, they simply disappeared into the bush. Around the same time, one of the Fiji Missionaries, Father Jean-Baptiste Prin, had a terrible experience. He was accused of a crime he had not committed and thrown into prison in Fiji. Convinced that he had no hope of a fair trial before a British Magistrate, he escaped from jail and made his way to Adelaide in Australia. There he was re-arrested and brought back to Fiji. He appeared before a court and was acquitted. He immediately offered himself as a volunteer for the New Hebrides, to work alongside those returning from Fiji.

THE NANGIRE MISSION

Father Jean-Baptiste Prin set out with practically nothing to set up the first station on Ambae. His friend Father Jamond could not get over the sight of him leaving "with neither walking-stick nor satchel, just like the apostles; nobody ever came so close to imitating the first disciples setting out on their first mission" he wrote. With a little more money, Father Prin would have settled at Walaha where he was well received. But he had to make do with Nangire; and even then, he was forced to borrow 300 francs from the sea-captain who brought him there, the famous Fortuné Lachaise.
Nangire was well placed, central and still unoccupied. The Anglicans were working especially in East Ambae, around Longana, and a trader-missionary was busy in the West around Ndui-Ndui (Church of Christ).

In June 1901, Father Prin took up residence in a broken-down bamboo hut at Nangire, on land belonging to Chief Aro Eve. He was joined there not long afterwards by Father Faure, a man of delicate health.

The place was wretched and comfortless. The only drinking water came from brackish pools along the beach. The fresh-water tank, when it arrived at last from Vila, leaked like a sieve.

Father Faure was an intellectual. He spent his time reading and studying, waiting for the schoolchildren who never came. Father Prin tramped all over the steep Ambae hills, trying to find his "Fijians". Many of them were natives of Lolosori, or were supposed to go back there, so Father Prin bought a base nearby, at Loloepuepue. Father Prin even visited the island of Maewo. When he came back he found Nangire in a great state of agitation. The tribal warriors of Siga i Moli had murdered Patrick, a Pentecost Islander who looked after the Company Store. His body had been roasted with taros and eaten.

All the white settlers of Ambae were ready to join forces and attack the bush warriors. They wanted the Aro Eve villagers to join them in killing as many bush people as possible. They said that if they were pursued they would take to their boats (which would leave the mission defenceless before the vengeance of the bush people).

It was sheer madness. Luckily the missionary was able to calm the anger of his parishioners. It was finally through his efforts that they were able to negotiate peace.

Then, like a ghost, Father Deniau re-appeared. Now aged 66, the founder of Port-Olry and Malo, a man dogged by ill-luck whom everybody believed had gone for good, came to Nangire to seek out the "Fijians". It was unfortunate that Father Prin had to hand over the mission to him, just when he had begun to win the confidence of the people. Prin himself felt that he had come at a bad time, that the Nangire people did not want him. Soon, nobody came any more to the mission.

Then, around Christmas 1902, the high chief Sese Malasi of Lolosori sent his brother Mikaël Tagataga with a message: "Why stay at Nangire, where there
is nobody? Come and stay with us here at Lolopuepue where there are lots of people. "Father Deniau did not need to be asked twice. He left immediately for Lolopuepue. The Nangire People, furious that he had left them, stole everything from his house.

Young Father Bertreux came next, in March 1903, and was surprised to find the house completely empty. For years, the Nangire People would be like spectators at a waltz, watching the missionaries going and coming, coming and going. Father Bertreux liked Nangire, and would have been happy to stay there. He went everywhere, even as far as Walaha, where he was shipwrecked. But his school attracted nobody; he was so poor, and his neighbours so wealthy. He had nonetheless managed to gather some 30 catechumens when he found himself suddenly posted to Pentecost. Father Prin came back to Nangire in October 1906. Father Bertreux had been a joyful man, able to make people laugh... now they missed him at Nangire.

However, by dint of hard work, Father Prin made a little jewel of his mission. He knew that nobody would help him, that he would have to manage on whatever resources he could find on his own. With the people he planted cotton, coconuts and cocoa on the Nangire plantation. He planted for those who would come later; he was now getting on in years, and with his rheumatism he was no longer able to climb up the mountains of Ambae. In 1915, he left Nangire for the little island of Vao.

AN APOSTLE OF GREAT SIMPLICITY AND COURAGE: FATHER PIERRE MASSARD

On October 12th, 1922, Father Pierre Massard landed at Nangire. In his youth a member of the Alpine infantry, a survivor of the 1914-1918 war, he was a missionary quite unlike any other. He had an unshakeable faith, and an unswavering, almost naïve optimism, no matter what trials befell him. He had a blind trust in people and was always able to find an excuse for their folly, and their worst mistakes.

His first dream was to build a great school. Father Godefroy was well remembered at Nangire because he taught the children (from ’21 to ’22). But, at that age, children are
without pity, and there was continual bedlam in Massard's class: "they burst out laughing all the time" he said. A bit disappointed, Father Massard turned his attention to the bush. With his large army boots and thick walking-stick, he moved west into the villages: Loloharu, Vatukambani, Puigalato, Lone. He established a base at Lolobinanoe, which overlooked the Church of Christ at Ndui Ndui. With tireless zeal he turned eastwards, into the territory of his friend Father Suas, visiting Lolosori, Longana and Lolokaro. He was unstoppable: "we'll get the better of them yet!" he used to say, like the soldiers at the worst moments of the '14-'18 war.

And Father Massard succeeded. His naïveté made them smile, but they liked him. Little by little, he began to convert the villagers. In 1926, he had eighty-three baptisms. The Protestants fought him, and he fought back. He plunged into the hornets nest of Ndui Ndui. He wanted to reclaim the land belonging to the mission. But his men were hesitant. "Remember Fachoda!" cried the old lion Father Suas.

Father Massard did not want to hand over to the English the ground he had won, so he threw himself again into the fray. "Father Suas has given me all the permission I need until the end of the world", he told the Bishop, who was a bit surprised by the turn of events.

Finally it was at Lone that Father Massard opened a new base in 1933. He chose St François of Assisi as its patron saint, while St Claire kept watch over neighbouring Lolobinanoe. He strengthened his foothold at Bakaraméa by sending his old catechist Constant. The school seemed to be going well. "I didn't have a good head for school-teaching before, but I am improving. Instead of walking all the time, I take a rest from time to time and I stay with the children. They're very happy and they laugh a lot; perhaps they're laughing at me, but it doesn't matter, I love them all the same".

His kingdom was too vast. To visit it properly, he bought a horse. But learning to ride was a painful experience... he kept falling off. "At last I've discovered that it's not the horse that was no good, but the rider; and now I'm not afraid of my horse any more".

France's defeat in 1940, was a terrible shock for this veteran of the Great War. "It's a great dishonour. How could we retreat like that before the enemy!" He was so distressed by events in France that he became restless, irritable, and more and more absent-minded. He kept losing things, and it became a game for the children to find his glasses for him, or his pipe or his pincers... He knew that England was still continuing the war, and that the pro-British Protestants were sneering at him. Father Massard's troops began to lose morale. He begged Vila for catechists to strengthen his advance bases, but there were none! Father Massard, like the other missionaries, came up against this enormous lack. When he left at last in March 1947, his troops drifted away, leaderless and confused.
NANGIRE TODAY

Father Schir came in 1947 and tried very hard to put new vitality into the flock, which had grown smaller but which was still fervent. Father Groetz came in 1951 and was not replaced when he left in 1957.

Today, Nangire is no longer a central mission station. But it continues to reap what was so enthusiastically sown by Father Massard. In 1924, he had baptised a small boy, Chanel. Fifty-eight years later, his grandson Michel Visi was ordained a priest in the little mission of Nangire, on December 15th, 1982. The same year, a survivor of Lolobinanoe, Gabriel Hoke, became Vanuatu's first permanent Deacon.

A nice little church and a school full of pupils are signs of Nangire's vitality. The two stations of Lone and Nangire have about two hundred Catholics altogether.

THE LOLOPUEPUE MISSION (MARCH 1903)

In December 1902, the chief of Lolosori, Sese Malasi, invited Father Deniau to leave Nangire and move to Lolopuepue. Poor Deniau! Why was he in such a hurry to answer this invitation?

For he was now worse off than before; almost without food, ill, in a native hut without doors or windows, with rain pouring through the roof. Oh, if only he had a few catechists! If only he had a Sister, she would straight away have a hundred girls to occupy her at Lolosori alone. "I don't see what I can possibly do, staying here on my own", he wrote plaintively; "I can do nothing, absolutely nothing".

At sixty-seven years old, what could he do? But the truth of the matter was that the chief of Lolosori had no intention of being converted. He had invited the missionary solely in order to be rid of the Anglican "teachers" who kept pestering him. And yet, grace was at work...

Poor Father Pierre Bancillon took over the mission in January 1904 - what a good soul he was! From the moment he arrived, his life was hell. For a start, everything had been pilfered from the house. Then, during the first month, a village which was due to become Catholic attacked another village on the coast, killed five people and ate one of them with great solemnity. It was open war all around the mission. Father Bertreux arrived from Nangire, his rifle on his shoulder, his men all armed! For Bertreux it was a principle that the missionary must make himself respected. The pilferers must be made to make restitution. Father
Bertreux, with great bravado, sent orders to the famous Sese to present himself at once. Sese duly arrived, with his men all armed to the teeth. Luckily, Mikaël Tagataga was there to calm everyone down.

Tagataga became Father Bancillon's right-hand man, his only hope. He was a good man, and a devoted helper. Alas, outbreaks of dysentery are unpredictable and, despite the best efforts of Bancillon, Mikaël died during an epidemic on March 15th, 1904.

His sole remaining companion was little Brother Josefo from Tanna. They prayed together and encouraged each other. But all the time, news reached them of some new murder followed by the inevitable revenge. On Easter Sunday seven women were killed, and they were cooked and eaten almost on the doorstep of the mission.

Father Bancillon was too good. He invited people to his table and shared his frugal meals with them. But his life was in continual danger, and he shook with fear most of the time. He needed natangoura leaves to patch his roof; because he was slow to pay, they threatened to shoot him. Were the threats imaginary? Not in the least! On October 16th, they killed Mr Godden, the Anglican Missionary working at Lolowai.

In 1907, Father Bancillon began to suffer from horrible open ulcers on his legs. No more hill-climbing! He huddled in his little house, convinced that he had never been meant to be in charge of a mission. He wrote to his Bishop: "My apostolic labour on Ambae is now finished. Firmly and religiously, I await another appointment." Father Bancillon had suffered too much in those four years. He would never recover.

**FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE SUAS**

The man who came in July 1908 to replace the unhappy Father Bancillon was made of sterner stuff; it was Father Jean-Baptiste Suas, the doughty founder of Olal, the man who was afraid of nothing and nobody. His Lordship believed no doubt
that Suas alone, of all the missionaries could make something of this terrible mission!

Father Suas had been working at Montmartre, training the catechists. At last, after twenty years of waiting, the missionaries began to have the help of properly-trained catechists. He still had difficulty in following the strict lines laid down by his bishop, and no doubt His Lordship believed that a few years penury in Lolopuepue would soften his character a little... But when Suas found poor Father Bancillon with haggard eyes, and heard of the anguish and trials that man had lived through for four years, he realised that this was not a mission for the faint-hearted; it was a place where only the toughest could persevere and win.

At the beginning, Father Suas was fascinated by the strange personality of the high chief of Lolosori, Sese Malasi, a man of very superior intelligence, gracious, able to converse on any subject, but also very authoritarian, ambitious and cruel. He soon realised that Sese would not be so easily converted, but that nothing could be achieved without his help.

In March 1910, the "Fijians", whose arrival everyone had been looking forward to for ten years, suddenly arrived without warning. Nobody was expecting them, and it was a very poor home-coming. They were housed in a dilapidated yam-store, because there was no place ready. Father Suas had nothing: "no rice, no biscuits, no tobacco, no salt, no meat... a time of Lent indeed!" Moreover the weather was very bad, with endless heavy rain. The devil got to work, and all went down with heavy fever. Louis from Maewo was the first to die, then Leone, Eusebio, Petro. Three others, who had disembarked at Lone, also died. In September, nobody was left. The only survivor was Manuele, who was from Longana.

Thus the great hope that had been placed in these home-coming converts from Fiji turned, within the space of a few months, into cruel disappointment. Father Rougier had been right. Only an organised home-coming of these potential catechists had any chance of succeeding. But Father Suas was undaunted; moans and groans, he knew served no purpose. Instead he composed songs about his misfortunes, and those
of others. And he wrote. His style was easy and descriptive, and even at times quite spicy, which often startled the Bishop who always censored the articles he wrote for the review ANTHROPOS or for the Annales. "You cannot write the legends of Ambae in a beautiful classical style' Father Suas told him: "the truth is always down-to-earth."

His articles brought in some donations from far-away benefactors, which served to reduce his destitution a little. He would not begin trading in copra again, as he had done at Olal. The Bishop forbade it absolutely. A few poor wretches came to give him coconuts in exchange for a bit of tobacco, or a knife. Then even that was forbidden. Father Suas had the bright idea of selling butterflies, an item not yet included in the list of episcopal prohibitions. He "fed gloomy-looking caterpillars which, after a long sleep, awoke clothed in garments of light" as he put it. With these beautiful butterflies he managed to earn a few shillings.

But it was in his plantations that Father Suas poured most of his energies. He planted coconut trees for those who would come after him. He planted and planted. "It's an obsession I got from my father" he wrote. A neighbour laughed at him for planting cider apple-trees at his age. Father Suas told him: "True, I won't drink any of it, but my boys will drink it. And yours, what will they drink, you lazy good-for-nothing! Cow's pee?" Thus Father Suas answered long ago those who would sneer at priest-planters.

Around the same time, Father Suas discovered little Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. He prayed to her, and she kindly answered his prayers. She sent down a shower of roses and the good seed began to bear fruit, beginning in the neighbouring village of Losigoburie. Thanks to Manuele, last surviving member of the Fiji group, the movement of conversions spread as far as Longana.

However, there was a problem. Girls would not come for baptism until they had been tattooed. A girl could not get married until she had been tattooed, but the Church forbade tattooing. Father Suas pleaded the cause of tattooing, but in vain. His Lordship was inflexible. As the years went by, Father Suas found himself surrounded by a battalion of young ladies who were unable to find husbands because they were not tattooed. In this way, the banning of customs which were perfectly harmless delayed the movement of conversion.

The old chief Sese Malasi resisted to the end, too busy making war, and he died without being baptised. After his death, a frenzy of killing broke out in the region. Thugs who had been afraid of the old chief now came into their own. Wives were stolen, pagan feasts quickly came back in full swing, the throb of the tam-tams drove the villagers crazy. It was a time of madness, which culminated in the murder of Mr Freudenreich. A punitive strike by government troops calmed everybody down again.

That tragic war drove some of the terrorised villagers to seek refuge at the mission. Father Suas always saw the hand of "little Therese" at work. In 1916, Chief
Mwele Ala, the terror of the countryside, was shot dead with six bullets. His followers, hounded from their village, had nowhere to go except to the mission. At Christmas 1917, Father Suas had twenty-one baptisms.

Destruction by war, destruction by cyclones. Always new hardships. In 1922 and then again in 1923, two terrible cyclones devastated ten years of hard work. "It's a complete and absolute disaster! I've never seen anything like it since 1893 at Olal. So my missionary life ends as it began; except that, in the beginning, I had nothing to lose".

An even sorer trial came on July 13th, 1923 with the death of Brother Timothée, his faithful friend. He who had built so many churches was welcomed by the Lord into his own house.

Father Suas felt himself growing old too. Luckily, a young ex-infantry man arrived at Nangire, Pierre Massard. Father Massard, as we have seen, visited Suas's villages: Lolosori, Longana, Lolokaro. In May 1931, Father Suas left Lolopuepue for Olal, where two cyclones coming quickly on top of each other killed the old lion who had struggled so hard. He died at Norsup on June 12th, 1933 and was laid to rest on the little island of Wala.

THE CONVERSION OF THE LOLOSORI PEOPLE

When Father Suas left Lolopuepue in 1931, His Lordship did not have a young missionary to replace him. The situation was, in fact, dramatic; the Bishop had no fresh troops arriving from Ettrope. The Marist Fathers thought it was useless to send any more men until he renovated his out-worn apostolic methods. So the Bishop sent Father Tattevin, and then Father Caillon, and then Father Joseph André, all of whom had been missionaries for more than thirty years. It was Father Joseph André who converted the Lolosori people.

Why was it that these people, who had been friends of the mission for forty years, were still refusing to be baptised? The answer was simple: "They do not wish to give up their pagan feasts," wrote Father André, "or rather, they do not want to stop having feasts! The pagans have their feasts, the Protestants have their feasts, but the Catholics have nothing!..."

"I believed that we have been too severe with the prohibitions we have imposed... In December '39, Pope Pius XII allowed Christians to take part in celebrations in honour of Confucius... But what do we do? We abolish all feasts. And we put nothing in their place!" "Pagans and Protestants would all come to us if we permitted feasts. The ban which we have imposed in Bishop Douceré's name is practically the only major obstacle stopping people from becoming Catholics!"
When Bishop Halbert succeeded Bishop Douceré, everybody thought that he would be less rigorous. But he did not dare to go against his august predecessor. He insisted on keeping all the same rules, which perhaps had some justification forty years earlier, but whose meaning had been long since forgotten.

In June 1943, Father André almost died without baptising the eighty-three catechumens he had been preparing for years; he almost appeared before his Maker with his work unfinished. The shock was good for him. But he still hesitated until one day one of his Fijians said to him: "Father, you see too much evil everywhere. There are things which are bad, and every Christian must condemn them. But in our feasts, we know better than you what is of the devil, and what is not." On April 22nd, 1944, there were forty-one baptism at Lolopuepue. The people of Lolosori, for whom Father Suas had waited for so long, came at last into the family.

LOLOPUEPUE TODAY

Father Schir's efforts to pull Father Suas's Mission out of its lethargy were not always appreciated. Nevertheless he left a little jewel of a mission station where it is very pleasant to live. Sisters came to Lolopuepue during his time there; Father de Stephanis had built a house for them as far back as 1954.

The long stay of Father Morlini soothed whatever tension still remained and built up bonds of friendship with neighbouring villages, which all follow different religions. Brother Rolland did a lot of building there. The beautiful Lolopuepue church, as well as the church at Nangire, are his work.

In 1976, Father John Cecil opened at Lolopuepue the St. Martin de Porres Centre, for guiding late vocations. When the Centre changed its objective and began its own training programmes, it was thought preferable to rebuild at Lololima what had just been completed at Lolopuepue. Father Gianni Morlini then took over the station again, which was devastated by Cyclone Nigel in 1985.

Father Noel Vutiala, from the village of Lolosori, was ordained to the priesthood at St Michel, Santo, on January 6th, 1965. Alas! The Lord has already called him home, on October 1st, 1986, after 21 years in the service of the Church.

Ambae today has more than 600 Catholics, of whom 400 are at Lolopuepue.
THE MISSION OF ESPIRITU SANTO

THE PORT OLRY MISSION

On July 30th, 1887, Father Pionnier, true to his promise, returned to Port Olry. Along with Edmond and Anna, he brought two missionaries: Father Alfred Deniau, aged 51, who had been a missionary in Fiji, a man who knew his own mind and a very capable builder who hustled his workers along and got the job done quickly. He expected obedience from his men, but never listened to their advice or allowed them to question his decisions. He never seemed to get tired, but he quickly exhausted all those around him.

Father François Gautret, aged 31, who had been a missionary in Fiji for five years. Intelligent, and bursting with talent. A man who had known failure. He had offered himself as a volunteer for the New Hebrides, and now found himself in harness with the old lion, Father Deniau. No worse team could have been chosen. Luckily, a third arrived soon afterwards. It was Brother Désiré Ramaix, 21 years of age, a very joyful fellow, always whistling and singing, who loved to make jokes and play tricks on people. Thanks to him, there was a bit of good humour at the mission station.

Father Gautret was the first to slip away from the building site. He thought that it was more important to get to know the villagers and learn the language than to saw planks and hammer nails. Chief Péi offered to be his guide and teacher.

A LAND WHERE WIDOWS WERE STRANGLED

Among Chief Péi's functions was the fearsome one of strangling widows after the death of their husbands. Father Gautret understood the charitable intention of not depriving the deceased of his earthly companion, but nevertheless he was horrified. It was this custom, however, which brought his first baptism. Before the execution, Gautret preached the eternal truths to the crowd assembled for the spectacle. He explained the meaning of baptism, and Péi translated faithfully. Then the woman came forward, her body shining with perfumed oil. She seemed radiant with joy as Gautret poured the baptismal water and, as he moved away, Péi slipped the noose of tropical creeper around her neck and dispatched her into eternal happiness.
While Father Gautret was getting to know the bush, Father Deniau stormed around his deserted building site. He was constantly telling people off, so they just went away and left him. Brother Désiré, who was always playing the clown, simply added to the general disorder. Father Deniau came to the conclusion that it was better for himself and for everybody else that he go away and live on his own somewhere. He planned at first to go to Big Bay, and then tried Rano, and then settled on Malo in June 1888. He opened a large station, and called it Villa Maria. His hope was to start a school for catechists, as he had done in Fiji, but this dream was never realised.

SOME COURAGEOUS MEN

Father Gautret hoped to be left alone to work, but they sent him the old grey-bearded, Father Barrio. "He's a worker-priest" said Father Gautret "whose main preoccupation is the sawing of planks." Too old to learn the language, he kept himself busy by making kitchen chairs and armchairs. Luckily they asked him to help out somewhere on Malekula; so Father Barrio, always willing to give a hand, took himself and his saw to Malekula.

Now Father Gautret could manage the station in his own way. He had everything he needed to make a success of it; he had got a good group of boys together. He had the help of Edmond, and Anna enjoyed teaching. Better still; in January 1889, he was sent a young assistant, Father Henry Perthuy, a brave missionary who would never allow himself to be disheartened until finally the sea took his life.

It was shortly after Father Perthuy's arrival that Father Gautret cracked up. He could feel the bitter resistance of paganism, desperately trying to hold onto its young people. He knew that he would do no better than old Fathers Barrio and Deniau. He had never suffered from fever before, but now his health went rapidly downhill. In May 1890, Father Doucéré found him in "a state of indefinable prostration" and took him away from Port Olry. Once again, malaria had won.

To support young Father Perthuy, His Lordship sent Father Gédéon Béziat, whose task was to move into Lelek Bay, in Hog Harbour. The Port Olry people lived in mortal fear of the fierce warriors from Lelek and refused to accompany him. Taking Edmond and two terrified children as rowers, Father Béziat went ashore, bought a piece of land on the bay and hastily left. The savages of Lelek Bay did not harm him, but malaria did. Like the others, he was taken away more dead than alive in April 1892.
Now on his own, Father Perthuy tried to come closer to the people. He shared their life, worked in the gardens with them, cut himself a canoe, ate from the common dish. Chief Péi’s family was ready to be converted and François Néaléget was the first to be baptised, in August 1894, during the priests’ retreat in Lamap. The movement was now under way, and in May 1895, the exhausted missionary went to New Caledonia to get his health back. He was not worried. Old Father Jérôme Guitta had been with him for a year now. Father Guitta had survived his years on Wala and Rano and, now aged 72, no longer knew what fear was...

CAPTAIN FRANCOIS ROSSI SHOT DEAD ON THE PORT OLRY BEACH: AUGUST 3rd, 1895

Alas! An unexpected calamity was now going to ruin the mission. On August 3rd, 1895, Captain François Rossi, a planter from Ambrym, was shot on the beach. The murderers threw the body outside the priest’s house. But he was still alive; a single bullet had passed through his chest, and he was able to receive the Last Rites. Father Guitta buried him between his house and the church.

On September 5th, the man-of-war came with troops to punish the wrongdoers. Father Pionnier was on board. He wanted to save the little mission. To avoid bloodshed, he appealed to the chief and his people to hand over the murderer. They handed him over, but said that they would now kill the missionaries. Father Guitta was not afraid, but Father Pionnier decided to close the mission. They loaded everything they had onto the man-of-war and went to Tolomako, in the corner of Big-Bay. They were well received, and Father Pionnier promised to come back soon.

But in Nouméa, Father Pionnier was accused of acting in haste. It was not necessary, they told him, to pull out so quickly. Father Perthuy was now in good health, so they sent him back to Port Olry. He was convinced that the people would welcome him with open arms. His disappointment was very great; they told him to clear off, and threatened to shoot him. He left, but three school-children came with him. Chief Péi was away somewhere; he never came back. Port Olry now seemed to be abandoned, once and for all. But seven years later, Father Bochu would start the mission again.
In 1898, France had been humiliated by the British at Fachoda, in Africa. And now it looked as if France was to have a similar experience in this tiny Pacific archipelago of no interest to anyone! Working through Presbyterian Missionaries, it seemed, Australia was doing its best to evict France from the New Hebrides. Minister Delcassé asked Minister Decrais what he was doing about it. What help was he giving to missionaries? None, obviously; the Republic was secularist and fiercely anti-clerical! Moreover, the Republic persecuted its missionaries (in Noumea for example) whereas the British Crown made use of its missionaries.

The Minister was asked to do something to counter-act this stupidity. He promised a sum of 12,000 Francs for the first six missionaries to leave for the Pacific. But he forgot to say who, exactly, was going to give this grant. The affair was passed endlessly from one government office to another, and the six missionaries (Fathers Vazeille, Prin, Faure, Chauvel, Bancarel and Bochu) landed in Noumea without a penny.

Once again, Mr Higginson appeared on the scene. It was he, in his usual grand style, who advanced the money. He hoped, naturally, that Father Doucere, leader of the expedition, would show his gratitude by giving special attention to those places where Higginson had interests, and especially Big Bay in Santo. What can one do when one is poor? Father Doucere had no wish to bury his men in the remote corners of the great bay - he had been against, the founding of Tolomako by Father Pionnier five years before. Father Doucere tried to put off taking a decision, but eventually agreed to what Higginson wanted.

FATHERS PIERRE BOCHU AND CASIMIR BANCAREL CAME TO TOLOMAKO: MARCH 25th, 1901

The reception they were given at Tolomako was far from encouraging. In the tangled undergrowth they found what remained of the material transported by Fathers Pionnier and Guitta on September 6th, 1895. Pigs, goats and ducks had long since disappeared. The people had been waiting for six years. They had built a house (Father Vidil saw it in '96) but the promised missionary never came. But
a Presbyterian Pastor, the Reverend Sandi land, had opened a mission not far away, and the people of Tolomako had agreed to accept a "teacher".

With the help of two New Caledonians and four young men from Lamap, trained by Father Pionnier, they built a solid house on stilts. But when the workers left, the place was completely deserted. Nobody came to the mission. When Father Pierre Bochu could stand it no longer, he set off on his horse and went to Port Olry, the station which had been abandoned. This was in January 1902.

Father Bochu was convinced that, without a boat, a remote mission like Tolomako had no possible future. But Father Casimir Bancarel showed extraordinary patience. For four years, he waited for parishioners who never came. Worn out by fever, he went to Lamap for three months, and then came back to wait patiently again for his people. Father Bochu found Tolomako so grim that he sent Brother Desiré Ramaix to stay with Father Bancarel and bring a bit of gaiety to the place.

Then another Presbyterian Minister came to the area: the Reverend MacKay. He was so severe that everybody fled from his mission. They turned towards Father Bancarel. Unfortunately, Father Bancarel was then sent to Ambrym, in May 1905. For eight years, he would display the same infinite patience at Craig Cove, waiting for people who never came.

Tolomako was more or less abandoned when, in December 1908, a British ship came and carried off Chief Moli Eron, at the request of the Presbyterians, and deported him to Fiji. Moli Eron's followers were enraged, and sent a message to Father Bochu asking for a missionary. Things seemed to be turning in favor of the mission. But the only priest whom Father Bochu had available was Father Roux, a man who seemed ill-suited for bush-work. He was always getting lost, and falling off his horse. Yet it was he who arrived, in December 1909.

Father Emile Roux succeeded better than was expected. He cared for the sick. He tramped up into the high bush to bandage the victims of shoot-outs.

He loved teaching, and managed to bring together a few pupils. But malaria rapidly destroyed his health. A neighbouring planter, Mr. Fysh, mortal enemy of the Reverend
MacKay, treated his fever with bottles of gin, but without success. And then Father Alphonse Ardouin, who had crossed the great island on foot from Saint Michel, reached Tolomako and found Father Roux slumped in his bunk, discouraged, his strength gone. His school was empty. The children had left him.

FATHER ALPHONSE ARDOUIN

In October 1911, Father Alphonse Ardouin came to try to make something of this outpost which nobody wanted. Compared to Baie Barrier, swarming with children, Tolomako was like a barren and lonely swamp. But Ardouin was descended from Chouan rebels. Like his ancestors who had fought so bravely in the Vendée marshes, he too would struggle, in poverty and destitution, and would never admit defeat.

Others came to help him, like Father Louis Clénet in 1913. He only lasted for six months and later would remember it as "a place made by the devil one day when he had the runs". And Father Pierre Bancillon, who had never recovered from his terrible years on Ambae, breathed his last in this desolate spot. It is there that he sleeps, waiting for eternity. But Ardouin never lost heart.

The years went by, and his flock grew. Oh, it was slow, but Tolomako became too small, and the place was humid and unhealthy. He was thinking of moving the population northwards, to the vast open spaces around Pyakala. But then he was appointed to Port Olry and discovered the Promised Land. In 1921, like a new Moses, Father Alphonse Ardouin would lead his people from Tolomako to Port Olry to begin a new life.

THE RETURN TO PORT OLRY

FATHER PIERRE BOCHU

As old Father Guitta had predicted, it was easy to take over Port Olry again, if one started from Tolomako. Father Bochu had done it already, in January 1902. But what a mess the place was in! After six years of neglect, almost nothing remained. The house had been ransacked. A few baptised people had followed Father Perthuy to Sesivi. The others had all disappeared. Chief Péi had been deported. The murderer Nokrog was still in prison (he had been given fifteen years).
Father Bochu was a strapping man of twenty-six, an excellent horseman, afraid of nothing. The whole region was ravaged by tribal wars, but Bochu went everywhere, even to Sakau, where he was made welcome in all the villages. He was responsible for the whole coast, from Cape Cumberland to the Segond Canal, and he kept asking, loudly and in very clear terms (Bochu never minced his words) for a boat. When at last in 1904, he was given his little cutter, the "Saint Peter", he was also given a new appointment, to Melsisi. Over the next few months, the missionaries found themselves moved rapidly hither and thither, from one station to another. Father Bochu came back to Port Olry, finding it emptier than before. His "Saint Peter" was still there, and in 1907 Father Bochu went to found the station known as Saint Michel, on the shores of the Segond Canal.

He travelled a lot by sea, leaving St. Anne's Mission in the hands of Father Roux. Father Emile Roux hated being left on his own. In 1909 he moved back to Tolomako. Luckily for him, because the reign of Thangaru was about to begin.

THANGARU THE TERRIBLE

Thangaru was already a notorious war-chief in 1907 when French marines took him prisoner. But Father Bochu was his friend and sought his release on the promise that he would try to live peacefully with his neighbours. But this aggressive warmonger continued to harass the mountain villages. Things came to a head in 1911 when he sent his killers to Hog Harbour, where there was a settler called Thomas, and also a Presbyterian Mission. The French militia, and then the British, organised an expedition to find him. They were a total failure. Then the French and the British joined forces and, with naval backing, attacked Thangaru's hideout. It was a disaster: two guides were killed, another was wounded, Thomas had a bullet wound in the chest. But Thangaru was still free.

The villagers of Hog Harbour were panic-stricken, and went in daily fear and dread of the revenge of Thangaru and the great Vister Naïsth. But finally the warriors themselves came to Father Bochu to negotiate a truce and, as a guarantee of good
will, Vister Naïeth parted with a few of his children for the school. There were also some families, terrorised by the war, who had come down from the hills to seek the protection of the mission.

For the first time in ten years, Father Bochu saw a glimmer of hope. Many warriors had been slaughtered in battle and their widows, to avoid being strangled, gathered around the mission, their only refuge. On September 29th, 1912, the great Vister Naïeth himself was assassinated. That night, the priest was awakened by piteous cries: "Father, hide me quickly! They're coming to hang me, but I don't want to die!" It was one of Naïeth's wives. The rest of his wives came later, with their children... But in the upper bush, war was raging, because Thangaru had appointed himself to be Naïeth's avenger.

When he considered that he had adequately revenged his old partner-in-crime, Thangaru attacked the mission. His warriors overpowered Father Bochu and led away the women refugees with their children. "Is that the thanks I get, after all I've done for you?" Father Bochu asked him. "That was all a long time ago," replied Thangaru. It was November 25th, 1915.

Some families escaped and hid on Dionne Island, led by Eugene Batik, a catechist from Lamap (one of Father Pionnier's boys) and in October 1920 Father Bochu left Port Olry for Saint Michel. He left behind him about sixty people on Dionne, of whom 29 were baptised.

FATHER ALPHONSE ARDOUIN JOINED TOGETHER TOLOMAKO AND PORT OLRY AT SAINT ANNE'S MISSION

When Father Ardouin, missionary at Tolomako, took charge of Port Olry, he found what he had been seeking for years: a large tract of land on which he could settle his Big Bay converts. He decided to transport the whole population to this new Promised Land.

On May 21st, 1921, Father Ardouin brought the first three Tolomako families to Port Olry. Over the next ten years, after every trip to Big Bay, he came back with one or two families. If his boat had been bigger, the transfer would have taken place more quickly.
But he only had a small whaler, to which he had fitted an engine. The Port Olry people left Dionne and came to the mainland, so that now everybody was grouped together in a single large village.

In June 1932, the elusive Thangaru, whose reign of terror had never ceased, was shot by his own people. Mortally wounded, he wanted to be brought to the priest. But he had lost too much blood, and died on the way. "Poor Thangaru" wrote Father Ardouin, "may his soul go to God. Are these people really guilty? Their war, is it not their way of winning justice?"

On May 15th, 1934, the beautiful little church was blessed; it was already too small. Father Ardouin rejoiced to see so many children being born. Such fine families! Saint Anne's Mission became an oasis of peace, and the people from the hills began to come down. Soon there was not enough room for all.

The older generation had been selling off their land without too much thought given to the consequences, and now the Port Olry people did not have enough for themselves. During the nineteen years that Father Ardouin spent at Port Olry, he tried hard to win back the ground that had been lost... Bishop Douceré gave him a lot of help.

Father Ardouin's dream was to die among his flock. But it was at Saint Michel that the Lord recalled his good and faithful servant, on July 27th, 1941.

RETURN TO BIG BAY:
TOLOMAKO, PESENA, PIAMATSINA

During the thirties, having brought all his Christians to Port Olry, Father Ardouin hardly ever went back to Big Bay. In 1952, Father Teppaz was planning to bring catechumens together at Matantas. But it was Father Barthe who re-established regular ties with the great bay of Queiros.

Father Jules Barthe had passed one short year in the islands, at Wala. He went to Montmartre for a rest, after an attack of malaria, and stayed for forty-seven years! In 1955, Bishop Julliard took him from there and sent him to Port Olry. The return to active mission work gave him a new lease of life.

He was not afraid of sea-journeys and re-opened the Tolomako Mission, but a little more to the north, at Tapnapui. The Adventists, stung by jealousy at the sight of bush-folk joining the Catholic Church, managed to have their leaders put in prison by reporting a crime that had taken place years before.

Then people from the northern shores of Big Bay asked the priest to come, and he opened a little station beside the Pesena river. In 1965 Father Joseph Bordiga began to make more frequent visits, often accompanied by a nurse, Sister M. Cabrini. Two years later, he was moved to Sydney.
His successor, Father Maurice Linossier, who had already made contact with pagan villages in the south when he was stationed at Saint Michel, had plenty of time, during his fourteen years, to properly organise his Big Bay out-stations. To Tolomako and Pesena, he added a third: Piamatsina.

PORT OLRY TODAY

Hardly had Father Ardouin finished his church than it was already too small. In Father Barthé's time, Gérard Fiorari constructed a fine church, with an impressive bell-tower. Gravel for the brickwork was carried all the way from Big Bay on the "Saint Anita". If it was now possible to build, it was largely due to the hard work of Father Alexis Jahan (in 1947) and Father Joseph Louppe (1952) who had done a lot of planting and created resources.

In Father Roman Martin's time (1963) Attilio Benediti built the first modern classrooms and put a final polish to the church, which was blessed on the feast of Saint Anne in 1965. Father Bordiga was there then. All the pagans came.

Father Maurice Linossier arrived in 1967 and stayed for fourteen years. We have spoken of what he accomplished in Big Bay. At Port Olry he developed the school and built dormitories for the children from the out-stations. The mission began to radiate outwards and Loran, Lelek, Lorevulko and Lorethiakarkar came into being. The dramatic events of the Santo rebellion, and the repression which followed it, are pages which must be turned. The Catholics were made to pay dearly for the growth and development of the previous years.

In twenty years, Port Olry went from 430 to 1280 Catholics. Father Albert Sacco, who came there from Tanna in 1980, inherited a vast apostolate which is still growing. With his speedboat he frequently visits Big Bay and has built two fine churches at Pesena and Tolomako. He has founded a new mission at Matalimarave, to the south of Tolomako, where Father John Cecil has installed a team of St. Martin de Porres Brothers.

Father BOClIU’s first church at Port Olry
On March 24th, 1879, Admiral Dupetit-Thouars was exploring the archipelago in the naval cruiser "Le Segond". Between the islands of Santo and Aore, he discovered a magnificent natural harbour which he named the "Canal du Segond" (now universally known as "the Canal"). To the banks of the Canal came the first settlers recruited by the Société Française. In 1889, when they held a farewell party for Captain Lugan, the Commanding Officer of the "Messageries Maritimes" shipping line, they decided to call their settlement "Luganville".

Whenever Bishop Doucere toured the northern islands, he always stopped for a few days at the Canal, and the planters repeatedly asked him to send them a priest. The Bishop had nobody available. But Father Bochu was based further north, and with his cutter he could visit Luganville from time to time.

In July 1907, Father Bochu explored the shores of the Canal and came across a piece of land which was still free, between Messimy and Russet. A most beautiful site, which was later to become the Saint Michel Mission. To indicate his occupancy of the place, he began to plant coconuts, and lived in a hut with his workers. He continued to visit his mission at Port Olry, going back and forward on his boat with Eugene the catechist. Very quickly this exhausted him, and when the time came to build at Saint Michel, he asked for help.

In October 1909, Father François Rougé arrived at Saint Michel. He expected to stay there no longer than was necessary to build the house... but he remained for ten years. Father Rougé had a dream of creating a great training centre at Montmartre, to include the catechists' school and a technical school, and he wanted to develop the Montmartre farm. Frightened by this ambitious project, His Lordship thought it better to steer Father Rougé in another direction. When Rougé had finished building the house at Saint Michel, he realised that he was now a prisoner of the station he had created. He returned to his idea of starting a technical school. He observed that the white youth went on for further studies in Noumea, while the black youth disappeared back in their villages, and the
half-castes remained. Could something not be done for these young Melanesians, he wondered. His idea was to make good Christians of them, and teach them to work. Helped by these apprentices, Father Rouge built the delightful little church at Saint Michel, with its gothic arches. Begun in 1912, it was blessed only on February 5th, 1918. Again and again, Bishop Doucere raised his hands in despair at the sight of this grandiose project which seemed to go on for ever. But Father Rouge persevered to the very end...

In 1911, Father Alphonse Ardouin arrived. Everybody believed that now, at last, the evangelisation of the pagans would begin. This apostle of Baie Barrier, this tireless walker was not likely to be deterred by Santo's hills. He visited all the nearby villages, such as Beleru, and went to live at Naturuk. Not long afterwards, having crossed the island from south to north, he came to Tolomako and found Father Roux at the point of death. He agreed to take his place, and so the Santo bush was abandoned for another twenty years.

Father Rouge left in November 1919. To the very end, he hoped that the Bishop would allow him to open a school, and that he would have Sisters. He wanted to do something for the young people of Santo - take charge of them, and train them. Seeing that it was not possible, he preferred to hand over to somebody else. Old Father Vazeille stayed for a while to mind the few remaining schoolchildren. Then he asked to end his days at Olal (he was seventy), a mission station which he dearly loved. He died there on April 1st, 1921.

Father Pierre Bochu came to Saint Michel in September 1920. He was still in charge of Port Olry, and worried about leaving his little flock in the middle of "gun-crazed maniacs". The little flock was handed over to Father Ardouin in 1921.

At that time, the Canal was looking more and more like a parish of Asiatics. In 1920, the first boat-loads of Tonkinese labourers arrived and, every year thereafter, they arrived in their hundreds to work on the surrounding plantations. Many suffered from malaria, dysentery and various intestinal infections. The first doctor who came to treat them, Doctor Lehotte, waited four years for a hospital to be built and died in Father Bochu's arms in February 1925, haemorraging from the urinary tract.

So Father Bochu decided to build the long-promised hospital himself. The house of the nursing Sisters was still unfinished when they arrived on January 22nd, 1928, (Sisters Marie Gérard, Cyriaque and Vianney). Planks, nails and hammers were easily available. Luckily, for on February 14th, there was a cyclone. Using the material lying around, the Sisters nailed up planks to hold the doors and windows and so saved the house.

In March 1929, Father Bochu was promoted Captain of the "Saint Joseph". He said goodbye to Saint Michel, where they were still waiting for a school...
Father André replaced the gruff Captain Bochu who left to take up his new job on the mission ship in March 1929. Father Bochu had travelled about the islands for almost thirty years, spending most of his time on building sites, toiling and sweating. He began to look like the beachcombers whom he frequented, and he spoke their language. It would have been unthinkable for little Father André to behave like that, and yet he won the friendship of the Santo Planters and was able to get them to contribute towards the project which neither Fathers Rouge nor Bochu had been able to realise, a large school with dormitories for boarders.

The Tonkinese continued to arrive in large numbers. Hundreds came on the "Laperouse" and the "Gia Long". In 1929, there were 5979 Tonkinese in the archipelago. A lot of them were Catholics. They needed help and support. They were harshly treated, and from time to time they rebelled. In September 1930, on Malo Island, they murdered their overseer, Monsieur Charpentier. The Tonkinese Catholics built chapels everywhere, at Mango, Chapuis, Surenda.

Despite all these new parishioners, Father Andre found time to go up into the bush, and it was he who converted the people of Beleru. They had lost contact with the mission since Father Ardouin's time. A woman from Beleru, called Lisi, had attended catechism classes in Vila as a child. She was a strong-minded woman! She went home to Santo, still unbaptised, and then fell sick. She went to the hospital, which was then in the care of the Sisters, and asked permission for people from her village to build a house at Saint Michel. That was the beginning of their conversion. Lisi had just adopted a small boy, Angelo. She sent him to Montmartre so that he would become a catechist. The people of Beleru were baptised on August 14th, 1935, and Jean Angelo became their catechist.

After a long battle with the Bishop, Father Andre was allowed to build his school and dormitories. There were opened on August 7th, 1933. He had the support of the whole population of the Canal. Joseph Andre left Santo for his native France in February 1939. He had not been home for thirty years.
It was Father Alexis Jahan who was at Saint Michel to welcome the formidable armada of American troops who were getting ready to invade Guadalcanal. From the front of the church, as far as the eye could see, stretched the ships of the US navy, unloading huge mountains of stores and materials, and 200,000 men. On Sundays, the church was full of soldiers who came to Holy Communion. Catholics who spoke English! It was unheard of!

However, there was a tragedy! Lisi, who had brought the Beleru people into the Church, was murdered along with her husband Louis Maewo and their daughter, by a group of soldiers.

In 1944, the war moved away. A new town gradually came into being on the banks of the Canal du Segond, where the American base had been. It was there that the Saint Thérèse Parish was started, in 1960.

SAINT MICHEL TODAY

Father Rouge's great hope was at last realised, and Saint Michel got its school. Father Maximilien Teppaz, who came in 1947, had the idea of bringing in students from islands which had no school of their own.

The idea of a Central School became a reality under Father Linossier, with Sister Marie François Régis as headmistress. The Sacred Heart Brothers came in 1967 and started a technical school which was to attract great numbers of young people. Brother Roland Bernier built the classrooms. At the same time, the SMSM Sisters began domestic science classes for girls from the islands.

When the Sacred Heart Brothers left in 1985, the Technical School was taken over by a team of young local teachers under the leadership of Lucien Bourriaud, a lay missionary who had worked for many years in Vao and Port Olry.

TOWARDS THE SOUTH SANTO BUSH: NAMBEL, OKORO, VIURU

In 1957, Father Maurice Linossier came to Saint Michel to help old Father Andre who had been in charge of the Parish since 1952. In 1960, Father Nicolini took over Saint Therese, the new parish which had been started in the centre of town. The missionary at Saint Michel was now freer to explore the bush, which had received no attention for a very long time.

Father Maurice Linossier began by re-opening the American road to Beleru and extending it to Nambel. He also began to visit the tiny pagan villages, hidden in the
bush of the mountainous hinterland, in particular between the Wailapa and Navaka Rivers. In 1960, he was able to start a small mission at Okoro, close to the Loloviso River. The people from Penantsiro, in the hills, came down to the mission. Later, he began a second base at Viuru, close to the Navaka.

Thanks to the hard work of Hubert Bulessiko, a catechist from Melsisi, the first of those two bases developed rapidly. After the departure of Father Linossier the conversion movement continued, and it spread to Viuru. But the great movement of "return to the customs" launched by the Nagriamel Political Party dealt a very severe blow to these nascent Christian communities. What was missing, to give them a really solid foundation, was a school. Father Linossier wanted to open one, but when the Diocese was really beginning to develop its schools, little outposts which were only beginning did not interest the planners. It was not until 1987 that a little school eventually appeared at Okoro. Despite everything, the older converts are still friendly towards the Catholic Church, and they will no doubt return one day.

THE SAINT THERESE MISSION

Saint Thérèse Parish grew up in and around what remained of the huge American camp. Father Andre began to celebrate Mass in a large abandoned warehouse, and in 1956, the Sisters from Saint Michel took over a row of small huts and used them as classrooms. It was the beginning of the present Primary School. Then in 1960, with Gerard Fiorani directing operations, Father Linossier built the school on its present site.

Father Nicolini was the first Parish Priest. In 1962, Father Edouard Wagner arrived. It was during his time that the parish church was built (M. Morin was the builder). For ten years, Father Edouard Wagner was the apostle of Scouting in Santo. The younger parishioners of St. Thérèse still remember him with great affection. His untimely death on May 24th 1974, was keenly felt.

With the help of his scouts and local planters, Father Wagner began a chapel on the islands of Malo, not far from the site of the Villa Maria Station which Father Deniau had founded in 1888 and which he had abandoned five years later. The chapel was blessed on November 9th, 1969. Father Joseph Foucher was the Parish Priest at the time. He spent two years at Saint Thérèse.

Father Joseph Foucher is a man who never passes unnoticed, and whose cheerful demeanour and good humour never fail to brighten the surroundings. Under his leadership, Saint Thérèse began to become more of a Melanesian Parish.
When Father Wagner died, Father Monnier took charge of Saint Thérèse and Saint-Michel, now joined together to make a single Parish. With Okoro, Viuru, Nambel, Beleru and Malo, it was a heavy load, especially as Fanafo was about to begin.

**FANAFO**

The "Nagriamel" Movement, started by Jimmy Stevens in 1965, was a reaction against the growing influence of European ways and customs on Melanesian Society. Nagriamel wanted all land to be returned to the people. It also rejected all imported religion, and campaigned for a return to ancestral custom.

Nagriamel’s Headquarters were at Fanafo, about 20 km from Luganville. It rapidly became a rallying centre for all the villages of the Santo hinterland, and then began attracting people from all the other islands. Most of the Churches strongly condemned this neo-pagan movement. But the Catholic Church was unwilling to sever contact with the members of the rapidly-growing movement, whose aspirations needed to be listened to and understood.

In 1967, the SMSM Sisters took charge of the Fanafo Dispensary. Father Monnier was a frequent visitor and was able to maintain friendly contact with the movement’s leaders.

When gatherings were held, up to 2000 people would attend. It was Fanafo which became the centre of the Rebellion, which was in fact quite a peaceful one. The Rebellion was ruthlessly quelled; and Christians were to be seen beating pagans with truncheons. An appalling counter-witness... This took place in August 1980. The Sisters did not leave.

**SAINT THERERESE TODAY**

Today, the Saint Thérèse Parish has recovered a lot of its old vitality. Despite the 700 or so Catholics who were either deported or left Vanuatu freely after Independence, the Parish counts about 1300 souls, as well as a large number of workers who are not permanent residents in Santo. The schools are full and Father John Cecil has just opened three new ones at Okoro, Fanafo and Nambel. A fine act of faith in the future.

Finally, when speaking of the Church’s presence in Santo, one cannot omit two institutions of capital importance. The Mission ship "MV St. Joseph" and the Procure.
Having weathered many a storm, the first "Saint Joseph" was driven ashore by the terrible cyclone of 1959. It had accomplished its task well, that of being (in Bishop Doucere's phrase) "a floating mission". But being based in Vila it was too far from the northern islands and was unable to perform all the services expected of it.

The new "Saint Joseph" was to be based at Santo. From there it could quickly reach all the mission stations in the northern islands. The ship was to perform a colossal task during all those years when a lot of building was being done, carrying tons of cement and iron. On the way back to Santo, it was invariably full of copra or cocoa, and carrying passengers from the missions. For many years, the Captain and the mechanic have been Vanuatu men. They know all the anchorages and can be trusted absolutely.

THE PROCURE

The Procure is a sort of centralised supply agency servicing the mission stations in the outer islands. It has its own workshops and warehouses, and it is responsible for operating the "Saint Joseph". Father Alexis Jahan founded it in 1962, on the banks of the Sarakata. Father Jean Rodet thoroughly re-organised it, and later Father Erminio de Stephanis and Monsieur Albert Jardin gave it many years of distinguished service.

A twice-daily radio schedule puts the Procure in contact with every mission station in the Diocese. The man in charge at the Procure, with his team, is expected to deal with (and solve!) a whole range of problems, finding and transporting supplies of every kind, dealing with the accounts which all of this requires, housing and feeding travellers in transit... The job is never-ending and requires an endless supply of patience and understanding. And diplomacy too, because everyone wants to be served first.

"The first Saint Joseph"
EFATE

1,000 KM²
20,700 INHABITANTS
3,120 CATHOLICS

BISHOPS OF
PORT VILA P. 120
MELE P. 128
PORT VILA P. 129
MONTMARTRE P. 132
LOLOLIMA P. 135
On August 9th, 1889, the Port Vila settlers, seeing that nobody took any interest in them any more, decided to organise themselves. They chose Monsieur Chevillard as mayor of their new commune, which they called "Franceville". The Mele Planters then founded "Faureville", named after the President of the Republic. Uneasy at this expansion of French interests, the Presbyterians gave their support to the setting-up of an English Company, and Burns Philp was born in 1896, quickly becoming the arch-rival of the French Company, S.F.N.H. It was clear that important things were happening on Efate, and that the Mission’s Headquarters should leave Lamap and move to Port Vila.

THE BISHOP’S HOUSE

When Father Forestier relinquished Mele in 1889, he did not lose everything. To thank him for his work, he was given the choice of two hectares on the site of the future town of Port Vila. It was Father Pionnier who chose them, and he chose well. The magnificent location of the present Bishop’s House.

Father Joseph Lambotin was appointed to build the new centre. Father Lambotin was famous for his ability to work for long hours without a rest. It was he who built the church on Wala Island, almost on his own. Father Vidil was frequently amazed to see him sawing and hammering in the full blaze of midday!

Father Joseph Lambotin came to Vila on May 11th, 1898. In New Caledonia, he had gathered the material he needed for a house measuring 10 by 20 metres. But just as he was about to construct the house, he was given orders to cut it in half, and build the other half in Mele. It was this truncated building, which all the older Fathers still remember well, which became the Bishop’s House. It consisted of two rooms, one on either side of a small library-cum-sitting room. The verandah was closed off at each end to make two tiny bedrooms. This tiny place, completed in April 1899, served for sixty years as the Bishop’s Residence. It was destroyed by the famous cyclone of Christmas 1959.

Father Lambotin wore himself out digging a deep cistern in the coral rock. Then he went to Mele to build the other half of the house - the one-storey edifice which still stands today at Mele. During all this time, Father Lambotin was in charge of the Vila Parish and the Procure... Completely worn out, he went back to New Caledonia in May 1902 to become chaplain to the convicts in the penal colony (a vocation for which his life so far had admirably prepared him...)

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On February 14th, 1901, Reverend Father Victor Doucere landed in Port Vila. He was the Catholic Mission's New Leader. And he was to hold the reins of leadership in his hands until his death on May 12th, 1939. In fact, he had been in charge ever since he first came back in 1889.

Father Victor Doucere was a Breton, born in the Côtes du Nord Region on April 3rd, 1857. He was ordained at the age of 24, taught for three years and then entered the Marists.

After a year of novitiate in England, he left for Oceania and reached Noumea on January 3rd, 1887, just in time to see the first missionaries setting off for the New Hebrides. He was supposed to be going to the New Hebrides himself, but Bishop Fraysse, realising that in Father Doucere, he had somebody quite out of the ordinary, appointed him immediately to his Cathedral as a curate.

A strong bond of friendship was to grow between the two men. He quickly became the Bishop's trusted confidant, and when old Father Forestier finally gave up in 1889, it was Father Doucere who was sent to lead the very difficult New Hebrides Mission. At Lamap, he showed that he was a good missionary and, whenever possible, he visited the conferees scattered around the islands. But it seemed then that he was unable to bear the climate, and the Bishop recalled him to Noumea in April 1893. We have seen already how he continued to guide the ship from there, even though Father Pionnier was at the helm.

When Father Lambotin was building the new Bishop's House in Port Vila, everybody was talking of the possibility of the New Hebrides becoming a separate diocese, with its own Bishop. Many of the missionaries were being tipped as likely future Bishops. Father Rougier was mentioned for his abilities as an organiser. Father Pionnier, because he was very likeable and had lots of energy and Father Doucere was spoken of too, for his prudence. Father Lambotin said that if the three
of them could be mixed together, and their essence distilled, the perfect Bishop would emerge. However, the process of distilling Bishops had not yet been perfected, and so the three men had to be taken as they were. And it was the prudent Doucere who was chosen.

On February 11th, Reverend Father Doucere was appointed Prefect Apostolic. In fact, he had been acting as such for two years. Then on March 26th, 1904, he was promoted Vicar Apostolic of the New Hebrides. It must be noted that, from that day onwards, the expansion of the Catholic Mission came to a halt and there were no new foundations until Tanna began in 1933. The new Bishop wanted to consolidate what had already been begun, and in order to achieve this, he went so far as to close down the missions at Epi, Mele, Lopangalo and Tolomako. From the very day of his election, he was determined never to incur debts, and this resolution he would firmly keep. As far as the missionaries were concerned, it meant tightening their belt another few notches.

Bishop Doucere was extremely demanding on his missionaries - and on himself as well. He believed that heroism could be expected from true apostles. Yet he would never allow his men to see themselves as heroes. And he turned a deaf ear to their tales of poison and cannibalism.

Above all, he wanted to form good solid Christians, and he insisted on this every year at the retreat. And it is a fact that defections were few. He insisted that the new Christians must be completely segregated from the baneful world of paganism which they had left behind. Anything which "rejoiced the heart of man " was, for Bishop Doucere, highly suspect.

The same idea carried over into the training of catechists. Bishop Doucere was suspicious of giving them any kind of training which might give them ideas of grandeur and make them proud. They must be, above all, good examples of Christian living, pious and submissive. Above all, submissive.

Obviously, the Missionaries, struggling with the resistance of the pagans and the progress of the Protestants, were far from sharing these convictions of their leader. But His Lordship believed that he alone had the grace of state to make decisions. It is a pity that he did not listen to the ideas of men like Fathers Loubière, Suas, Ardouin and particularly Gonnet, who all believed that they too were faithful to the Holy Spirit.

The people of Port Vila still retain a feeling of veneration for Bishop Doucere. When he preached, he moved hearts. He was also a fervent patriot.

However, all the visitors sent by the Society of Mary between 1910 and 1930 were filled with despair at the stagnation of the Catholic Church in the island group.
At every successive visit, still more ground had been lost. What was the use of sending young missionaries...? When at last in 1933, the old Bishop decided to open a mission in Tanna, he was answered immediately by the arrival of several young missionaries. But it was too late, existing gaps needed to be filled before men could be spared for the new mission.

Bishop Victor Doucere died on May 12th, 1939. A great crowd followed him to his final resting-place. He had held the reins in his hands until the very end, unwilling to let go.

BISHOP JULES HALBERT

Jules Halbert was from Nantes. He was born at Landreau, on February 7th, 1886. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Doucere himself, who was in Europe at the time. He came to New Caledonia in 1911, and for 28 years was in charge of the same mission, Kone. He was consecrated Bishop in Port Vila on December 10th, 1939.

Having no experience of the New Hebrides, Bishop Halbert was to scrupulously follow the directives of his distinguished predecessor. It was war time. Everything was rationed, and development was impossible. Apart from four Fathers who arrived just before the outbreak of war, his missionaries were all old men, worn out by work. It was only in 1947, that fresh troops arrived. He decided to leave them in the care of his successor and resigned on May 11th, 1954. He died at Saint-Louis, New Caledonia, on February 3rd, 1955.
BISHOP LOUIS JULLIARD

The New Hebrides Missionaries expressed a desire to have a Bishop who knew the country and its people. Father Louis Julliard was chosen, a man not very imposing to look at, but who had done magnificent work for thirteen years in the difficult Melsisi Mission.

Louis Julliard was born at Coubon (Haute-Loire) on March 13th, 1912. He came to the New Hebrides on December 31st, 1937. Appointed to Sesivi, he very nearly died of malaria after only a few months on Ambrym. When he recovered, he was appointed to Port Olry. Very shortly after his arrival, a man was shot dead just at the entrance to the mission. He had not yet managed to restore peace when His Lordship sent him to replace Father Guillaume in the wake of that tragic war which had caused the spilling of so much blood at Melsisi. Louis Julliard was a remarkable diplomat. He had a gift for calming disputes. He always listened very carefully, gave long consideration to his decisions, and then kept to them firmly. He was very close to his catechists and knew his people thoroughly. These qualities would make him an excellent Bishop. He lived very simply, rarely pontificated, and did not believe that he had a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. He trusted his men and supported them. Major decisions and new directions were taken at the annual meeting, where the experience and the ideas of all could be profitably heard.

His great fortune was that, at last, missionaries began to arrive in good numbers. They came from everywhere - France, Spain, the United States, Belgium, Holland, Ireland, England, and especially Italy. The Catholic Mission benefitted greatly during those years from the manna sent by FIDES (French Aid for Development) and by the careful stewardship of Father Verlingue. New classrooms were built everywhere. Under the guidance of Father Janique, the Catechists' School at Montmartre now began to produce teachers (over 200 in all, within the space of a few years). By force of circumstances, the members of the Catholic Church came to be more and more French-speaking.
Dispensaries were built in all the mission stations, often with the help of the "Leprosy Trust Board of New Zealand". Nursing Sisters staffed them, and did extraordinary work. The birth-rate rose everywhere and the mortality-rate dropped. The appearance of our mission stations improved. No longer did they look wretched and abandonned. Brother Roland Bernier's construction company opened new building sites every year, training many young carpenters and bricklayers who would prove their usefulness in the years to come. At Montmartre, Brother Leo Lapointe transformed the plantation, overgrown by jungle, into a model farm.

During this period, many new churches would be built. Most of these were paid for and built by the new christians themselves: Melsisi, Port Olry, Craig Cove, Vao, Baie Barrier, Baie Martelli, Norsup, Walarano, St. Therese - Santo, Loloepuepue, Nangire, Imaki, Lowanatum - Rather anxious, our neighbours say: "The Catholic Church is rich!" But not really. It is the generosity of the missionaries and the people which makes the work advance so well.

This period of Bishop Julliard is marked by a missionary awakening. For thirty years, the Catholic Mission had made no progress. Behind its fences, it huddled and stagnated. Geographically, its presence was very limited, and yet, many regions remained where the local population belonged to no Church, especially, on the islands of Santo, Malekula and Tanna. It was high time for the Church to make contact with these areas. And so it was that the mission to West Malekula began to develop at that time, as well as the mission to the Santo Bush, to Big Bay, to South-East Ambrym and to Middle Bush, Tanna.

Having resigned in 1976, Bishop Julliard returned to the life of a simple missionary. He was now, as he used to say, no more than the "forty-fifth wheel of the cart" but he continued to serve the people of Saint-Michel and Port Olry. He died in Noumea on February 12th, 1984.

**BISHOP FRANCIS LAMBERT**

After Bishop Julliard's retirement, for a short time, Archbishop Martin acted as Apostolic Administrator. Then, once again, an experienced New Hebrides Missionary was chosen to lead the diocese.

Bishop Francis Lambert was born on February 7th, 1921, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, USA. Ordained in 1946, he came to the New Hebrides in 1948. His first appointment was to Lamap, and from there he made regular visits to Ambrym, the Maskelynes and Toman. He opened a small base at Dixon, visited the Big Nambas plateau, and started the mission at Mae, close to Norsup, among the last Tiraks of the region.
In 1955, Bishop Julliard put him in charge of the Central School at Montmartre, and then appointed him to Melsisi in 1959. He had another taste of Vila during six years as Parish Priest, and even worked for a while in Tanna before becoming Provincial of the Marist Fathers in Oceania in 1971. He was named Bishop on December 31st, 1976, and consecrated by Bishop Julliard on March 20th, 1977.

Bishop Lambert already had a thorough knowledge of the diocese. Moreover, being neither English nor French but speaking perfectly the two languages, he seemed ideally suited to bring together in harmony the disparate elements of the soon-to-disappear Condominium (whose divisions would survive stronger than ever in the political parties of the new nation). The new Bishop would have the very delicate task of guiding the flock through the difficult moments of Vanuatu’s Independence.

Despite strong opinions to the contrary, the Catholics were strongly committed to preparing for Independence. The best proof of this is that Father Gerard Leymang, a local Diocesan Priest, formed a Government of National Unity of which he was Prime Minister on December 20th, 1978. It was the only possible way to resolve the deep divisions which the Condominium was leaving behind, and it obliged the two main parties to work together.

At Independence, declared on July 30th, 1980, the English-speaking political Vanuaaku Party formed the new nation’s first government. The Catholics, about 90% of whom were French-speaking, found themselves, so to speak, on the losing side. A savage punishment campaign was organised against them at the time of the Santo Rebellion. They are unhappy memories... Bishop Lambert’s task was not an easy one. He tried very hard to show that the Catholic Church was not uniquely a French-speaking entity, and he was always at pains to show his loyalty to the Government in power. At one stage, the Catholic schools were about to disappear. This feeling did not last long, and confidence was quickly restored - fortunately, because the difficulties were only beginning.
One can understand why the main thrust of Bishop Lambert's episcopacy has been towards the training of Local Priests, Sisters and Brothers. It is a very long and exacting task, and also very costly. It will be necessary to wait for another few years to reap the fruit, but it is certain that all these sacrifices will not have been made in vain.

THE BISHOP'S HOUSE TODAY

The cyclone of December 28th, 1959, destroyed the humble dwelling built by Father Lambotin. It had lasted for sixty years. It was replaced by a solid and square one-storey building. Despite its fortress-like appearance, its roof was removed by Cyclone Uma on February 7th, 1987.

From the upstairs balcony, there is a magnificent view of Port Vila Bay, and old Bishop Julliard used to enjoy watching the harbour traffic through his telescope. His heart was in the islands. Downstairs his tireless chancellor, Father Verlingue, could be heard banging away on his typewriter.

When Bishop Lambert came, he built the present Secretariat where Mr Noc Saksak presides today, linked by radio to all the mission stations. The daily radio schedule at 11.30 a.m. enables the missions to listen to each other and to Vila.

The D.E.C. (Catholic Education Office) has its headquarters there too, across the lawn. Inside Mr Georges Kuse and his staff tackle the endless problems created by an army of 266 teachers and 4707 schoolchildren scattered through 42 Primary Schools, not to mention 4 Secondary Schools with 19 classes and 410 pupils. Therein lies the vitality and the hope of the Catholic Church in Vanuatu.

Next to the D. E. C., Father Gerard Leymang has organised a whole series of offices in what used to be called "the Zoo" in the old days, where missionaries were housed during the annual retreat. These offices are now the nerve-centres of many diocesan activities:

- Catechetics in the schools;
- Communications - UNDA. The diocesan newspaper "EKLESIA", a vital source of information for the Church in Vanuatu and overseas;
- The Credit Union which helps people to properly manage their money;
- The Committee for Justice and Development of Vanuatu (CCJD-V).

Bishop Lambert is well aware how too much centralisation can lead to stagnation in even the best-organised undertakings. So he keeps in touch with the islands by making long and in-depth visits which enable him to feel the heartbeat of his diocese.
MELE (THE SECOND MISSION STATION)

The large stone archway built by Vietnamese Parishioners still guards the gateway to the second Mele Station. Father Le Forestier's station was a little bit further along the Devil's Point Road, beside a little stream which never runs dry. The missionaries had not planned to return to Mele, but some people from the small island had become Catholics in Fiji. They were due to come home and Father Rougier wanted a base to be set up near them.

Father Lambotin found an unoccupied site of 27 hectares. Before beginning to build, he got the consent of the Mele people, who at first had been hostile. The house was finished at the start of 1901 and Father Vazeille moved in. The "Fijian converts" arrived on June 8th. A few days later the first nineteen trainee catechists arrived: Mele was to the their training centre.

On December 8th, Bishop Fraysse presented a statue of Our Lady to Bishop Douceré at La Conception, Noumea. It was carried ashore at Mele on December 20th. For seventy years, the people of Vila would walk in pilgrimage to "Our Lady of Mele", praying and singing to the Mother of the Saviour. The schoolchildren of Montmartre were the first pilgrims, on December 8th, 1908. The iconoclasts who smashed the statue in 1984 certainly gave no thought to its venerable history. Nor were they aware, probably, that Father Faure who, with Sister M. Tarcisius, exhausted his energies in caring for Mele people who were victims of cholera, died a victim himself on April 7th, 1903, at the age of 29. His body now lies in that piece of Mele land to which the Catholic Mission is now denied entry.

In July 1903, the school at Mele was transferred to Montmartre. It no longer seemed necessary now to keep a missionary in residence there. Jean-Pierre Romeuf, the priest with one arm, lived there for three years and then in 1908 went to Lamap.

When the Vietnamese came in the twenties, Father Durand, who was in charge of the Procure at Vila, became their chaplain and Mele became their rallying point. When the Vietnamese left in 1962, Mele became the weekend paradise for the scout troop of the Port Vila Parish.

In 1974, Father Jahan came to live in the house at Mele, intending to end his days there in peace. But in 1978, the people of Mele held a huge demonstration, claiming their right to the land. The priest had to leave, the houses were ransacked and the church desecrated.

Finally, a cement factory was built on the Mission. It collapsed after a few years. Today, in a wilderness of weeds and long grass, Father Lambotin's house stands empty, as if still waiting for someone to come and live in it...
THE PARISH OF PORT VILA

When the planters asked for a Catholic Mission in Port Vila, they expected it to provide a hospital and a school. Father Lambotin drew up a plan: the complex would be built on land belonging to the Mission. But to his astonishment the construction work was begun on another site, at Anabrou, on land belonging to the Société Française: the school, the Sisters' house, the hospital and the doctor's house—all would be at Anabrou. It was Higginson at work once again, making use of the Mission to increase the value of his own land while striking a blow at rivals, Messrs Chevillard and MacLeod. Those who pay the piper have always called the tune...

On May 10th, 1901, the first four Sisters arrived: Tarcisius, Constancia, Jacques and Marc. That same year, Higginson's company went bankrupt, and a large question-mark hung over the school at Anabrou. Yet it continued to prosper.

In 1904, the Marist Brothers came to Port Vila to open a college. Dogged by bad luck from the beginning, the school lasted for eight years. In 1913, the French Administration acquired the buildings for use as a hospital. Today, the ex-French Hospital stands on that site, now known as the George Pompidou Building. The older boys now had no proper school, so in 1913, Father Godefroy opened St. Joseph's School in the grounds of the Cathedral. In 1952, Father Loubiere enlarged it, adding a boarding section.

The first Chapel was built by Father Lambotin in a great hurry, and it looked like a large barn. It was destroyed by fire on November 30th, 1922. It was re-built with reinforced concrete in 1924 and today serves as the Parish Presbytery. The grotto dates from 1925. The Calvary monument below the Bishop's house was built in 1937 to celebrate 50 years of the Catholic Mission.

Three Parish Priests left their mark on the early history of the Parish:
- François Dégoulange: 1904 - 1916
- Pierre Gonnet: 1916 - 1917
- Edouard Loubiere: 1917 - 1955

But the real Parish Priest of Port Vila remained: Victor Doucere.

No village on the island of Efate became Catholic. From the start, the Presbyterian Church was present everywhere. But the Parish which gradually grew up around the town of Port Vila is like a picture of the Universal Church, and parishioners from all over the world find themselves immediately at home in the little Cathedral.

Converts came from all the ethnic groups. A little church was built at Paray and people from Erakor came there for mass.

The Tonkinese, who soon numbered 2000, came to mass at Mele. There were Javanese, Arabs, Tahitians and Fijians. François-Xavier, the Japanese manservant of
Father Suas, prepared some of his fellow-countrymen for baptism. Celestin, a catechist who was also a Third Order Member, instructed people from the islands in the main points of the faith. Sister M. Cyrille gathered a group of about thirty Melanesian and Tonkinese women in her Don Bosco Circle, and prepared many of them for baptism.

Father Loubiere was the prison chaplain. On July 28th, 1931, he assisted six Tonkinese who were sentenced to the guillotine and baptised them before their execution. For many lost sheep from the islands, a spell in prison was the road to salvation.

Father Loubiere had been a missionary in Namaram and he was happy to find a group of Pentecost people at Siviri village near Port Havanah. People from Nguna invited him to come and visit "Na Ora Ma Tua". Why did these Presbyterian villages extend this invitation to the Catholics? Five months after his visit, in April 1937, it was learned that their missionary, the Reverend Mullen, had been murdered.

Father Durand was chaplain to the Tonkinese, who kept arriving in ever greater numbers. He made regular visits around the islands, calling at plantations with Vietnamese labourers. This was one of the reasons which eventually decided the Bishop to purchase the "Saint Joseph". His famous "floating mission" made its triumphal entry into Port Vila harbour on October 7th, 1927.

Then came the war. The historic rallying behind the Free French Forces of General de Gaulle took place in the Parish Hall on July 20th, 1940. The American Army, within a few months, changed the face of old Port Vila. On August 7th, 1942, the first heavy aircraft took off from Bauerfield. Thanks to the war, Port Vila had entered the modern era.

Father Loubiere was Parish Priest of Port Vila for 38 years, and always remained very much a missionary. He knew how to look about him and he was present where people needed him.
PORT VILA TODAY

Port Vila has grown into a large town, with a population of 15,000. It is no longer the "Franceville" of the past. Europeans are still plentiful but they are mainly English-speaking. The bulk of the population comes from the islands. The common language of communication is bichelamar, but most people quite easily handle three or four languages.

People from the island missions find a new style of life when they come to town, and tend to lose their roots.

The young people are an easy prey for the Religious Sects, which seem to multiply every year. Boys and girls suddenly find themselves free of traditional controls. If they find a job, they are in no hurry to return to their island. If they are living together, they put off marriage until later.

Kava drinking in the new "Kava Bar" is very popular among men. It is not a drink which gives energy and vitality to those who consume it. But at least it has reduced the amount of drunk brawling on payday. In many areas of Vila Town, the people are very poor. Perhaps not quite destitute but badly housed: especially since February, 1987, when Cyclone Uma passed over the town like a steam-roller, flattening the little huts built in the slum areas.

There are of course those who are well off, though hardly any of them are Catholics. Vila remains a cosmopolitan place. Yet many foreigners were deported after Independence, especially from the class of lower paid workers: Wallisians, Gilbertese. Business is still mainly in the hands of the Chinese and Vietnamese.

Port Vila is the largest Catholic Parish in Vanuatu, and perhaps, also the most difficult. When Father Loubiere, after 38 years of service, handed over his charge to Father Robert Janique, it was like any typically French Parish and remained so until the eve of Independence. The schools and the French Hospital were in the hands of devoted and competent Sisters, who were perfect models of their kind. The Scouts under Edouard GAUCHET were very successful. Despite its mainly European face the Parish was always open and welcoming to people from the islands. Anyone who needed convincing of that fact had only to witness the scout parade.

It was a period for health and well being, and the Parishioners always showed great generosity is supporting their schools.

Little by little, the situation is changing. Through force of circumstances the Sisters have gradually left the hospital, the school, the youth movements. The Church seems distant; it speaks another language. It must seek new ways of being present and the Synod of 1987 must help it to discover them.
A fine Cathedral was built in 1975, when Father Chapuis was Parish Priest of Port Vila. A striking building of modern aesthetic appearance. But the material of the building may not resist the test of time and even less of cyclones. A second church was built at Paray, in the area known as "Namba Tu", where Wallisians and Futunians had settled. Another Chapel was built at Forari on the east coast of Efate, where there is a little Wallisian Village.

Already there were fears for the future. Clouds darkened the horizon when newly formed political parties began to make hostile noises. The Catholics from the islands were delighted to see Father Gerard Leymang become Prime Minister in 1978. But the wheel would turn. The Port Vila Catholics were lucky at Independence to escape the misfortunes suffered by their brothers in the north. They remain a strong and loyal force.

In 1981, Father Rene Du Rumain took charge of the Parish. He was close to the people from the islands and knew them well. He knew that among them were many young people willing to serve their church and take responsibility. When he left, Father Gerard Leymang and Father Robert Janique were appointed co-administrators of this large and beautiful Parish which Father Lambotin had founded 89 years before.

MONTMARTRE : CATECHISTS' SCHOOL

One thing that the missionaries repeatedly asked for was a Catechists' School. Father Deniau, when he began his mission in Malo in 1888, planned to open a school for catechists there as he had done in Fiji. Alas, Malo was a failure and everybody waited impatiently to see what would happen. As soon as Father Doucere arrived in Vila, he was besieged with requests from the missionaries to begin a Catechists' School as soon as possible.

As Father Vazeille was not overworked at Mele, the first pupils to be trained were sent to him. But the Diocese was already on the lookout for another larger property. Mele was unhealthy. Father Rouge discovered the site at Montmartre and Bishop Doucere was immediately captivated by it. On the 29th December, 1902 the first mass was celebrated under the banyan tree.

Father Loubiere, newly arrived from France, took charge of the first buildings: simple houses for the Priest, the Sisters and the students. He had a well dug, a road built, and in 1903, was ready to welcome all the boys from Mele. Sister Marie-Gabriel, the pioneer from Olal, also moved in. Father Rouge supervised the work on the chapel (the 3 churches of Vila, Mele, and Montmartre were built at the same time).
In early 1906, Father Suas who was at Namaram became very seriously ill. The Provicar Father Rouge, who had always greatly admired Suas' strong personality, saw in this an ideal opportunity. In the Bishop's absence, he appointed Suas to run the school at Montmartre, and sent young Father Loubiere to Pentecost. Everyone welcomed this decision. Father Suas knew most of the students, and could speak their language. He was capable of turning these boys into good catechists, not tongue-tied weaklings but young men able to stand firmly on their own two feet. On his return from Europe, the Bishop was very put out. He did not like the new way of doing things, and felt he could not work with this man of steel. His response was to send him to Lolopuepue for 23 years to bring him into line.

In July 1908, Father Rouge took over as Head. He felt that it was impossible to pursue a serious course of study while at the same time striving to maintain this vast property of 800 hectares. His suggestion was therefore to divide the establishment into two quite distinct sections - the students on the one hand, and on the other, a group of paid workers who would also receive religious instruction. But the Bishop was horrified by the idea of labourers being introduced into the school, especially as the school was now opening its doors to girls. When the Bishop said no, disagreement was out of the question. For daring to disagree, Father Rouge found himself once again working on the site at St. Michel in Santo.

In September 1909, he was replaced by Father Salomon, a submissive man who had held out bravely for 10 years alone on the island of Wala. Father Salomon had the support of Father Godefroy, an excellent teacher, and Bishop Doucere was well pleased. Unfortunately, on the 25th September, 1910, on the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Father Salomon died suddenly. Bishop Doucere wept for his dear friend. There was still Father Godefroy, a perfect teacher, but in the eyes of the Bishop, too young to take charge. Just at that time, Father Gonnet returned from Sydney, anxious to get back to his post at Loltong. The Bishop appointed him to Montmartre. Father Gonnet was perfectly capable of running the school. He knew exactly what was required of a good catechist, but he was never allowed a free rein in their training.

In 1916, Father Gonnet was replaced by Father Boisdron, a dynamic man who was unfortunately not very good at taking orders. Sent to Namaram by the Bishop to help with rebuilding after the cyclone of 1922, Father Boisdron was never recalled because now the Bishop had found his man, the submissive, obedient Father Jules Barthe. The school at Montmartre increasingly took on the character of a monastery. The upkeep of the plantation remained a priority but precedence was given to devotion over study. Young men and women were directed towards the religious life: Tertiaries and Filles de Marie.
Bishop Doucere was shocked when the Superior General of the Marists said to him, "What you have here is no school for catechists!" Nevertheless, it was true. They had gone one stage further along the road to perfection.

Despite all of this, Montmartre did produce a group of Filles de Marie whose devotion was unquestionable, and if Father Barthe's catechists were not exactly fountains of knowledge, they were men of deep faith with a keen sense of service.

**MONTMARTRE TODAY**

In 1955, Father Barthe left Montmartre, worn out after 38 years in charge of the school, the plantation, the orphanage and the formation of the Filles de Marie etc... Father Lambert who took over from him, saw at once the need for some kind of streamlining. For some time now there had been no real need for an orphanage. The children were always welcome in families. It had to give way to provide room for young people wishing to study for a better future.

Another change involved separating the school from the plantation. It was finally agreed that students would come to the school primarily to study, although there was nothing to prevent both boys and girls from growing some vegetables in the gardens.

Another welcome addition to the staff was Brother Leo Lapointe, from the U.S., under whose expert guidance the farm was to flourish. From then on, the Father in charge of Montmartre was able to devote himself entirely to the task of educating the students. Father Francis Lambert, from 1955 to 57, Father Joseph Bordiga from 57 to 64 and above all, Father Robert Janique from 65 to 76 - each of these contributed in his own way to the new Montmartre. The Sisters, for their part, brought about enormous changes among the girls, and no-one will ever forget the achievements of Sister Marie Meriadec.

The school continued to change. For a long time it remained a Primary School while at the same time providing a hostel for young boys and girls pursuing further studies at the Lycee Louis Antoine de Bougainville or at the Teacher Training...
College. Responding to the needs of the time, Montmartre became a sort of breeding ground for teachers and most of the francophone elite of the country have passed through its doors at some stage.

In 1976, the school was entrusted to the Sacred Heart Brothers. Montmartre at this time was the Central Catholic School where young pupils were trained to better serve the Church and Country.

In 1981, Bishop Lambert decided it was time to move onto the next stage: Montmartre became a Secondary School recognized by Government. The large problem of staff was solved with the co-operation of Brothers, Sisters and local teachers. The school is striving to maintain its freedom in order to remain a true Catholic Secondary School.

"LA SOURCE"

Now the farm which was to be called "La Source" could come into its own. Father Camille Rossignol had invented the most amazing machine to plough through and cut the heavy bush which had overgrown the coconut plantation. Soon Brother Leo Lapointe had his own men and equipment to develop the 800 hectares of the property. It was astonishing to see, after just a few years, these vast pastures with almost a thousand head of choice cattle grazing on them.

Today, the farm is managed by Charles Rogers, who also oversees the training of new plantation managers for the Republic of Vanuatu.

LOLOLIMA

As far back as the time of Bishop Julliard, Father Cecil had set up a Training Centre for late vocations at Lolopuepue: Saint Martin de Porres. The Centre fulfilled a real need. Candidates flocked to it and it had to be doubled in size, but the spot chosen seemed ill-suited to the necessary expansion.

In 1981, having first of all considered the islet of Dione near Port Olry, Father John Cecil decided on an isolated spot 4 kilometres from Montmartre: Lololima.

The Centre was rebuilt and was even more beautiful than the original. A sign of the times: - the language spoken is English, to meet the needs of those preparing for further training in Fiji or Papua New Guinea.

Lololima is now a charming spot with its trees and flowers. It has continued to expand. The Community of Brothers of St. Martin de Porres has been set up nearby. Now Father John Cecil has been replaced by a fellow New Zealander: Father Paul Donoghue.
TANNA

561 KM2
17,600 INHABITANTS
1,328 CATHOLICS

LENAKEL P. 137
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THE TANNA MISSION

A mission to Tanna had been talked about since the earliest days, but no-one seriously felt they could make any headway in this Presbyterian domain. Then, in the Twenties, the fortress began to show signs of crumbling and more and more appeals were being made to the Catholic Church. As far back as October 1923, Father Durand, on a reconnaissance mission, was unable to find a base. Then in 1925, 100 hectares were put up for sale at a derisory price. The Mission bought but found only one and a half hectares at Lowanatum.

LENAKEL

In 1932, a house was built but the Bishop had no missionary. On the 7th March, 1933, a ghost disembarked at Port Vila: Father Jean Godefroy, who had already converted the people of Olal in 1915, then the people of Vao in 1925. Why shouldn't he go and convert the Tannese, since he had been restored to health at Lourdes? The Bishop decided at once that he should leave for Tanna with Father Chauvel as a companion.

Alas, Father Godefroy died several days later, on the 29th March, and Father Chauvel followed him to the tomb on the 9th May!

However, the Bishop sent Father Durand on the "Saint Joseph" just to have a look. On the 26th May, 1933, the priest was welcomed by a Catholic policeman, Pierre of Baie-Barrier, and celebrated the first Mass on Tanna soil. Then, on visiting the villages, he found a cordial welcome. A missionary had to be found at all costs! At that moment, the Burns Philp Company offered a 30 hectare plot of land with a house at Lenakel.

Then, despite his advanced years, the Bishop went himself to Tanna to take stock of the situation, and decided: Tanna would have its Mission, and Captain Bochu, who was now too old to sail the "Saint Joseph", would be its first missionary.

On the 16th November, 1933, Father Pierre Bochu set off with the catechist Pierre Batik, his wife Josephine, and a Statue of St. Therese offered by the Carmelites of Lisieux. Father Bochu set up house at Lenakel but there was to be no miracle. The Tannese were not in a hurry. "Short of Divine intervention, the conversion of the Tannese will be a long and exacting task" wrote Father Bochu at the end of one year.

At Lenakel, he was faced with indifference or the open hostility of the Presbyterians. However at Lowanatum, people began to come in large numbers.
Soon his old legs were tired running back and forth between the two stations. The Bishop presented him with a ramshackle old vehicle, but the old man was well aware of all the work that could be done in the bush.

By January 1938, he couldn't take any more and left for Vila to make a plea for Tanna. There, he suffered a stroke which left him partially paralysed. Father Bochu was not to return to Tanna. The brave fighter died at Montmartre on the 15th November, 1941.

Father Roman Martin arrived in Tanna in March 1938 with 3 horses. He made Lowanatum his centre and explored every corner of the island preaching the Gospel and caring for the sick.

About this time, the repressive measures carried out by District Agent Nicholl against the adherents of the John Frum Movement caused some former Presbyterians to turn to the Catholic Church. Those who asked Father Martin to come to them at Whitesands were more concerned with seeking his protection than being converted, but a small mission station was established at Loono.

This wave of sympathy was soon to reach the south of the island. At Imaki, a man called Augustin, who had been converted in New Caledonia, persuaded his compatriots to call Father Martin. In 1954, Bishop Halbert had the good fortune to baptise the first families. Father Roman Martin spent 17 years alone on Tanna. He left behind him only a handful of baptised Catholics but the seeds had been sown.

Father Pierre Massard, the legendary missionary of Nangire, arrived in 1953, and for 7 years his jeep could be seen bumping along the track between Loono and Imaki. A guardian angel was always there to rescue this absent-minded apostle from the countless spectacular tumbles he took.
Father Albert Sacco arrived in 1954. This former Indian Army Major held out on Tanna for 27 years. In March 1957, a tidal wave washed away his mission station. He rebuilt a fine one, a big school with 7 classes and, shortly afterwards, a new church. A community of Filles de Marie came to work with him in 1974. Father Sacco also developed Ikiti with the catechist Juliano of Namaram. He started Imaru, Lamlu and went to regain Ancityum which had been abandoned for more than 100 years.

### IMAKI

After Father Massard’s departure, Father de Stephanis built some classrooms, first of all at Loono, then with the help of Brother Roland, a large complex at Imaki. The Catholic Church took on an air of prosperity hitherto unknown: young teachers and more and more students.

Father Bordiga, who arrived in 1970, hit upon the happy idea of asking Sister Marie Anthelme to guide and advise the teachers. The catechist Zéphirino from Melisesti came to Loono with his wife Rosita. The first community of S.M.S.M. Sisters was established at Imaki in 1980. New centres were to develop: Lautapunga, Ikanavateng, Enkataley.

### TANNA TODAY

At Independence, the sympathisers of the Catholic Church went through a very rough period on Tanna. Alexis Youlou was murdered, his followers were mistreated, tortured or imprisoned. The Marist Fathers had just handed over to the Columban Fathers. They were received very sympathetically by all, even by those living in Middle Bush, where a community of St. Martin de Porres Brothers was later set up.

Then in 1984, the very kind Father Arthur Tierney who was working at Lowanatum was expelled from Tanna. Father Jim Shiffer who was known in all the "nakamals" on the island also left. Their replacements were refused residence permits, and Tanna now had no priest. To add to this distressing state of affairs, the dreadful cyclone Uma which struck on the 7th February, 1987 ravaged the whole island, and help was slow in coming.

But the 1,300 Tanna Catholics are courageous people who will be able to stand the test.
THE REAPERS OF THE HARVEST

If the Mission to the New Hebrides began with the Marist Fathers, very soon they were joined by others. First of all from overseas, and then by members of the local church. Some of the latter would now like to share with other nations the faith which they have received: "A Church comes to full maturity only when it, in its turns, becomes a missionary church".

MISSIONARIES FROM OVERSEAS

THE MARIST FATHERS

When the Society of Mary agreed to go out and evangelise the South Sea Islands, it also assumed responsibility for the New Hebrides. The above history illustrates the generosity of those men who gave their lives in order to bring the Faith to these people, who were as yet largely uncivilised. 97 Marist Fathers have worked in Vanuatu since 1887 and 47 have died there.

THE MARIST COADJUTOR BROTHERS

Since the start of the Catholic Mission to the New Hebrides in 1887, the burden of physical labour has been lightened with the help of a few highly valued craftsmen. Only 7 came from Europe or America. Fifteen or so from the South Pacific have given a few years’ service.

THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY (SMSM)

1898 saw the arrival of the first two Sisters. Together with the Priests they helped to make the first inroad into the country for the Church. 163 Sisters of different nationalities were to follow, and they devoted their lives to the service of the Mission. Many of them died in Vanuatu without ever returning home to their own countries. The Sisters are involved mainly in caring for the sick, in teaching, in catechetics and in women’s groups. For some years now, they have been joined by local girls who will in their turn become missionaries, and will go out to share their faith with other less favoured peoples. Today there are 4 ni-Vanuatu SMSM and 2 in training.
THE MARIST BROTHERS OF MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

These were educators who came to Port Vila in 1894 to set up a College. Unfortunately, they left after 8 years. However, their presence has borne fruit, and today a young ni-Vanuatu is undergoing training with the Brothers in New Caledonia.

THE LAY MISSIONARIES

A number of lay people have given a few years of their lives in the service of the Church. 4 nurses, and 8 teachers have contributed in this way to development in Vanuatu. The present situation in the country has meant that some have had to leave earlier than they would have liked. There is only one still in the country.

THE BROTHERS OF THE SACRED HEART

In 1967, a Community of Brothers opened a Technical School at St. Michel in Santo. Later they undertook the training of young people at Montmartre. Many young people have received their religious training at the hands of the Brothers and in their turn, are now helping in the development of their country.

THE COLUMBAN FATHERS

Before coming to Vanuatu, they worked in Fiji. In 1978, Bishop Lambert put them in charge of Tanna. Three missionaries have worked there but have left. There are others ready to take over, but they have not been granted residence permits. And so, at present, Tanna is without a priest.

THE DOMINICAN SISTERS FROM NEW ZEALAND

In line with his wish to open up the Mission to other Congregations, Bishop Lambert placed the Dominican Sisters in the large Mission Station at Walarano in 1980. They are involved mainly in catechetics and in the development of women's groups. They also look after the smaller missions of Norsup and Mae.
THE REAPERS OF THE HARVEST

THE LOCAL APOSTLES

The first apostles were the catechists. They have played a considerable part in the evangelisation of their country. The Priests have always appreciated their assistance in the Missions, regretting only that there have been so few of them and these not well trained. The catechist school at Loltong is making good these deficiencies. Today there are more than 100 Catechists, 80 of whom have already taken a promise.

THE FILLES DE MARIE

Originating in New Caledonia, the Congregation of the Filles de Marie today numbers 33 Sisters who are working with women, young people, teaching religion and also caring for the sick.

THE LOCAL PRIESTS

The first local priest was Cyriaque Adeng from Ambrym. He was ordained in 1955 and has served for 32 years. Today he still looks after Craig-Cove.

Father Gerard Leymang from Malekula, ordained in 1962, was Prime Minister of his country in 1978. At present he is an Episcopal Vicar in the diocese.

Father Noel Vutiala from Ambae was ordained in 1965. For a long time, he was chaplain to the New Hebrideans living in New Caledonia. He was Parish Priest of St. Therese at the time of his premature death in 1986.

These first three Priests received their training in Palla in New Caledonia.

Father Michel Visi from Ambae, ordained in 1982, studied in Fiji and was made Parish Priest of Melsisi.

Fathers Blaise Buleban, ordained in 1979, Noël Molvis, ordained in 1983 and Jules Bir, ordained in 1986 are all Marist Fathers from Pentecost. They were trained in Bomana (Papua New Guinea).

Today, young men are undergoing training in two major Seminaries; 7 in Suva and 5 in Bomana, P.N.G. In addition, ten or so are in training at the Apostolic Centre of Tenaru in the Solomon Islands.

THE BROTHERS OF ST. MARTIN DE PORRES

For a long time, the missionaries hoped to have local Brothers, especially to help them set up new institutions, and to lend support to new isolated Christian Communities. This idea of young people giving a few years of their lives in the service of the Church took root, and in 1983, Father John Cecil founded at Lololima
THE REAPERS OF THE HARVEST

a new community of Brothers of St. Martin de Porres. After a certain amount of preparation, the first group was sent to Lamlu in the centre of Tanna in 1985. They prepared catechumens for baptism and supported this little, newly-born Christian Community.

Two other attempts were made: one at Ikiti where the Brothers were forced to withdraw for political reasons; the other in Santo, in the bush above Tolomako, which is proving successful.

IN CONCLUSION

The Church in Vanuatu is a living Church. It had some difficulty in taking root, but today it is alive, and the Synod being prepared at this time will form part of its vibrant history. It has created solid Christians, conscious of their responsibilities.
## CATHOLIC POPULATION OF VANUATU

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# SCHOOL POPULATION

## 1. PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## 2. SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- St.-Michel (Santo) 121
- Walarano (Malekula) 45
- Melsisi (Pentecost) 55
- Montmartre (Efate) 189

TOTAL 410
In Conclusion

This brief history of the Catholic Church in Vanuatu has no doubt made you aware of the great and wonderful work accomplished by our missionaries since 1887 and even before. You are probably filled with admiration for these holy apostles, men and women, who so courageously suffered and died that others might rise and live with the Risen Saviour.

For all these heroes of the Church and for the work they have done we can only say over and over again:

Thank you, Lord, thank you!

Today, we are reaping the fruit of their labour of love. As the number of Catholics in this country steadily increase and also the number of priestly and religious vocations we know that this is the result of the sweat and blood of those who came before us.

May the Church continue to blossom during the next hundred years and become the strong Local Church that our Missionaries always hoped to establish in Vanuatu.

Bishop Francis LAMBERT
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