A GREATER THAN
SOLOMON
HERE

A STORY OF
CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

CLAIRE O'BRIEN
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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 (dmi – Solomon Islands)
Petites Filles de Marie (pfm – New Caledonia)
Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth (soln – Fiji, Tonga, Samoa)
Marist Laity
A GREATER THAN SOLOMON HERE

A STORY OF CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOLOMON ISLANDS
1567 - 1967

CLAIRE O'BRIEN
Solomon Islands
1995
A GREATER THAN SOLOMON HERE

A story of Catholic Church in Solomon Islands
1567 - 1967

Claire O’Brien - December 1995
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To produce a history is the work of not one, but of many people. The historian must rely on the kind collaboration of these, each of whom has a part as guide, storyteller, interpreter, reader or guardian angel. Therefore it happens as the work nears completion, the writer is in pain for two reasons.

First, the tremendous gratitude towards all those assistants cannot be expressed personally, but simply in one sincere word of thanks to everyone who helped in all the innumerable ways that aid any gatherer to put things together. Please take it that for every name written there are dozens unwritten to whom the same thanksgiving is due.

The second pang arises from the realisation that the work is limited. The sea is so wide and the net is so small. The writer can only select, not necessarily the most significant, but what best fits the basket. History sees but the fin of the shark, and leaves the reader to guess the unseen beauty or blemishes below the surface.

When Archbishop Adrian Smith of Honiara Diocese, Bishop Eusebius Crawford of Gizo Diocese and Bishop Gerry Loft of Malaita diocese asked that this history be written, it was with the hope of commemorating a double anniversary: The 150th year since the death of Bishop Epalle in 1845 and the 400th year since Mendana died in Santa Cruz. My gratitude to these Bishops for their continual support and encouragement, and for the facilities they have given to ease the task.

Thanks also to the religious congregations most connected with early missionary activity, the Marist family and the Dominicans. To their Provincials of 1992, Fr Francois Kedraon of the Society of Mary, Oceania, Br Ray Arthur of the Marist Teaching Brothers, Sr Marie Lamerand of the Marist Missionary Sisters, Sr Rosaria of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, Fr David Halstead
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Thank you to translators Fr Larry Hannan SM, Fr Dona Hite'e, Fr Joseph Foucher SM, Fr Francisco Sarage SVD, for your time and help. To readers Ian Mckinney, Tony Barton, Michael and Bernadette Mullany, Sr Mary Lou Morehead and not least my sister Patricia and her family of eager assistants. Then there are Marilyn and David Seiter who came to a last minute rescue with computer expertise and untold generosity when things appeared worst. Thanks is too weak a word for such saviours.

Finally, word of my deep appreciation goes to Bernadette Misiga and Saniela Raukeniana, for typing and computing and endless patience, and to Fr Norman Arkwright who left no stone unturned to ensure completion of the work. It is because of all such persons, willing to go the second mile, that the book is ready for the printers, who are thanked in anticipation. November 1995.

Claire O'Brien smsm
**ABBREVIATIONS:**

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<td>ASMSM</td>
<td>Archives of Marist Missionary Sisters</td>
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<td>L to P.</td>
<td>Letters to Procure 1898 - 1919</td>
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<tr>
<td>OMPA</td>
<td>Oceania Marist Province Archives (Suva)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OP</td>
<td>Order of Preachers (Dominicans)</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.I.M.E.</td>
<td>Missionary Fathers of Milan</td>
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<td>S.M.</td>
<td>Society of Mary (Marist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMSM</td>
<td>Missionary Sisters of Society of Mary</td>
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<tr>
<td>TORM</td>
<td>Third Order Regular of SM</td>
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The Tree of Life
is now alive in our islands.
We praise and thank God for all those
who have planted and nurtured it.
Jesus grew to maturity in the gentle shade
of his Mother, Mary.
Shaded as he was,
may we continue to bear fruit.

Not ours to bring to birth
That final realm; nor shall our labours build
Out of the rubble of this fallen earth
The New Jerusalem, which shall never be
Christ's perfect Bride save in eternity.
But neither are our failures nothing worth:
For through our broken effort He prepares
The hallowing of creatures that shall bring
Eternity upon us unawares
Beyond our best hope or imagining

James McAuley
FOREWORD

Mendana was the first international visitor to arrive in Solomon Islands, coming with five ships on two occasions and he died just 400 years ago.

This year 1995, Ting Hong has just arrived from Taiwan with a floating fish-canning factory and a fleet of 100 fishing boats to settle here with 12 other fishing companies. Other visitors like the Malaysian Marvin Brothers are causing social and political upheaval because of their contentious logging operation.

The appalling congestion of traffic in Mendana Avenue, Honiara's main and only thoroughfare has become a normal feature of daily life. The rapid major construction of roads and bridges through Kumagai Construction Japan congests even more. This year local shipping companies can transport you to Malaita in 3 hours or Makira in 7.

The change from subsistence to money economy is still developing and the concomitant problems of cash flow are confusing to all. It seems more flows through the new casinos in Honiara than through sub-treasury but where from and where to?

1995 also marks the arrival within the Catholic Church Solomon Islands of the Salesians from Japan, the Fijians of Marriage Encounter, more Filipino priests and sisters to join the old hands of the Marists and Dominicans. This year also marks the setting up of the major seminary in Tenaru under the direction of the Vincentians. Local clergy and vocations are increasing comfortably. And the converts to Islam are also increasing. Another first this year is the entry of secondary students into the private Catholic school called Bishop Epalle.

There is a bright glow over the future but unsettlement is never far away. People are tired of corruption, dissatisfied with negligence; inflation and malaria are becoming rampant.
Guadalcanal people in the bush are thirsty for answers and once more are searching into home cures and culture with a revival of the Moro Movement. Yet the population is youthful and vibrant - another resource ripe for the harvest, visited by an international mixture of voluntary service people, challenging Solomon Islands youth to community service.

Into this bubbling atmosphere, along with these other visitors, this little book you are holding makes its timely appearance scattering its seeds to recall various moments of grace in the maturing of Solomon Islands. It has been written to record for you the simple but heroic beginnings of a young Christian country, to remind you of the spirit of the church at work through the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Mendana’s achievement, the 150th anniversary of the first Marist missionary attempt and the 100th anniversary of the real beginning of the church.

You will read of the struggles, sufferings and tragedies of men and women who came as first visitors to these islands called Solomon - the price they paid of their lives tells you of the value they set upon the people who were living here already for many centuries. Their journey coming here, often enough took twelve months and they took nothing away with them and in so many cases left their mortal remains here. When they did go back home they fired the imagination and ideals of their own people and started a procession of missionaries, some of whose activities are recounted in this book up to the period of the early 1960’s, the time of the 2nd Vatican Council.

Why did they come here to spend the best years of their lives, experiencing such hardships far away from their homeland? It is easy to say they came to bring God’s word revealed in the bible but in fact this is where so many of them found him. They came to proclaim Christ’s message in the gospel but here on all kinds of dark and dangerous occasions they found him already waiting, they met him face to face. It is a mystery why they gave up so
much to come here, it is a greater mystery that they discovered greater wealth than they ever left behind.

A Solomon Islander once paid this magnificent tribute to missionaries in this country. He said, "When missionaries first came, we discovered that we could trust them. Then we were surprised to find that they trusted us. And then we found ourselves trusting each other." Surely it was the Spirit that was at work in that interaction.

Read through the following pages and you will glimpse the faith that drove them on. Their commitment to people here in Solomon Islands caused them to enter deeply into life and the way they threw away their own lives caused amazement and upheaval in the life of those they lived with. It didn't make sense to see such sacrifice but the wonder of it did make locals think and set about making change in themselves.

Perhaps this story, seen through the eyes of Sr Claire and told in her own style, will make many of her readers think and wonder about the values of these present times. Hopefully quite a few will grow in determination and commitment and christian faith and set in motion plans in the mind and changes in the heart that will lead to challenge and everlasting riches in Solomon Islands communities.

I think Sr Claire has produced her book with rather little contentment - she is unsatisfied because there is so much history in this volume left unwritten. She feels the need to go into more detail in people and places. For the time being, this story provides an interesting and fascinating description of "beginnings."

There is still a lot of work to be done, even in the period she has already covered in these chapters up to the 1960's. This book should encourage and inspire more Solomon Islanders to research the riches of their people's heritage and their development of faith. Fr J.N.Arkwright S.M., Tanagai, November 1995
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PART ONE   ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER ONE   THE GREAT OCEAN

Mountains divide, but seas unite.
PHOENICIAN PROVERB

Always, however far we travel back in time,
we surmise other forms behind the forms
that captivate us.
ANDRE MALRAUX

ENCOUNTER

It was on the Great Ocean that the two chiefs met. Bilebangara, headman of a Melanesian community greeted Mendana, leader of Spanish expedition to the South Sea. The year was 1568 A.D.; month of the ngali nut harvest; season of the wet north-west. As we know from a letter written by Mendana to his king, the meeting was without rancour. 'I told him my name and he said that he was called Bilebangara, and he requested me to exchange names with him so that he should be called Mendana, and I should be called Bile as he was. So we did and we remained on very good terms'.

For each recognised in this meeting that they were brothers - distinct, yet alike. The Great Ocean had brought them together; two men representing different hemispheres, different ways of civilisation, different gods... each knew the contrary faces of the wide sea that had brought one to the threshold of the other. Each knew something of that unfathomed Great Ocean.

It was obvious that to Bilebangara it was a darling sea. It danced along the shore, strewing bright twigs of coral and shell fragments,
toys for his children. It brought in season silver shoals of tuna, twinkling in waves that tempted the seagulls and lured the fishermen. In gentle weather, it crooned and hummed the tunes of a thousand aeons. When the 'koburu' blew annually with its thundering squalls and wild winds, its waves rumbled and writhed on the beach like a whale in labour.

For Bilebangara, the sea was there to serve him. It provided his food, his tools, his road and bridge to other isles. It was his friend and his foe. It was half his world. The mysteries of good and evil, of past and present, of life and death were wrapped in its all pervasive presence.

But to Mendana, the Spaniard in quest of certainties, it had been a harsh carrier. It had shown its obdurate side, hiding its riches, exposing its infinite stretches, its seeming endlessness, its bare horizons. Only now, as his men lay starving on the decks, had it at last relented. Only now had this fair shore appeared, and its inhabitants become human. Only now, with full heart could he utter his TE ALABAMOS SENOR!

THE PACIFIC

Two chiefs, yet humble ones. Each headed a procession that stretched back into dim millennia of saga and ancestral migration. Across plains and over hills, each tribe had trodden trails down to seaside hamlets on shores washed by that great sea. The Great Sea. Mendana's maps called it Mar del Sud. Bilebangara's name for it, we do not know. The Pacific Ocean covering more than a third of Earth's surface, has margins ringed with mountains of fire and poles of ice. It can modestly boast the world's deepest marine trenches, its longest coral reefs, its most active volcanoes. The scenic beauty of its atolls and lagoons are the delight of every photographer. Tourism has not been slow to cash in on the
"dernier Paradis," stretching nostalgically towards the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But the Great Ocean retains its secrets. It keeps its questioners in suspense, revealing itself mischievously in fragmented shards, in sculpted mementos, and in curious myths. Whence came the heterogenous peoples of the Pacific? To Bilibangara, modern Pacific Islander, and descendant of Melanesian seamen, such a question would have been irrelevant. To him, essentially a man of the present hour, today was what mattered. The future was tomorrow's sunrise, beyond a night's dreaming. The past was the shadowy yesterday wherein his grandfathers had lived, died, and become the spirits he now revered. Only in myth and story by moonshine or by firelight was the past evoked. Then, memorable tales were retold with variations, such as are recited the world over, proclaiming the familyhood of mankind.

As to the origins of his part of that family, Bile, unlike his more recent neighbours, the Polynesians, had no genealogies. If you asked, he might have told you the custom story of the eagle's daughter, Mele, ancestress of one of the three main clans of his island. He would most likely have been amused to hear of the findings and theories of the 19th century Malinowskis, or of the ethno-archaeologists of the twentieth. Nevertheless, between the century of Bilebangara and ours, the Great Pool has continued to entice and to reveal. In that four centuries, seamen and scholars, castaways and scientists, romanticists and cartographers were becoming ever more aware of the 'noble wild man' and his region. Consequently a spate of pacificologists was soon proclaiming countless hypotheses about the origins of their newfound branch of humanity. But by the end of the nineteenth century enough traders, missionaries and colonists had become Pacific Islanders themselves, that the question of origins had become secondary to that of survival.
SHIFTING TIME...SHIFTING PLACE

Human migration has always been part of history, ever since the disagreement thwarted the builders of Babel’s Tower. Ancient civilisations, the Chinese, Indian and Sumerian, each had their sagas of these movements of peoples. And aeons before the Austronesians peopled the Pacific, in the days when New Guinea and Australia formed one land mass, the Sahul platform, there were yet previous dwellers, non-Austronesian. Their small inroads into the Pacific may have been few, but their language remains in rare pockets to tease the detectives of racial mysteries. So while the artists of Altamira were limning cave walls with images of bison and other edible beasts, the non-Austronesians may have been perfecting their boomerang to outwit the kangaroo.

It was in 6,000 B.C (2) that the Oceanian melting pot of northern New Guinea was partly submerged by rising sea-levels due to melting ice. Thus New Guinea was separated from Australia, and certain highlands and peaks became islands as the oceans flooded their valleys. The eastward migration of today’s Melanesian probably began at that time. Austronesian landsmen, now short of terrain, started to launch out in seacraft loaded with families and food seeds to found homes elsewhere. Ethno-archaeology gives support to this theory.

Today’s experts in that field, notably Bellwood and Irwin in 1970s, and Chaziné and Frimagacci in 1980s find that the island groups east of New Guinea appear to have been uninhabited before about 4,500 years ago. It appears that since then, migrations of Austronesians began slowly to occupy the Solomons, and moving south, Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

A later series of migrations from Philippines and South East Asia claimed parts of western Polynesia. During those years the Oceanian voyager was becoming ever more adept in seacraft.
Not once, not twice, but a thousand time he grappled with the wiles of that ocean; fought it and failed; or wrestled and conquered, finally befriending it.

Not in one century, but in scores of centuries, not in one lesson, but in legion, he had learned to read the pages of sea and sky. The flight of the frigate bird that told of land in the offing, the sprouting nut, the lone butterfly - each passed on its message to this man who had developed the eyes to see, the ears to hear and the perseverance to keep on paddling and sailing.

From these intrepid seamen of bygone days, came those who settled on Islands of the south, the Austronesians. These were the forbears of Bilebangara of modern times, 16th century A.D. who began to people Melanesia about 2,500 B.C.

In the course of time, geographers found it convenient to make a tripartite distinction among the island groups of Oceania. Under this naming, the term MELANESIA identifies 'the black Islands'. Rising from ancient volcanic action, their thickly forested mountains stand blue-black against the sky, often forming the backbone of the larger land masses. The first settlers built their leaf houses along the shores, choosing alluvial lands near river mouths where soils were rich, and food gardens easier to cultivate. In such an area, between two rivers, was Bile's domain, then called Gehe.

MICRONESIA refers to the 'tiny isles', mostly north of the equator. Its first people, Austronesian, came directly from Philippines and Celebes to these minute coral humps and atolls. The people who were to settle POLYNESIA, giving 'the many isles' of eastern Pacific their personality, were the last comers. Of Mongoloid origin, they probably entered by way of Indonesia and the Philippines. Some too, in modern times, would return west,
perhaps as fugitives, to find empty isles in today's Tikopia, Bellona, Rennel and in the small isles east of Santa Cruz. Thus a widow's mite from Polynesia expands the treasury of the Melanesian archipelago where Bilebangara and Mendana greeted one another.

Though the Great Ocean is so extensive, it appears to have been the last peopled. Yet elsewhere the human stream was, as it always had been, and is, continually in motion. Parallel to the Oceanic migrations, and half a world away, countless other groups continued their epic journeys, ever shifting camp from settled regions to move further afield. The Semitic tribes of the Middle East, emerging from the shades of pre-history were but one of these.

A TRIBAL UNITY

The race that was to be known as the Hebrew tells how God spoke to one of their patriarchs, Abraham. It was at God's word, that this father of a race, strengthened in faith, left the affluence of Ur to test unknown frontiers. Other races, other tribes moved perhaps without such assurance of a divine hand to direct their traffic. Social pressures pushed, human and practical allurements pulled. They came and went, surveyed the distant greener field, returned and set out again and yet again.

About the same era in which the last groups of Polynesian migrants were pushing their sturdy outriggers into the sunrise of the Great Ocean, a young warrior king in the middle east was engaged in forays against boundary marauders of the kingdom being forged for Abraham's descendants, the 12 tribes of Israel. One of the sons, Solomon, would rule that kingdom at the peak of its glory. Solomon would become symbolic of the wisdom and wealth of that brief era of Hebrew triumph in its united kingdom.
In that period, certain artists of a distant archipelago that would be named after King Solomon, were cutting petroglyphs in caves along their Poha River. An infant being born, some human faces and frigate birds; these are still to be discerned, if not deciphered, today, 3,000 years later.

It was from the line of this shepherd king, that, a thousand years later would come the Messiah of Hebrew dreams. Promised, according to their tradition, from the days when God walked with the first man and woman in an Eden of harmony, the Messiah was to redeem this creature who wilfully had rejected that Eden. Mankind - the creature made in God’s image and likeness - had fallen, been exiled, and awaited generation after generation, outside the fence of that former Eden, this Redeemer who would restore that ancient harmony of relationship with its Creator.

The Messiah came. Unexpectedly ordinary, claiming divine sonship, teaching not merely the love of one’s own, but also love for enemies, he was arrested for spreading dangerous ideas, was put to death; and was raised to life again. So stated his followers, a disreputable handful who were inspired to proclaim the ‘good news’ that God was our Father, that Christ, his Son Redeemer of mankind would be with them all days.

The Church, having been established by Christ to preach the Word of God that he incarnated, and that she, as his body, still and for all time incarnates, (being of its nature missionary), began her mission, through the preaching of St. Peter on the very day she, at Pentecost like Christ, himself, was born by the power of the Holy Spirit into the world.

A. Barton.

This teaching, seditious according to Rome, blasphemy to traditionalist Jews, foolishness to the philosophers of Greece, nevertheless spread like leaves in a whirlwind across the lands of the Mediterranean. Accepted at first by small groups of enthusiastic radicals in the five great cities, it was soon being
publicised across the length and width of the Roman Empire, and beyond into the seventy cities of Alexander. There a common language made gossip a joy and before long, the followers of this rebel Messiah were dubbed 'Christians', followers of Christ, the annointed one.

How the Christian era in mankind's history began, how the new teaching survived external pressures such as persecution, exile and death, and internal damage such as apostasy, heresy and corruption, is another story. Suffice to say that its heart, Christ, had given his followers a mandate not only to seek truth, to live by love, but also to, 'Go teach...' the rest of mankind these ordinances.

GO TEACH...

The first apostles took this injunction seriously. Their disciples, in turn, took up the challenge, and the word of Christ spread east and west from India to Spain, went south into Egypt and Ethiopia, and later recrossing the sea, was heard by the barbarians of northern Europe and their outlying isles.

The acts of the missionaries and the martyrdoms of those first centuries may be said to match the zeal and the violence of our own. But in the succeeding years referred to as the Dark Ages, in the fogs of strife and decadence, the church lost much of her initial missionary sense as well as the conviction that this is what she exists for.

It was not till the 13th century that the church returned to her sense of mission. In this dawning renaissance, there emerged a handful of leaders, whose combined efforts were to bring about a true rebirth of fervour. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas were foremost in the 'revival of preaching' that characterised the new orders. Their concern was 'both to
INSTRUCT the benighted faithful, and to CONVERT, in the case of the Franciscans, the eastern infidel.' The heretics nearer home were confided to the Dominicans. These mandates would continue in to 'New World' along with its ongoing discoveries.

When Columbus sailed across the Atlantic in 1492 aspiring to prove a theory, Europe became aware of her neighbour continents in the west. Though initially mistaking his discovery for outliers of India, Columbus pioneered the trail that would lead to endless discoveries in this 'New World' of the Americas. Shortly afterwards, what became known as the Pope's Line (4) was drawn to assure harmony between the paramount navigators of the time, the Spaniards and Portuguese. A result of this temporary division was that the Pacific ocean, glimpsed by Balboa in 1513, became for Spanish explorers the challenge that caused the 16th century, in the annals of human exploration, to be called the Spanish Century.
CHAPTER TWO  THE SPANISH CENTURY 1500-1600 A.D.

Look always forward.
In last year's nest you'll find no birds this year.
MIGUEL CERVANTES 1547-1616.

If Spanish success in the 16th century owed something to this dictum, it was because looking forward at that time meant looking 'westward'. Just as the boundaries of the physical world had been challenged by Columbus's crossing the Atlantic, so too had the measureless horizons of the mind. Just as human migration took a quantum leap, so too did missionary activity. It was if the mustard tree of parable had dropped a nut that would now split into myriads of shoots as it rolled on to alien soils.

By 1542, the globe had been circumnavigated, the Pacific had been named, and Spanish ships had launched seven exploratory expeditions across its vast distances. The Spaniards had established colonies and vicariates in Mexico, Peru and Colombia. They had considerable settlement in the Philippines, where the city of Manila was soon to be founded. And on each side of the Pope's line of 1493, missionaries from both Spain and Portugal, the intrepid Franciscans and Dominicans were chaplains and hopeful missionaries on every Spanish voyage.

In the same year, 1542, there occurred three events that are of relevance to the church in the Pacific. That year saw the Jesuit apostle, Francis Xavier arriving in India from Spain. To the fishermen of the Coromandel Coast as to the intelligentsia of Japan, he brought their first inklings of Christ's message. His ten years of intense activity made him the exemplar and patron of Pacific missionaries. The Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross was also born in 1542. Monk, prisoner and poet, he was to become as famed a missionary in the domain of the spirit, as Xavier in his island-hopping apostolate.
The Spanish navigator, Alvaro de Mendana Y Neyra too was born about this time. Less famed in human records, indeed something of a tragic figure, Mendana is nevertheless significant as the representative of Christianity in its first recorded encounter with Melanesia.

ALVARO DE MENDANA Y NEYRA was born in Spain, in the province of La Coruña. Of Mendana's first twenty-five years little is known. That he belonged to a well-to-do family in the golden age of Spanish art and literature, we do know. That he was familiar with the cantatas of Morales, and the ballad tunes of Luis Milan, we may surmise. Did he laugh and cry at the plays of Gil Vicente? Was he affected by the paintings of his contemporaries, El Greco, and the writings of Cervantes, or the hilarity of Lope de Vega, who dashed off 11,000 lines of verse during the Armada conflict? Though such things are likely, we cannot say. The first official mention of the young Mendana occurs in a letter from South America to King Philip II of Spain. Licenciado (Governor) de Castro of Peru tells the king that he has charged his nephew, Alvaro de Mendana, with the leadership of an expedition across the Pacific.

That this nephew was capable and conscientious is confirmed in numerous later documents. Having such a responsibility thrust upon him meant that the 25 year old Mendana would have to deal amicably with the heterogenous group of expeditionaries, which comprised navigators, mathematicians, cartographers and other skilled personnel, some of them highly experienced and more knowledgeable than himself. On a voyage of indeterminate length, he would have to keep peace between the dedicated members of the expedition and those less disciplined. In a journey whose goal was vague, and slightly quixotic, he would need to make stern demands, forge painful decisions. ‘He seems to have been a man of humanity and of a sympathy with natives, rare enough in those days, and of a policy and self-restraint far
beyond his years,' Amherst wrote. Mendana had courage, some
wisdom, and a great deal of faith. He may have quailed at his
uncle's order, but he did not refuse.

MENDANA ON THE WAY...

The expedition commanded by Mendana was sent forth from
Callao, port of Lima, Peru on 19th November, 1567. The
'fleet' consisted of two middle-aged ships. As in every Spanish
naval venture, its capitana or flagship carried the Commander, the
Chief Pilot and Officers. The Almiranta was second-in-command.
This Capitana, 200 tons, was called LOS REYES (The Kings)
while the Almiranta, 140 tons, was named to honour all saints,
TODOS SANTOS. They carried between them about 160 men.
Two pilots and two priest-chaplains travelled on each ship.

Mendana's co-officers included Pedro de Ortega, who was Camp
Master; Hernando Gallego, Chief Pilot; Gomez Catoria, ships'
Pursar; Don Hernando Enriques and Pedro Sarmiento, navigators.
Each of these has left to posterity an account of the voyage from
his own viewpoint and bias, a fact for which later historians would
be grateful. There were four Franciscan friars, of whom Fray
Francisco de Galvez, the Vicar, was Mendana's personal chaplain
and consultant.

Much theoretical planning had attended the proposed voyage, but
the practical preparations were hurried and less satisfactory. The
expeditionaries launching into the mysterious Mar del Sud hoped
to reach land reasonably soon. That they were optimistically
inaccurate in their calculations is not surprising. We learn from
the log records that latitude was determined by observing the
daily positions of sun and other stars. In underestimating the
expected duration of their journey, they were to suffer a shortage
of provisions that nearly proved fatal to the whole enterprise.
OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPEDITION 1567-69.

What were the objectives of this hastily put together expedition? It cannot be said that there was a clear-cut goal, for the journey was an exploratory operation - an open road with no given destination. Nobody knew what they might discover; where they would land; what peoples they might meet. For Licenciado Lope Garcia de Castro, and the officials of Peru, the general aim was certainly the discovery of lands, for as we have seen, 'there were strong grounds for believing that within the Spanish hemisphere, and between the limits of Peru and the Moluccas, lay not only New Guinea, but also a vast antarctic continent.'

Rumours of such continent, or southern lands - some Terra Incognita yet to be recognised, had long since fascinated the Franciscans. Before mid-century, these eager missionaries had already made their own the intention to take Christ to the yet undiscovered Austral Lands. They saw in Mendana's expedition, and later, that of de Quiros (1606) a hope of realising this goal as did Mendana and Quiros themselves. Hernando Gallego, Chief Pilot, declares at the beginning of his voyage narrative that the conversion of the heathen was the primary aim of the expedition. 'I have made it my first objective,' he wrote, 'to enable the missionaries... to guide the Infidels into the vineyard of the Lord'. 'It is certain that this objective was constantly in the minds of the leaders of Spanish expeditions in the South Pacific', asserts Jack-Hinton. He debunks the inane stereotype of the Spaniard as a Conquistadore out for gold and spoliation. The view that evangelisation was 'mere pious hypocrisy, concealing the real motive for conquest and destruction' is a superficial one, based on racism, and unsupported by facts. Thus he cites Madariaga, (1942)

*How can we understand that age in which faith was like air and light, one of the very conditions of existence, the very breath with which people spoke?... State and religion, faith and civilisation were one in those days.*
Alvaro de Mendana would have time at sea to ponder the question of goals. So far the Pacific had been slow to yield its secrets to newcomers. As yet, despite their forays into its distances, no one quite knew its perimeters. Opinions as to the size of planet earth itself were controversial. Since the 2nd century A.D. when Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria had proposed global measurements, and designed theoretical maps, the question had been shelved. It was now becoming a practical issue, old conjectures being replaced by an ongoing investigation.

As Mendana was well aware, there were myths and there were facts. On the spectrum between there were myriad suppositions, guesses, theories and old sailors’ tales. Mendana’s secondary task was to bring some light and clarity into dim spiderlines on maps of the southern hemisphere. The Spaniards had not been idle since Magellan’s weather-beaten "Victoria" (Our Lady of Victories) had in 3 years encircled the world, arriving back in Seville in 1521. Indeed there was a flurry of activity among scholars, cartographers and navigators in Europe. Mendana would most probably have learned of the junta of Badajaz that assembled in 1524. Here the discussions centred on the east-west spheres of authority between the Portuguese and Spaniards. Other peripheral matters, more theoretic than practical, included the oft-discussed mystery of the location of Ophir, source of gold for Solomon’s temple, built two and a half millenia previously. The position of such alluring isles was vaguely associated with an ancient conviction of the existence of a southern continent. This Terra Incognita was first posited by Pythagorus, who saw it as a mathematic necessity in the equilibrium of a perfectly spherical world.

Certain maps, owing something to Marco Polo and to Arabic and Asian scholars, even represented this imaginary continent by an open-ended coastline named Jaya La Grande or Terra Australis.
With regard to myths, doubtless Mendana had heard of the Inca King Tupac Yupanqui. Legend held that, two centuries previously, this famous warrior had sailed west from Peru, leading a fleet of balsa rafts carrying 20,000 men to two large islands. There, black men, horses and gold were said to be in plenty. Naturally, such tales were regarded sceptically by hard-headed seamen, but scholars perceived that Indian legends often backed other dreams from antiquity, the perennial stories of isles whence Solomon shipped gold for his temple.

With the dark side of the hemisphere now acknowledged as part of the whole, who knew what wonders might emerge? No unicorns perhaps, but likely enough were the emerald pastures in which they were said to graze. Why even uncle Lope de Castro had not been abashed to make mention of 'some islands called Solomon,' yet to be discovered.

What Mendana did know as certain was that, of the Spanish voyages heading west since Magellan's, only two had found land to the south. In 1542 and 1545, parts of the New Guinea coastline had been mapped by De la Torres and Ortez de Retez respectively. While to the north, Hawaii and the Philippines were already familiar to the Spaniards, the ocean to the south stretched seemingly landless for leagues without end. He was soon to know just how boundless that ocean could be, as day after day, and week after week it mirrored infinity encircled by a single horizon.
CHAPTER THREE  

LANDFALL 1568

Landsmen reason; seamen navigate.
PORTUGUESE PROVERB

Chief Pilot Gallego noted in his journal:

The pilots told me that I was the only person who was not disheartened after having sailed so many leagues without seeing land; and when I told them that they would suffer no ill, and that with the favour of God, they would see land at the end of January, they all kept silent and made no reply.

Hernando Gallego was reputed, with reason, to be a competent navigator. But by now, he knew that, with reason, his competence was being questioned. They had crossed nearly 7000 miles of ocean wave, as bare as a Nullarbor Plain. And though a tiny isle and a series of shoals had proved his prediction disappointingly, it was no wonder that Sarmiento, himself no mean navigator, was complaining, and that sea-weary sailors were despairing.

A contemporary proverb declared: Landsmen reason; seamen navigate. Records testify to the fact that Gallego's seamanship had that alliance of experience and intuition that make a true navigator. Whether it was through intuition or excellent eyesight on that windy morning, 7 February 1568, Gallego bade a sailor climb to main-top and look south. His hunch was correct: the sailor scrambled down the rigging, having shouted that land was in sight, to confirm the good news with the Chief Pilot.

Catoira records how at the announcement, there arose from the two vessels breasting their way through the billows, the joyous sound of singing, as soldiers, sailors and all hands burst into the song of thanksgiving: Te Deum Laudamus.
The euphoria increased as the hours lengthened the outline of hills against the skyline. Next morning the ship's company awakened to a shore stretching east and west, indicating a sizeable land. However in their efforts to find anchorage, they found themselves trapped inside a reef. The larger and more clumsy Capitana was unable to turn around. Later Mendana was to write,

Seeing ourselves in these straits, we called upon Our Lady, for we had no hope of help except from heaven; and when we were in the deepest affliction, thinking that we all must perish, either by drowning or at the hands of the Indians, the ship went about and we turned out to sea.

STAR OVER YSABEL 8 FEBRUARY 1568.

Their relief was short-lived. Once outside, they found that they were in a veritable maze of coral shelves. Morning long, the sailors wrestled with wind and vessels, seeking a passage to land. The shore so close, yet so inaccessible, was an unbearable thought. Around midday, Mendana urged further resort to prayer and petition and indeed a sign of divine aid was seen:

Steering for the shore...we saw a very bright and re-splendent star, which appeared on the right side of the mainmast, and steering to the right we entered a port with no mishap whatever.

Another sign occurred:

At the entrance we saw a mountain above the sea, all of living rock, from which a large piece covered with trees fell into the water with a great shock and noise; although it sometimes happens in Spain that some star is seen at noon, that we should see one when we were in such necessity, and then succeed well in entering the port, causes us to regard it as a work of God, and to believe that it was from his hand that this beacon was sent to lead us safely into port.

In his perception of the crashing rock, Mendana shows kinship with the extra-sensory perceptions of the Pacific Islander. Who among us here has not seen the breaking branch, the falling fruit,
the cracking lamp glass as signs of imminent birth or death, or as events that presage mourning or joy?

The Spaniards called the harbour, Estrella Bay and the island over which the star twinkled, Santa Ysabel. Their first act ashore was one of thanksgiving. The Vicar, Fray Francesco de Galvez, carried a cross to a small hill. When it was set up, they all said a prayer and the clergy chanted the hymn, Vexilla Regis.

In Mendana’s letter to the king, he tells of his meeting with the chief, Bilebangara:

On the same day when the ships arrived, there came one of the principal chiefs of the island... who after performing some ceremonies with me came on board. I gave him presents and treated him well, and we became friends. Our manner of making friends originated with him.

We have seen how the two exchanged names in a Melanesian custom signifying friendship.

Was this place part of the ‘Western Lands’?... the long sought Terra Incognita? Would these people, now watching with such animation and curiosity be amenable to the Christian message the Spaniards had brought? Would they, (and this was the most urgent consideration for the moment) be willing to feed this batch of half-starved seamen?

Answers to these questions were vital to the maintenance of the expedition. Mendana addressed them immediately. Consultation with his men soon made it clear that further exploration, both coastal and inland, would be the means of finding answers to these concerns. For the Capitana or Almiranta to examine the coastline so securely guarded by reefs, would be foolhardy, even if possible. A brigantine, smaller, lighter and more nimble had to be built. Mendana put his men to the task at once.
EXPLORATION

While in Estrella Bay, although the ships company were on half-rations, Mendana forbade any raids upon the natives, despite the fact that they would not agree to provide food. Even his friend Bilebangara at first could not be prevailed upon to allay their hunger for fresh vegetables. Several had died of scurvy. Mendana consulted the Vicar. He recounts:

Fray Francesco de Galvez replied that he was aware that I had done all that I could...that I had made friends with the chief, and with his Indians, giving them gratuitously articles of barter and that I might well go inland in search of provision, paying for it with other things; and that if the natives refused to barter it, I might take some in moderation, but not in such quantities that they would feel the want of it, and not touching any of their other property, nor their wives or children.

Mendana sent a small scouting party inland under Sarmiento, the week after arrival. Another was sent east, led by Ortega. Their instructions were as above. To build trust, it was worth enduring hunger a little longer. Food was brought eventually in good quantity, and not food alone. Mendana tells how one chief, feeling sorry for the Spaniards having no women, brought along three, "and they thought to tempt us by asking us to buy them. I made signs to say that we refused, and bade them to take them away, which they did immediately."

On the next foraging party, which aimed to attain the summit of the central range, several villagers brought food to barter, and were helpful to the travellers. Fray de Torres accompanied the group to ensure that in all dealings with the people they met there should be "regard for their well-being, and that all should be in accord with Christianity and their consciences."

It is not surprising that certain tribes were amicable, and others hostile. The domain of Bile was but one region of the island, that like its neighbour-isles, was in by no means a united entity. Of
the several tribes in Ysabel, some were alien and even xenophobic to one another. They spoke different languages, denoting their various migrational origins, and often had different beliefs and customs, as Boghesi (1948) tells us, describing his own home island.

Amherst states, 'Every expedition dispatched from the ships had orders never to take life except in the last necessity; and this order was strictly obeyed by the Camp Master, Ortega, both in his adventurous journey inland and in the first voyage of the brigantine which set out eastward as soon as it was built.'

Nevertheless there were skirmishes as well as peace offerings. The Spaniards refrained from killing, but did burn down some houses. There were ambushes and showers of arrows, and some failed arquebus shots. When Sarmiento's group was attacked, a fight ensued, during which Bile's uncle was captured and brought to the ship. When Mendana set him free, the old man turned back and embraced Mendana, so great was his gratitude. Sarmiento accompanied him back to his village where his people wept for joy, and regaled the Spaniards with yams and coconuts.

What did these explorations achieve? First, it was discovered that Ysabel was no continent, but a rather narrow island. The sea could be seen to north and to south by the expeditionaries standing on the ridge of the central range. Regarding the land, we have several reports from the expeditionaries. In 1574, these men, interrogated about their discoveries, before a court of enquiry, gave pleasant reports of their impressions. One such stated that, 'this witness believes it to be one of the best lands he has seen in his life'. A typical statement is that recorded by Juan Garcia Torrico:

Santa Ysabel is a long strip of land, and has many people and big villages and rivers; is fertile with food grown on the land, with palms and almond trees, and there are a great many pigs and Castilian chickens and ring-doves and
other birds which are good to eat, and that ginger grows there and many other fruit trees, and sarsaparilla and much timber for boats and other buildings. (8)

Reports about the islanders are equally favourable. They are ample testimony of a fraternal interaction with their hosts, that gives the lie to later biographers who liked to depict their Spaniards as harsh conquerors, blazing their trails with blood.

The natives of those islands are gentle and civilised and showed much good will and wish to know civilised and natural things, and accepted with much delight what we began to teach them, and this witness believes that they are people who could easily be converted to the Holy Gospel and the faith of the Christian religion, and if it were preached and taught to them, great service would be rendered to Our Lord’. (signed Manuel Alvarez)

This passage and others similar, seem to indicate that once the Spaniards had picked up a little of the local language, there were conversations touching on religious beliefs. These may have been initiated by the Franciscans a couple of whom went on every inland journey. Mendana himself was not abashed to tell in his letter to King Philip of his attempt to explain God to Bile Bangara:

He asked me where God was, and if he was a great Lord. I replied that God had made the 'colantha caaba fina', which is the heavens, the earth and the sea, and that from him we had life, and that he had created us all, saying many of the words in his own language. He thought that he understood me, and wishing to signify the same to me, he made a sign in the following manner. He raised his open hand in the air and said in his language, 'This is heaven.' Then with the finger of the other hand placed upon that which he had stretched out, he said in our tongue, and then in his own, 'King and great Lord of the earth and sea.' Then he pointed to the ground saying, 'Lord of the earth.'

I replied that so it was, and he was well satisfied that he had made himself understood.

We are told in Kelly's narrative that the villagers nearby, when Mass was celebrated, stood watching apart with a certain reverence. Thus in small ways did the persons of two cultures
touch the lives of one another, momentarily perhaps, as sunlight
plays on wave crests. History sees but the tip of the wave, but
who knows what submarine currents stir the depths below?

RETURN OF THE BRIGANTINE 5 MAY, 1568

Noah could not have been more relieved with his dove's return
than Mendana with the first return of the brigantine. Likewise, no
dove could have been more pleased with its green bough, than
Ortega with his logful of discoveries.

The newly built brigantine had left Estrella Bay on 7 April,
cruising eastwards. It carried thirty in all, sailors, soldiers, four
lads given by Bilebangara as guides, the Chief Pilot, Gallego, and
Camp Master, Ortega. On their return, there was much to
report. Other islands had been found, named and mapped. On
Palm Sunday, 7 April, the island we know as Malaita was sighted
and named Isla de Ramos... Island of Palms, to commemorate the
day. The Ngela group was also named variously: San Dimas and
San German, Buena Vista, La Galera and La Florida. The brig
landed on Savo, and called it Sesarga. To the south a coastline
appeared to be that of a large island. Its villages were numerous
and its population dense. This land, green at the shore, with
misted dark mountains beyond, reminded Ortega of his home
province in Spain. Thus it was named Guadalcanal.

Turning north again, they headed for Santa Ysabel, and
discovered on its southern coast a sizeable isle which they named
San Jorge. Here they spoke with the people who told them of a
great chieftain Benebonefa (or Ponemanefa)... who was not
available to the visiting explorers. It was probably at San Jorge,
Jack-Hinton suggests, that Ortego and Gallego decided to
circumnavigate Santa Ysabel. Further island discoveries were
made as they cruised along the coast. They named these: San
Nicholas (today's New Georgia); and later as they rounded the
broken line of isles at Ysabel's western end, San Marcos which is Choiseul. Again reefs and shoals inhibited the landing of the fragile Santiago, which continued its circling of Ysabel, to arrive back at Estrella Bay on May 5.

Mendana was heartened by the return of Ortega and Gallego. The seventh inland party had just come back but some of the able-bodied had fallen sick. Others had died. The climate was blamed for the illness probably caused by malaria. Because of this, it was decided to move on to Guadalcanal, where, Mendana hoped, the illness might abate, and further exploration could be carried on. The two large vessels pulled up anchor and headed south for Guadalcanal. The brigantine led the way.

GUADALCANAL

The sight of two large vessels and a smaller one nearing their coast, aroused much interest among the Guadalcanal folk. 'A thousand natives assembled on the beach,' Gallego's journal tells us. Though we may doubt the accuracy of such a number, we too can share the amazement that must have attended that landing. The ships entered a bay, which they called Port Cruz. The friars carrying a cross accompanied by Mendana and others proceeded through this crowd to climb a hilltop, where they set up the cross. Then as they had done in Ysabel, they sang the Vexilla Regis in thanksgiving.

The crowd below now began to shoot arrows. Some of the soldiers resorted to the arquebus, and two men were shot. This sad beginning did not auger well for the Guadalcanal sojourn. No doubt before the day was out, a thousand tongues had given a thousand accounts of the event.

Next morning when the Spaniards returned towards the hill, the cross no longer stood there. As they came nearer, they saw some
men hastily attempting to re-erect it, but they fled in fear before they had managed. The Spaniards set it firmly in the ground once more, and Mass was celebrated. It was to their surprise that the cross was never again touched by the people, nor was the small chapel they built ever disturbed.

On an expedition inland to the mountains, (possibly up today's Mount Austen) two Franciscans, Fray de Galvez and Fray de Torres in company with the scouts were in wonder at the panorama of Guadalcanal. They saw 'more than thirty villages of ten to twenty houses and more within a league and a half. And all the slopes around the hills were full of huts, clearings and plantations, kept in very good order.' We of 20th century Solomon Islands may still wonder at this view which bears no likeness to the sparsely populated inland of modern Guadalcanal.

The party remained at Port Cruz a month. A tidal river (likely Mataniklo) supplied fresh water, but food was not available. From the outset, the tribes round Port Cruz, not surprisingly, were suspicious and uncooperative. When Mendana called together some head men and requested food in exchange for goods, he was refused. Doubtless there were leaders as generous as Bilebangara, but these did not come forward. Food was seen to be in abundance, and Mendana's men were starving, yet it was only after consulting with his friars, that he ordered that some provisions be taken from the land, as previously, with the same provisos.

On Ascension Day, ten sailors, sent to fetch water from the river, were ambushed and nine killed. According to Catoira, 'the dead were cut in pieces, and their heads split open... We buried them near the place where Mass was said.' (9) Mendana, sincere upholder of gospel values and respect for human life, was now put to the test. Like many another missionary was, and would be, he was caught in the vise of cross cultural contradictions, where
one had to decide which is the better of two evils. On this occasion, he did order retaliation. Some houses were burned, some villagers killed.

In the fortnight following, the villagers began to bring food for barter. But not surprisingly, the good rapport that had existed with the Ysabel people, was noticeably lacking here. No further conversations about the Creator took place. In fact, contact with the islanders henceforth would be limited to the business of survival: food, water and care of the sick.

As many of the ship's company were now ill with malarial fever, the friars were usually on board, tending the sick. Kelly tells us that as well as being counsellors and confessors, the Franciscans were often skilled in medicine and surgery, cooking and hair cutting. Moving among their patients, they attended to their needs.

As for the Commander, Mendana's desire to find land suitable for settlement and convert its inhabitants, was now yielding to the harsh reality. This land was settled, and from all accounts, densely populated. His own expeditionaries were dying daily. There was already a murmur among the ship's company and the Commander was aware that unless the expedition hurried homewards now, there might be none left to tell the tale.

Meanwhile, the brigantine had left on a second exploration on 7 April. Gallego and Enriquez, its leaders, made maps of south Mala coasts, of Ulawa, the Three Marias and Ugi. They also sighted another good-sized island to the south, and named it San Cristobal.
SAN CRISTOBAL JULY 1568

On the return of the brigantine, it was decided that all should proceed eastwards to San Cristobal. Towards the end of June, the brigantine piloted the two lumbering vessel through a storm to a harbour in San Cristobal. Anchoring there on 2 July, they named it Puerto de la Visitacion de Nuestra Senora (Port of Our Lady's Visitation). A village ashore gave hope of barter for vegetables. 'I spoke to the people,' wrote Mendana in his narrative, 'and we were on friendly terms.' However, next day, they seemed to have changed their mind at the instigation of their chief. He, in a strange ritual with incantation, caused such 'fear and trembling' in his followers that the warriors took up arms, and told the intruders to be gone.

The Spaniards, disappointed, and now desperate for food, answered with the firing of arquebuses. The villagers ran away, while the visitors took what food they could find. They stayed in the bay over a month, while Gallego sailed the brigantine southwards along the east coast of San Cristobal, to two isles which they named Santa Ana and Santa Catalina. They also discovered that 'all the Indians in this island (San Cristobal) fear the island of Ramos (Malaita), which is at war with all the others.'

DEPARTURE

The brig returning from its third trip had learned that there was no large land mass close by. A decision now had to be made. Early in August Mendana summoned a general assembly of officers, friars and seamen, 58 in all, to discuss the next step: to start a settlement? to explore further? or to return to Peru? The protagonists for and against each course gave way eventually to the commonsense of Gallego. Indicating the patched-up ships, the scarcity of provisions, and the sickness of the ships' company, he suggested that to return in defeat was better than to perish in
unknown glory. 'It was Gallego who saved the expedition,' Amherst comments le years later.

There were two island lads aboard as interpreters, but before leaving San Cristobal it was decided they should have company. Accordingly, 'one of the natives, his wife with an infant at the breast, and a young girl, the wife's sister were taken captive.' Catoira records that Mendana did not wish to have women on board, and would have set them free 'if several persons had not prevented him, saying that since she was the Indian's wife he ought not be parted from her.' Mendana then bade them be clothed, and put the group in care of the Franciscans. Catoira continues, 'and when they saw the good treatment they received, they showed no signs of sadness, and laughed with everyone.'

On 11 August, the LOS REYES and TODOS SANTOS, after Mass on shore, set sail on the homeward course. Stormy weather harassed them for several days. Mendana on the advice of Gallego reluctantly turned north to cross the equator, and to head for Mexico on a more travelled route.

That horrific journey homeward is well documented by Catoira, Gallego and Mendana, and may be read in their pages. The contrary winds, the cockroach-infested food, the thirst and other privations, the dead thrown overboard every few days...all these were routine. Catoira gives us a glimpse of the ships' company during the storm of October: those below in water up to their necks, of the General and Fray Maldanado moving among them exhorting those at variance with one another to be reconciled, as the friars, comforting them, urged them all to forgive one another. 'Those who were at enmity embraced each other and we all set ourselves to help the sailors... After they joined in singing the Creed, one friar encouraged them to die like Christians, urging them to true contrition and repentance for their sins.'

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The story of the rest of the journey reads like a serial of horrors, and of miracles. It may be read elsewhere. For Mendana, the expedition had been but a pyrrhic victory over the Mar del Sud. For him, every triumph was wiped out by disappointment; every joy of discovery cancelled by the pain of so many dying. He had converted nobody, and had founded nothing. His ships arrived home with the luck of one in a thousand; a third of his personnel had died, and some dozens of islanders.

The return voyage had taken over a year coming via Mexico to Peru. The ships limped into Callao in September 1569, twenty-two months after they had departed so blithely westwards, with such high hopes. Now, the young Commander could but cut his losses and count his blessings. In his letter to the King, he attributes all to God's goodness, and with a ray of faith he adds 'as the mercies which God shows to man are always brought to perfection.' (Amherst)
CHAPTER FOUR    RETURN 1595

Can this be all that the Great Ocean gave,
A doubtful glory and a broken rite?
Spears of the sun lie shattered in the wave;
Hope into history sinks out of sight.
JAMES McAULEY

Bilebangara raised his open hand in the air and said in his language: 'This is heaven.' Then with the finger of the other hand placed upon that he had stretched out, he said in our tongue, as well as in his own, 'King and Great Lord of the earth and sea.'

Twenty seven years is a long time for a man to cling to a dream. It was more than half of Mendana's life. Did the Chief, Bilebangara with arm outstretched, stand in Mendana's memory as symbol of a people desirous of knowing more about God - 'king and great chief of earth and sea'? Was it this image that sustained his nearly 30-year aspiration to return to the isles he had discovered?

For his expedition into the Mar del Sud was seen by his contemporaries as a failed attempt. The new Licenciado, replacing his uncle de Castro, was unappreciative. The bedraggled ships that arrived back in Lima's port in early 1569, merely confirmed the opinion that the expedition, empty of promise, was wasted effort. For though the discoveries were real, even of significance, Orozco tells us, they were dismissed by certain citizens, in the City of Kings, as 'of little importance'. Fellow-navigator, Sarmiento, never sympathetic to his Commander, blamed Mendana for his poor navigation, and bad management. Thus the discoverer of a new archipelago that was to be known as Isles of Solomon, received no acclamation, nor did he bask in any glory.
Though possibly crushed by the ill-success of his voyage, Mendana was not defeated. Still young and enthusiastic, he was able to report to King Philip II in a positive manner. His account of the expedition is straightforward. If he is over-emphatic in his effort to convince the king of the goodness of the people he has seen, and of their likely response to Christianity, who can blame him? And if he refrains from mentioning details of the incident when his nine sailors were attacked at Port Cruz, their heads split open, their brains eaten, who will condemn his reticence in speaking the full truth? Surely his conviction that human goodwill lies deeper than local custom, is commendable? Throughout his letter to the king, he emphasises the favourable, and down-plays the dreadful aspects of the expedition. Perhaps even as he writes, he is kindling a hope in himself for a part in some future enterprise that will vindicate his failure.

Be that as it may, Mendana persisted in his desire to return during twenty seven years of delay, interspersed with promises that petered out, and hopes that failed to realise. Though there was royal sympathy for his cause, history and politics opposed him. Spain’s superiority as a sea power had gradually weakened after the retirement of King Carlos V. With the accession of his son, Philip II, who reigned from 1556 to 1598, Spanish wealth and prestige declined. Officially Spain preferred to maintain her established colonies, rather than to found new ones.

In the interim, Mendana was twice appointed to command an expedition to return to ’the western isles’ he had found and to start a settlement there. Preparations began in Spain, and Kelly tells of how twenty-three Franciscans assembled at Seville in 1577, hoping to evangelise these islands, now beginning to be called Isles of Solomon. They were disappointed as Mendana himself was, when further setbacks postponed the venture. While the friars were re-directed to Manila, via Mexico, Mendana voyaged to Peru via Panama.
In the following years, Mendana had to contend with hostility, petty jealousies, poverty, imprisonment, more broken promises and disappointment after disappointment. What was it that made this ageing romanticist so determined to return to a place, which over the years had idealised in his memory?

SECOND EXPEDITION 1595.

Eventually, the utopian dream ceased, and there came an awakening to reality. A bustling in the port of Callao aroused Peruvians to the imminence of an expedition about to depart. It was the first half of 1595. Turibius, Archbishop of Peru was away in the hills visiting the villages of his vast diocese in the Andes. While the four ships at Callao were being fitted out to found a Christian colony in Mar del Sud, it is interesting to note in other parts of Christendom an apparent recession among the ‘people of God’.

In Europe, with its long heritage of Christian tradition certain territories were now split in their allegiance to the Church. Persecution was rife, daily making martyrs of both ‘heretics’ and ‘faithful’. On the other hand, in Japan, since the death of Francis Xavier, the increasing number of Christian conversions had begun to alarm the Emperor. For the last 10 years the converts had suffered persecution equal to that of their fellow believers in the West. As expeditionaries in Peru were bidding farewell to their relations, far away in London town Catholics were being tortured, hanged and quartered. Their counterparts in Japan were being crucified at Nagasaki. (10)

In June 1595, the 4 vessel expedition left Peru to seek the islands of Mendana’s first voyage. Although Mendana had never used the name, these were now officially called Las Yslas de Salomon, with Mendana appointed their Governador. While the first expedition had been exploratory, this one was fitted out to found
a colony. The two galleons, SAN JERONIMO (Capitana), and SANTA YSABEL (Almiranta) were accompanied by the galeot SAN FELIPE, and SANTA CATALINA, a frigate. They carried about 370 persons. These included Mendana's wife, Dona Ysabel Barreto and her three brothers. There were many families with children as well as sailors, soldiers, servants and handy men. There were two priest chaplains, and possibly a third (11), thought to be a Franciscan.

The Chief Pilot was Pedro Fernandez de Quiros. 'Probably one of the most competent Iberian pilots of his day,' says Jack-Hinton. De Quiros was an idealist, like Mendana, inspired by the desire to spread the Christian message by converting the pagan.

Among the passengers, however, there were others inspired by lesser goals: adventure, greed and power. Within their own ranks, the duel between good and evil would take place. The bewildered pagan would see but a smudged version of the message they claimed to carry.

In fact dissension arose even on the journey. Though landings were made in the Marquesas and at PukaPuka, the passengers became weary as weeks dragged into months, and the lands of Mendana's memory were far away as ever. Murmurs of mutiny spread, as dissatisfaction with their Commander led to doubts of his previous discoveries. But one dawn, in September, the sleepers arose to see a fine dark line on the horizon, and a volcano before it, puffing smoke.

As the passengers gazed, the faint coastline evolved into a sizeable island. Dark tree-clad hills rose from a narrow beach, where at intervals, groups of leaf-thatched houses twittered into life with children playing about.
While relief was the first emotion of both Commander and Chief Pilot, the two, Mendana and de Quiros were soon dismayed by the discovery that this was not the expected San Cristobal, previously charted. De Quiros was already aware that the errors of distance and longitude of the previous voyage, were now seriously affecting calculations on this one. Had the ships, even now, continued west for another four degrees, they would surely have reached San Cristobal. For the moment, however it seemed expedient to make landfall, for other anxieties had arisen. The Almiranta, SANTA YSABEL had disappeared overnight, some suspected in the turbulent waters surrounding the erupting volcano. Others thought that it had wilfully sailed on and away during the night. Though searches were made in the following days, no trace of her was found.

Meanwhile after coasting round the 50-mile long island the three ships cast anchor in a U-shaped harbour to the west. They called it Graciosa Bay, and its island Santa Cruz.

SANTA CRUZ  SEPTEMBER 1595

The island, (also called Ndende) is central in an arc of several isles of the Santa Cruz group that forms the eastern outer edge of today's Solomon Islands over 600 kilometres from its capital, Honlara. The perfect cone volcano, due north of Graciosa Bay, still intermittently erupting, is Tinakula.

The sea weary expeditionaries landed a week before the Feast of the Holy Cross, 14 September. For all, the name Holy Cross was to be prophetic. The people here were friendly, understanding the need of travellers for food. To Mendana, they appeared physically akin to those he had met in Guadalcanal. They were in fact Melanesian, but, as we know today, of a more ancient migration. The Santa Cruzians, are one of the rare tribes of South Pacific, whose language is non-Austronesian. The Chief,
Malope, welcomed Mendana. As in Ysabel, years previously, the two head-men exchanged names, in mutual trust.

This favourable beginning was not to last. The colonists, glad enough to land, were not as delighted to remain. Many, disenchanted by the unpromising shore and the secretive hills, were unwilling to accept this site for their future home. The climate was humid and the passengers, languid and ill-tempered, began to squabble among themselves. A tropical fever, (probably scrub-typhus rather than malaria, today's medicology suggests) afflicted even the healthy. Building was slowed down, and the sowing of seeds delayed. Mendana himself fell sick, and was unable to exert authority.

**SPEARS....SHATTERED IN THE WAVE**

Within two months, forty one expeditionaries had perished. This included two of the chaplains. (12) Malope the Chief had been murdered. Broken by the news of his friend's death, Mendana himself died, 18 October, victim, it would seem, of his own ideals. His brother-in-law, Don Lorenzo Barreto was thereafter appointed Captain-General of the expedition, and Dona Ysabel, as governess. Shortly afterwards, Don Lorenzo himself succumbed to sickness, and the settlement attempt was abandoned. De Quiros led the ailing expedition on its disastrous way to the Philippines.

In every human sense of the word, Mendana's second expedition to Solomon Islands was a failure. In its aim to found a colony and convert the local inhabitants to Christianity, it can rightly be said to have been tragic. What tribe would want to imitate those trouble-makers whose treachery betrayed their own too trusting leader? When the Spaniards, in justice, hanged their own criminals, what lesson was conveyed to the puzzled islander? When Chief Malope, Mendana's namesake and protector, was
killed by jealous soldiers to spite Mendana, what precept of Christ was exemplified? What rags and tatters of Christianity were left for the Santa Cruzians to ponder in their hearts, as the survivors' ships stumbled over the sea and away?

Such questions can be answered only in shame. The facts lie stark as bones on the shores of history. They are still acts of the apostles in the ongoing story of the people of God, always in need of redemption.

Thereafter the Solomon Islands, discovered in tears and named in faith, having been found, were then mislaid and afterwards shelved for two hundred years by doubting geographers. Meanwhile the inhabitants of the archipelago who would some day be called Solomon Islanders, carried on as they were doing when Bilebangara first sighted the pair of battered ships that hobbled into his harbour.
ENDNOTES FOR PART ONE

2 D. Frimagacci, LA TERRE NOIRE, p.6.
3 Ibid. p.8. Re. Austronesians.
4 Stephen McNeill, HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS, 142.
5 C. Jack Hinton, DISCOVERY OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, p.27.
6 The term Indians is used throughout the Spanish narratives to denote natives of these islands.
7 From Mendana’s second narrative, as translated by Basil Amherst.
8 From documents, translation by Conway p.147.
9 Catoira, narrative II, pp 378-381.
10 In 1595, Robert Southwell S.J. was martyred, one of 600 English martyrs during the persecution ending about 1700. The crucifixion of the martyrs of Nagasaki is dated as 1597 in Laux (p.467) and later in McNeill, p.158.
11 According to Fr Celsus Kelly O.F.M., two secular priests, Fr Antonio de Serpa and Fr Juan Rodriguez de Espinoza, accompanied the expedition. Both died at Santa Cruz. A third, name unknown, is thought to have perished on SANTA ISABEL. The Americas Quarterly. Volume IV, July 1948, p.437.
12 Recent research by Allen and Green gives tenuous support to the theory that SANTA ISABEL sailed on to San Cristobal, there to settle.
PART TWO  
THEN AND THERE 1845-55

CHAPTER FIVE  
PREPARATION

MAHEMARA whose hut is decorated with forty human skulls is by no means a tiger to whom to expose oneself would mean death. His welcome is always amiable, and he never lets us leave his dwelling without giving us a gift.

Fr. LEOPOLD VERGUET

The year is 1846. MAHEMARA lives on the island that Mendana had named San Cristobal, in the archipelago that the Spaniards called Solomon Islands.

Mahemara smiles.
As Sae la'a of the Oni people (1), he has the right to smile, to be proud, to be amused even at this stranger who is pleased to squat on a log, sketching his likeness.

The tribe which lives along Makira Bay, is called Oni. There is no evidence that they remember Mendana, who had been there 275 years previously. He had named their bay Port of the Visitation of Our Lady. The missionaries of whom this artist is one, have named it again Port Sainte-Marie. It is fitting, for they belong to the Societe de Marie.

As Mahemara regards his artist friend with smiling condescension, Fr Leopold Verguet looks on Mahemara with a certain puzzlement. He records this, just as he has left us with a fine sketch of the Sae La'a himself: 'What is even more strange is the alliance of cannibalism with a gentleness of custom and manners that can hardly be understood.'

37
These sketches by Fr Leopold Verguet were done in 1846 among the people of Makira Bay near today's village of Tetere.

SOURIMAHE of Arossi

Bishop John-Baptist Epalle

MAHEMARA
Sae-la'a of One
AND GOINGS

ILES SALOMON
Retour de la pêche
BISHOP CRAWFORD

FATHER LAWRENCE ISA, of Aleang, 1st priest ordained in Gizo diocese, December 1968.
Many waves had splashed against the stony headland of Makira Bay since Mendana's departure. For two centuries, the Solomons shimmered in the sun, its inhabitants undisturbed by strangers from afar. The map so painfully charted in the 16th century with its rugged coastlines, its islands dedicated to saints, its silent possibilities lay in archival captivity, all but forgotten.

Nevertheless Mendana's discoveries, seemingly futile and ending in tragedy, had repercussions that continued to stir the curiosity of European navigators. Tasman in 1640 had named Ontong Java, the large atoll north of Mala, inhabited by Micronesian fisher folk. In later 18th century, the discoveries of Bougainville in 1767, of Surville in 1769, and others, had led the French cartographers to suspect that many of these were rediscoveries of the places that the Spaniards had called the Islands of Solomon.

In order to verify this suspicion, La Perouse, who shares honours with Captain Cook as the greatest of Pacific explorers, was sent on a scientific expedition. He arrived in New Holland some few days after Captain Philip had disembarked to begin a British colony. La Perouse gave documents and letters to Philip to be delivered on his return. Leaving the Australian coast, La Perouse then headed for Tonga, Samoa and thence north-west following the trail of Bougainville. His two ships, ASTROLABE and LA BOUSSOLE together with Commander and crew never returned to France.

It was not till forty years later that the mystery of La Perouse's disappearance was partially solved. His ships had indeed found the Solomons in Vanikoro, an isle about 100 miles from Santa Cruz. The wrecks remain submerged on the reefs, with yet some stories to tell. (2) By this time, Solomon Islands had been reinstated as Mendana's discovery on Pacific maps, along with a
more recent discovery; that of the neighbouring coast of New Holland.

Much had happened in that era. The British, having recently lost their American colony, were quick to utilise their far-flung beach-head on the Australian coast. Ships of the East India Co began heading for Botany Bay with their cargoes of convicts. The western door of the far Pacific was ajar.

From the eastern side, American traders swiftly seized their own opportunities. Conflicts among European countries were causing delays in shipping across the Indian Ocean. The Americans brought supplies across the Pacific to Sydney, thence sailed to China for cargoes of tea. This triangular trade route soon found convenient short cuts through Bougainville Straits or between Santa Cruz and San Cristobal. Though these tea clippers rarely landed, the shores of the Solomons had become familiar landmarks by the 1840s.

It was the whaling industry which brought Solomon Islanders and overseas traders face-to-face. Bennett’s research throws much light on trade in the Solomons in 19th century. From her we learn that whalers, American and British, plied the calm waters south of the equator between May and November. Their best landing places were the small isles of Simbo, and Mono in the west, and Siklana, Santa Catalina in the east. But none was more favoured and favourable than that of Makira Bay in San Cristobal.

Makira Harbour excelled all other ports of refreshment. The people there.....soon gained a good reputation among the whalers, one of whom remarked ‘they are cannibals, they are thieves, but with us they will keep faith’. J. Bennett.

These then were among the first Solomon Islanders to be exposed to the wave of change already swelling across South
Pacific. Even in San Cristobal where the mischievous Kakamora play tricks with human progress, adaptation could still inch its way. People there for example no longer used bow and arrow. But Mahemara's warriors could still throw an accurate spear, and knew how to use a club to advantage.

**CHURCH 1600-1800**

The opening of the 19th century saw the Roman Catholic Church in a sad state of disarray. But in point of fact, the phoenix was about to rise again from its ashes.

*STEPHEN NEILL*

In these two centuries, the perennial mustard tree too had spread fresh branches. With growing knowledge of the oceans, the unknown hemisphere was expanding like a hibiscus at dawn. Side by side with the navigators, aboard their ships and caravels, the missionaries travelled. Across the Americas came the Franciscans, Dominicans and soon afterwards, the Jesuits, all bearing the good news of Christ. To the east they sailed to the Indies, the Philippines and Japan.

But the evangelisation of sophisticated Asians was a different cultural task from that of the ancient Maya, Aztec and Inca civilisations, and vastly different again would be the understanding of Blebangara's 'gentle' folk, and the diverse peoples of the Pacific.

In this realisation, Pope Gregory XV devised definite guide lines for co-ordinating such multicultural mission activity. In 1622, he founded the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (it shall be referred to in this account henceforth as Propaganda Fide). In order to support and implement its services, Pope Urban, six years later opened the College of Urban in Rome for the study and understanding of world cultures. The College was part of Propaganda Fide, aiding it with an input of
world-wide information and its output of new but well-informed missionaries.

One of the tasks of Propaganda Fide was to divide the world map into regions called Prefectures Apostolic. As the theoretical distances in these areas became tangible, they were divided into districts, each called a Vicariate Apostolic. A Vicar Apostolic was usually appointed in charge.

Legend tells of the monk, who in Rome's sixth century market place saw 'angels, not Angles' being sold as slaves. The story underlies the concern of this monk (who later was Pope Gregory I) for the evangelisation of nations. Gregory XV, was likewise, in his time, to promote the spread of the gospel. It may well be that when Cardinal Cappellari in 1830 was elected to Papacy, it was a like concern that prompted him to take the same name as the two missionary minded predecessors. What is certain is that this scholarly Gregory of modern times (1830-46) had briefed himself thoroughly on the subject of Oceania, even before his election to the papacy.

To millions in Europe, Oceania was simply an outsize ocean on the other side of the globe. To the crowds in packed cities of the old world, it was a huge unintelligible vacuum.

More recently, Gregory knew Oceania to be the title of one volume of the six comprising a magnificent Atlas made by the Belgian cartographer, Philippe Vandermaelen (1795-1869). Witgen tells us that Propaganda Fide was presented with this atlas in 1827. We can imagine how Cardinal Cappellari must have browsed in admiration through its pages of 373 coloured maps of lands of the entire world. It was from this atlas, that the word 'Oceania' was adopted by Propaganda Fide as the generic term covering Australia and all the Pacific Islands.
Having spent several years as Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, he was distressingly aware of Oceania, covering nearly a third of earth's surface. It needed but little stretch of imagination to realise that its complexities were enormous. Even before perusing Vandermaelen's beautiful atlas, he understood that the dimensions of that vast area were more extensive than its mere length and width and depth.

The abstraction of sea leagues on a map would soon give way to the realities of sailing through archipelagoes, paddling canoes between reefs. Wind and waves, sky and frigate birds, sluggish sun, treacherous currents, wrecks and drownings, beauty and ugliness such elements of oceanic time and distance would become revelation awaiting the missionaries to the Pacific.

People lived there, and they were part of the whole world about whom Christ was speaking when he said 'Go, teach..' Gregory's pain arose from the fact that recent events in Europe had damaged and divided the church in traditionally Catholic countries. Political rivalries, such movements as Jansenism, rationalism and freemasonry, the suppression of the Jesuit Order from 1773 to 1814, the French revolution, all had contributed to a drastic weakening of Catholic evangelisation.

Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, had made advances in the Pacific. While Catholicism in Europe was undergoing setbacks, the Evangelical Revival in Britain, Germany and Denmark dating from the mid 18th century attracted many serious Protestants. In Britain it led to the founding of a Missionary Society which by 1797 had dispatched its first missionary ship, the DUFF to Tahiti. The enterprise was supported by people of all classes, and from diverse protestant communions. The ship carried 4 clergymen, and about 40 volunteers skilled in various trades and crafts.
The account of their early disappointments and triumphs belongs to the history of all apostles of Christianity. In the same era, as the DUFF evangelists were trying to persuade the royal Pomare of their God's supremacy, the British Governors in New Holland were attempting to promote Christian ideals among their own convicts. In fact, some of the DUFF expeditionaries would later settle in Sydney, to become, under Rev Samuel Marsden, the first Protestant community. Their original fervour was reactivated in Botany Bay, by the occasional arrivals of shiploads of Irish convicts, against whose flinty Catholicism they could whet their ardour.

To north Polynesia, the Hawaiian Islands, came the equally dedicated Episcopalian evangelists of the American, not yet united, States. As in Polynesia, the missionaries gained the favour of royalty, King Kamehameha. Unlike the first troubous days in Tahiti, the first decade of the Americans in Hawaii met with much success.

Gregory was not alone in his desire to send missionaries to Oceania. Certain Catholic laymen familiar with the Pacific brought their concern to Europe. Wiltgen tells of two loyal advocates in particular who troubled to do something to remedy this state of affairs. One of these, Jean-Baptiste Rives (1793-1833) came from France to Oceania as a cabin boy. Stopping off in Hawaii, he fell in love with the place and its people. Amiable and ambitious, he later married a Hawaiian and became handy man and consultant to King Kamehameha II of Hawaii (then called Sandwich Islands).

The other was the well known French-Irish Captain, Peter Dillon (1785-1847) who discovered La Perouse's two long missing ships submerged on the reefs of Vanikoro. Both these colourful characters believed in approaching the highest authorities of church and state in presenting requests for
catholic missionaries to be sent to the Pacific. Their petitions and proposals eventually resulted in the setting up of two Apostolic Prefectures in Oceania. Both, unknown to one another, were also influential in alerting French and Irish Congregations of religious to the needs of Pacific Islanders confronting another kind of migration, the 19th century influx of traders, exploiters and altruists.

After the election of Gregory XVI to the Papacy in 1830, the two Prefectures Apostolic in Oceania were subdivided into the Vicariates of Eastern (1833) and Western Oceania (1836) The former was confided to the care of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart, (known as the Picpus Fathers). The latter lay vacant for some time. Then almost by default it was given into the care of a small band of religious, seeking approbation for a Society of Mary. They would be known as Marists.

The Society of Mary evolved from a handful of seminarians in the diocese of Lyon, France. Many of its members were children of the Revolution. They had seen devastation, misery of spirit and heroism. Taking Our Lady as their inspiration and 'first superior', they hoped to rekindle something of her faith and courage in the spiritual famine that had impoverished the countryside. Three specific works had emerged from their activity in the first twenty years: the priestly and sacramental ministry; a group of teaching brothers for the training and instruction of youth; and sisters concerned for the pastoral needs of women and families. There was also a third order of laity. It was the hope that all four branches of the Marists would operate under the one administration. This was the gist of the first constitutions and Rule submitted to Rome. Its spokesman was one undistinguished country priest from the diocese of Lyon.
Father Jean-Claude Colin was known to his confreres as 'little Colin'. Delegated to take the Rule to Rome for official approbation, Colin had missed his boat at Marseilles. Undeterred, he took a cargo vessel, and survived ten days of mal-de-mer through stormy seas to Rome. It was the wrong time of year to visit the Curia, they told him. Colin knew no Italian, so conversed haltingly in Latin to the few prelates he was able to visit. They expressed misgivings about his Rule. Fourissier says, He was told that the Church never had a society with four branches, his texts lacked precision; and furthermore he was asked if the proposed Society were really needed. Jean-Claude Colin returned to France empty-handed. The year was 1833.

Within the next 3 years Propaganda Fide had briefed itself on the works of the Society of Mary. It was impressed by its missionary spirit in its home region. But Rome advised that each branch should have its own administration. With this alteration, approbation for the Fathers of the Society of Mary was accorded in 1836 (3). At the same time, the Society was asked by Propaganda Fide to take responsibility for the Vicariate Apostolic of Western Oceania.

Rome named its Vicar Apostolic, also from the diocese of Lyon. He was the Most Reverend Jean-Baptiste Pompallier (1801-71). He would accompany the first Marists to Oceania. The land to be called New Zealand would be his base.

On Christmas Eve 1836, Bishop Pompallier aboard the schooner DELPHINE, left La Havre. With him were seven Marists, and four Picpus missionaries. The year-long journey took Pompallier to New Zealand, leaving the Marists in various islands of Polynesia.
Father Colin was meanwhile elected first Superior General of the Marists. He had often spoken of 'the whole world for Mary'. He had not dreamed that his Marists would be launched into another hemisphere in his own life time. Colin would be swept into the zone of France's Catholic action. The Society of the Propagation of the Faith was a national project, funding French missionaries world-wide. La Societe Francaise de l'Oceanie proposed to assist missionaries through 'a religious and commercial shipping company'. Within the next thirteen years, over a hundred Marists would be missioned to Oceania, and they would be charged with yet another apostolic vicariate. That vicariate would at first be called Melanesia-Micronesia. Within its vast areas, the history of the church in the Solomon Islands has its place. A Marist was appointed its first Vicar apostolic: Jean-Baptiste Epalle.
BISHOP EPALLE, Vicar Apostolic of Micronesia-Melanesia.

It was an imposing title for a fragile man. Nevertheless Jean-Baptiste Epalle bore the burden lightly. It did not dim his optimism as he stepped aboard the BUSSORAH MERCHANT on the Thames, heading for Australia, via Capetown. He led a group of thirteen Marist missionaries, all Frenchmen bound for Oceania. It was 2 February 1845, and they arrived in Sydney 21 June where they were warmly welcomed by two Marists at their transit house for missionaries.

The young bishop had already spent three years working among the Maoris in Ao Tea Roa (now New Zealand). In Sydney, his immediate task was to investigate possibilities of founding a mission somewhere in that vast but vaguely known expanse called Melanesia-Micronesia. Where that 'somewhere' might be was a splendidly open question. Sydney itself was still a penal colony; the Pacific, a superb surf wetting the beaches, and stretching to infinite horizons. Whaling ships came and went from Sydney harbour. American clippers stopped briefly, and sailed on to China. They passed non-stop through Melanesia and Micronesia, the Bishop learned.

Perched like a bird-of-paradise between Micronesia's minute isles to the north, and the black jungled islands of Melanesia in the south, was the large New Guinean land mass. It was there that Epalle's advisors, including Bishop Polding of Sydney, urged him to go. But the Bishop hesitated. Even after he had chartered the sturdy MARION WATSON, he was still uncertain as to his destination. While pondering options based on many discussions with sea-captains, he wrote to his Superior General, Father Colin: It could be that something providential is waiting for us at the door by which we enter, that is, the
Solomon Islands. The words would hang like a prophecy over MARIAN WATSON as it departed 23 October, to sail via New Caledonia like a small Noah’s Ark towards a Solomons yet to be discovered.

Meantime as Epalle’s missionaries neared their destination, the Societe Francais de l’Oceanie had begun to operate. It had been formed by a young business man of La Havre. Michel-Victor Marziou, spokesman for other concerned Catholics in France, saw that transportation of missionaries was a difficulty. No longer as in previous times, could missionaries rely on government ships to take them to their distant destinations. The unfrequented isles of South Pacific were nobody’s favourite shipping routes. Cook’s tours were only for the ultra wealthy. Funding for mere missionaries was a priority that appealed to few. One of that few was Michel-Victor Marziou. A devoted Catholic, he was also a fervent businessman, who envisaged ‘a religious and commercial shipping company.’ Trans-oceanic and inter-island, it would engage in trade to support itself. At the same time it would provide passages for missionaries in regions where shipping facilities were few and infrequent.

Bishops saw in Marziou’s proposal an answer to prayer. Without delay, Propaganda Fide was informed. Marziou had a ship ready, and awaited an answer. Propaganda Fide approved the idea. For the first journey, Marziou appointed as captain, Commandant Auguste Marceau. Renowned for his seamanship and courage, Marceau had recently given up his career in the French navy, in order to dedicate his talents to the service of the church.

His ship was called ARCHE D’ALLIANCE. After some delays it departed on its first venture to Oceania via Cape Horn. On board was a band of Marists heading for Polynesia. Among
them were Fathers Jean-Georges Collomb, Anliard, Crey and Villien. One member of this mission band caused surprise: a middle-aged woman. Françoise Perroton was going at the invitation of Wallisian women to their isle to teach them.

JEAN-GEORGES COLLOMB (1816-1848). A precocious child in the region of Savoie, this 4-year old was a talker, a bit of a show-off. He often embarrassed his mother, a young widow who had lost her husband and small daughter before the birth of Jean-Georges. Monfat tells of the time for example, in the church, when Jean-Georges had strutted in front of the pulpit. Standing sturdily there, he caught the attention of the preacher, who paused. 'You've said enough,' the youngster called, 'now let me have my say.' The priest was charmed by such boldness. Later he gave the boy his first formal lessons, and was not disappointed. His pupil's wit and eagerness to learn were apparent to all. It is not surprising to hear that 24 years later, this daring young man had made a name for himself. Bright boy in school, class leader in college, university student in Turin, he is now ordained priest and professor of dogmatic theology at the seminary of Moutiers.

Then in 1844 the newly elected Bishop Epalle asked for a coadjutor to cover this vast vicariate of Micronesia-Melanesia. Propaganda Fide considered the nomination of Jean-Georges COLLOMB but he was not yet thirty years of age. However as the proposed appointment was of some urgency, a dispensation was given and by January 1845, Bishop Epalle wrote to Father Colin to say how delighted he was that Collomb had been named to assist him in his double vicariate. Collomb himself had not yet heard this announcement. He was as yet exulting over other news: that he had been accepted as a missionary for Oceania. In November 1845, with a group of fellow Marists, he left La Havre on ARCHE D'ALLIANCE, en route to Oceania. In the same month, on the other side of the
planet, Bishop Epalle and his group of missionaries had just left Sydney, and were approaching their destination in Solomon Islands.

**BISHOP EPALLE ARRIVES AT SAN CRISTOBAL DECEMBER 1845.**

They called on their Marist confreres at Puebo, New Caledonia. Mgr. Douarre, in charge of a two year old mission welcomed and farewelled them. The travellers came in sight of San Cristobal on 2 December. They saw no one for the first two days, though they went ashore briefly. There Mgr. Epalle offered thanksgiving, and dedicated this first land of his vicariate to Our Lady. They called the Bay St. Jean-Baptiste, then resumed coasting along a shore made inaccessible by thick bush and mangrove roots. (A present day missionary calls this place, 'the second day of creation').

Two days later, as if from the deep, the ship was surrounded by dozens of canoes, the paddlers all shouting invitations to come ashore. It was obvious that they were familiar with overseas ships. Indeed Epalle had heard so in Sydney. San Cristobal was the best known island of the Solomons, as the whalers down south could testify.

But Epalle did not want to stop here. His deeper, and perhaps only other interest in Solomon Islands lay in Ysabel. Was it not the place where Mendana's chaplains had offered the first Mass? Where God had surely blessed the perilous landing with a sign at Estrella Bay, and a near miracle? Furthermore, from the practical side, the French captain, Dumont D'Urville, just seven years previously had mapped the coastlines from Santa Cruz to Bougainville. The navigational charts of Ysabel's San Jorge and Thousand Ships Bay were accurately detailed. It was
to this location that Captain Richards, at the bishop's request, now sailed.

ARRIVAL IN YSABEL

They dropped anchor in Astrolabe Bay 12 December. Again the ship was surrounded by canoes, the men in them shouting and gesticulating. There was no doubt about their friendliness. 'In their splendid canoes,' wrote Fr Jacquet, 'they escorted us to the spot where we cast anchor.'

Epalle's heart had gone out to them. This was his destination, a dream about to be fulfilled. Had he already discussed with his little band his desire to settle in Ysabel? At what point in his journey had the long delayed decision been made? We do not know, but Fr Verguet wrote: Since we intended to settle in their midst, we did not want to repel them by a cold reception, so we invited some of them to come aboard.

The happy rapport was maintained. Over the next few days, Epalle made daily excursions in the dinghy along the nearby coast. Taking with him a couple of sailors, a brother and two priests, he returned each afternoon with favourable findings. Day by day Epalle's option for Ysabel was being affirmed. Ysabel as a place of settlement offered fertile areas with fresh water and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Montrouzier, in a letter to his brother later, comments on the generosity of the people, bringing food of the best. They even offered their visitors a child in exchange for an axe, giving them to understand that its flesh 'would be a rare delicacy'.

This friendly and lively tribe did however warn the travellers several times that a certain tribe on Ysabel, beyond Maunga Point was hostile. 'They are bad. They are fighting men,' they told the missionaries. The Bishop in his enthusiasm was
dismissive of difficulties. 'If they are at war, we’ll try to put peace in their midst,' he declared.

The account of the fourth day's event is well documented. Letters from Fathers Montrouzier, Verguet, Jacquet and Fremont all give practically synoptic reports. As Fr Chaurain was one of the three Marists accompanying the Bishop, his record is more detailed. On that day, 16 December, the exploratory party had started out later than usual. The Bishop had overslept.

Though late, he lingered over morning prayer. When reminded that the dinghy was waiting, he said casually: If I listened to human nature, I wouldn't go out today. But anyway, we'll come back earlier.

Three ship’s officers accompanied the missionaries. Mr Blemy asked the Bishop in which direction they should go. 'To the enemy tribe,' said Epalle. As there was a fair breeze, they hoisted a sail. No oars were needed to cross the 7 mile passage past Maunga Point.

While not far from land, they saw a crowd waiting, so still and unmoving that they seemed to be rocks on the beach. As they approached, it became obvious that a troop of 50 or 60 men awaited the dinghy, silent as statues. As the visitors landed, "we made signs inviting their trust, and asking them to meet us. Then one pale old man with white hair and beard advanced, trembling towards us. He held a spear and a club, and offered some fruit, while the rest of his companions remained motionless. In exchange for the fruit a piece of iron was given to him. He handed it to a young man who appeared to be the chief, carrying a decorated shield. But he regarded the iron with contempt. Another young fellow, seeing the
Bishop’s ring, offered some partly eaten fruit for it. The Bishop smiling, shook his head.

It was only at this point that the party, so light-heartedly landing, suddenly awoke to the fact that the silent, frowning group before them was not a welcome party at all. Brother Prosper remarked, ’But they are all armed for battle!’ Probably the warriors had momentarily been at a loss too. Surely smiling faces display an ignorance of serious business. No sooner had smiles disappeared than a war cry broke the silence, signalling action. An axe struck the head of the Bishop. There was a rush of warriors, as the visitors, taken by surprise, tried to ward off their assailants, and return to the dinghy. It is difficult to describe what exactly happened during the ensuing hubbub; enough that in ten minutes time, the dinghy was fleeing from the beach, its men wounded, the Bishop unconscious. It was only afterwards that the participants would recall and piece together the sequence of events.

It was hardly 11 o’clock when the ship’s carpenter saw from afar the dinghy returning. He called the others, who watched the approaching party with growing alarm. The Bishop, half stripped, shirt wrapped round his head, lay bleeding across the knees of Brother Prosper. Officer Blemy and Fr. Fremont were quietly trying to stem their own bleeding. The ship’s doctor, Dr Guior was alerted.

The unconscious Epalle was raised aboard, and laid on the deck. Dr Guior examined him. There were five axe wounds in his head. Two had reached the brain. The doctor shook his head. ’Nothing can be done,’ he said. He then attended the injuries of M Blemy and Fr Fremont, both seriously wounded. As Dr Guior thought that Epalle would not live beyond ten hours, Fr Jacquet administered the last sacraments. The
Marists, joined by the Captain, Dr Gulor and two tribesmen from New Caledonia attended.

PUNITIVE MEASURES

Meanwhile, excitement was infecting the sailors of MARIAN WATSON. Their ship, like others venturing into unknown waters of Solomon Islands, had passed contract in Sydney as 'sufficiently manned and armed for defence'. When the dinghy had brought back its bleeding passengers that morning, the crew, eager for revenge, saw this as an opportunity for punitive action. What a tale they would tell on return to Sydney!

The Marists, busy tending their dying confrere were dismayed when Captain Richards announced his intention: On the morrow, his sailors would go ashore to attack the Maunga tribe in retaliation for their attempted massacre. Conferring among themselves, the Marists agreed that such measures must not be allowed. When Fr Chaurain, as spokesman, told the Captain of their opposition, Richards was visibly unhappy. He had his hard-bitten sailors to contend with, and besides, M Blemy had been wounded too, hadn't he? Chaurain, a doubting Thomas, could not quite believe. He had seen and heard the murmuring sailors, angry at being thwarted of their fun. He sat and wrote a formal plea:

M Commandant, not aware of all the motives prompting you to send a landing party ashore where our Bishop was mortally wounded, we believe that we must protest loudly and declare that we want no act of reprisal. This would be contrary to the very nature of our mission which is one of sacrifice and of peace. We beg you, and if need be, we insist, that you enter this protest in your log-book. Respectfully...(the signatures of the Marists follow: Fremont, Chaurain, Montrouzier, Verguet, Thomassin, Jacquet.)
This note was handed to the captain early next morning. Dinghies were already lowered for the sailors to go ashore to obtain yams and other vegetables.' They were armed. The Captain read the note. He reluctantly ordered his sailors back on board. Monfat’s record is a marvel of understatement: It was not without regret that the crew put down arms and came aboard.

Next day Friday 18 December, about 4 in the afternoon, the Bishop died, surrounded by his praying confrères. With him died his dreams and hopes of reclaiming Ysabel as the first Christian isle of the Solomons. In God’s good time, that would be done by other courageous missionaries of the Anglican community.

The nearby uninhabited isle of San Jorge was chosen as burial place. Mendana had written: He (Ortega) discovered an island near that of Santa Ysabel to the south, more than 30 leagues in circumference according to the opinion of the Chief Pilot; he gave it the name of San Jorge, and in the language of the Indians it is called Boru or Veru. (Amherst)

George Bogesi, whose article on his homeland, Santa Ysabel, is still the most authoritative (1948), tells us that traditionally, San Jorge island was believed to be the home of the spirits; one of the mountain ridges of San Jorge island is supposed to be the seat of Bolofaginla, chief of the spirits and enemy of the good spirits. (7)

It was to San Jorge that Fathers Verguet and Chaurain went to find a suitable spot for burial. Near a tree on which was carved the name Astrolabe, commemorating the landing of Dumont D’Urville in 1838, they cleared a small area and dug the grave. Verguet made detailed sketches and diagrams with measurements, relating the burial place to its environmental
context. This enabled Marists, over half a century later, to find the spot and disinter the bones.

At dawn, a dinghy carrying the Bishop's remains, was towed to San Jorge. The Captain and crew joined the missionaries in the requiem prayers. Chaurain reports that many eyes were bathed in tears. His two month presence on the ship had endeared the young bishop to all.

Thus Santa Ysabel, the first of the Solomon Islands to receive Christian missionaries, nearly three centuries before, now became the resting place of the first Christian bishop.
CHAPTER SEVEN  SAN CRISTOBAL 1846

I was overwhelmed by the thought that we were now orphans, without guide or support in the midst of these isles with the serious task of founding a mission.

Thus Fr. Montrouzier wrote to his brother soon afterwards. In the months to follow, the letters of Fathers Verguet and Montrouzier provide us with the main source of information about the mission at Makira Bay. Indeed they were all young fellows, all but two in their twenties. The senior, Fr. Fremont, aged 35, had been appointed Pro Vicar. The question he put to the group was where to begin the mission - here in Ysabel or back in San Cristobal? There were sturdy reasons for both places. The third option to go elsewhere was dismissed. The decision to return to San Cristobal seems to have been made on the basis of its better anchorages. The Captain set sail immediately. The schooner headed south-east for San Cristobal.

At Makira Bay, San Cristobal, Mahemara, Sae la’a of Oni village, had become accustomed to the whalers and traders who now came less frequently to his harbour. To his villagers however, it was still an event when foreign seacraft appeared. It was with some bewilderment in this first week of January 1846 that this shrewd headman noted that his henchmen were hesitating. This vessel signalled something different. On the deck of this ship, dogs were barking, hens clucking, goats bleating. And what emanated from its decks was not the odour of cut up whale, but of other animal smell, that of the yet to be seen horse and cow.

But curiosity had already overcome caution and the canoes were now sweeping alongside the ship. For it was Luku, self-appointed leader who was piloting the schooner into the harbour called by the Spaniards, Port of Our Lady’s Visitation,
renamed Port de Sainte-Marie by the Marists, (and known as Makira Bay in the twentieth century). Verguet gives us a picture of Luku, their guide:

He greeted us in the European manner, shaking hands without the least embarrassment, not noticing that he wore nothing whatever. He accepted a small glass of brandy, toasted the company, and gulped it down without batting an eyelid...certain proof that he was used to Europeans.

Full of delight, he asked what he could do for them. He belonged to the Mahia tribe of the north, and assured them that they would be happy to receive them. Luku piloted his guests along the coast. Despite the generous offer, Luku's place did not appear suitable for a permanent settlement. Though the people were as welcoming as he claimed, Luku was not offended when the missionaries opted for a less populous spot. The Fathers noticed a canoe different from those seen so far, and much larger. On questioning Luku, he told them:

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It was captured at sea from the people of Malaita.
And those who were in it?
We took them all.
You made them slaves?
Not at all. We cooked and ate them.
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'These answers from first to last were made calmly as though it were the most ordinary event. More proof,' wrote Verguet, 'of how shallow our understanding of these people is...'

The place they chose was an uninhabited stretch of shore behind which rose thickly wooded slopes. To the west, across the cove could be seen the thatched houses of Oni village. Here Mahemara was Sae la'a. We can imagine his enigmatic smile when told that the uninvited guests wished to purchase the land across the way. It was Luku who arranged the sale, which took place shortly afterwards.
Now eager to settle, the Marists made a fence to enclose the animals and a shed as temporary habitation. A garden was started by the brothers with cuttings of olive, orange, grape and fig as well as tobacco plants. Though at first the visitors were cautious and a little fearful, they were soon impressed by the friendliness of their neighbours. Within a short time the missionaries were joined in their activity by about thirty young men, who helped transport timber from the ship and posts from the bush. These soon became willing pupils, learning how to use a saw and wield a hammer.

MAKIRA FIRST MISSION DAYS 1846.

There was no precedent for missionary etiquette in Solomon Islands, no book of norms on how to win friends and make converts. Nor, until vernaculars were mastered and communication established, could the word of God be preached. That 'actions speak louder than words' is true only when that act is clearly understood. Bene's gracious gift to the Spaniards - a child's arm nicely cooked - might well be understood by the visitors in the spirit in which it was meant. But did the refusal of the morsel convey to the donors the message intended? Or did it merely leave in their minds a puzzle to be teased out?

The Marists' petition to withhold the usual retaliatory expedition against the Maunga tribe probably touched no chord (apart from anger) in the crew of the MARIAN WATSON. But did the Maunga warriors, triumphant in their killing, regard this Christian gesture with admiration? Or were they disappointed when punitive measures were not unleashed upon them? Forgiveness was not a virtue in this society, where revenge spelled courage, and violence the sign of power. The
ancient dictum, 'eye for eye..' was better understood. 'Payback' was normal procedure in Melanesia.

In their first months the Marists must have chewed over this dilemma. In San Cristobal already tainted by contact with unscrupulous strangers, greed and trickery, generally speaking, were mutual norms that governed dealings between islander and intruder. How proclaim a contrary value system in such a market place? Were these islanders then not amenable to the concepts of mercy, and of loving one's enemy? Where treachery was a game between rivals, and payback a social obligation, could one expect to achieve a reversal of such attitudes? How could one hope to preach the dissident values of Christ?

Such queries must have tormented Montrouzier as he lay in pain that day he was speared. The news of his mishap is often retold, but it was Verguet alone who recorded Montrouzier's concern for the man who wounded him. (8)

Ourimanu was an aggrieved husband. One of the sailors from the MARIAN WATSON had indecently approached his wife. Ourimanu, out to seek revenge, thought it fair to punish whomsoever came from the ship. Fr Montrouzier happened to be the scapegoat. Ourimanu's spear tip shattered as it hit Montrouzier's vertebrae, leaving a stake and fine splinters in his back. The men of Oni were quick to disown responsibility for the incident. Ourimanu belonged to a different village, they asserted, so did not know that the missionaries were their friends. It was precisely this message: that the Marists were not out to avenge, that Montrouzier longed to convey. He was lying temporarily helpless, but at his instance, two confreres became his ambassadors of reconciliation. Accompanied by tribesman, Pakiki, the two missionaries scrambled up to the hillside, that led to Ourimanu's house.
Ourimanu, taken by surprise, trembled at the sight of the two priests. Too late to flee, he bravely bade them enter, handing them coconuts and bananas. As mutual peace offering, they gave him iron and beads. Kind words and gestures were exchanged before leaving, and with Pakiki as interpreter, the visitors made their host promise to visit the wounded healer. No gunfire. No weapons. No signs of anger. History records no word of Ourimanu, but does mention his fear, twice overcome, and his subsequent friendship with Montrouzier.

A passionate man in a land where prostitution had become commonplace, Ourimanu’s anger on his wife’s account is understandable. This he had in common with Montrouzier, always a stickler for rights. Such persons, glimpsing love, are amenable to the power of forgiveness. Did Ourimanu too, recognise in this peace-making, a wisdom greater than that of Solomon?

MAKIRA 1846 DEPARTURE AND SETTLEMENT.

The MARIAN WATSON had stood sentinel during those first weeks of occupation. The enthusiasm of the Oni youth, the friendship and protection of Mahemara, and other tokens of good will all encouraged the settlers. For a time, their optimism tided them over the trivia of small threats, the mosquito bite, the constant humidity. The house was built, a chapel was started, the garden flourished. The home-sick cow was killed to provide an Easter treat. It was time for the ship to return to Sydney. It departed on 23 April. With it went three of the missionaries, two to New Caledonia, and one to Sydney to bring back supplies.9

During those early days of transition, when mutual fear and suspicion reigned, a gradual understanding of one another grew. Accidents happened; friendship began. There were times of panic, and moments of light. As appreciation grew on
both sides, a gracious relationship of trust was born. It gradually dawned on all concerned that the erstwhile 'strangers' were after all, distant cousin-brothers of the same human family.

Judith Bennett, author of the most comprehensive work yet written on Solomon Islands, speaking of traders in San Cristobal in early 19th century observes that:

In areas of frequent contact, a working relationship was built up. Both sides perceived contact to be mutually beneficial, yet, despite the increased familiarity, their understanding of each other remained superficial.

The observation is probably as true for the first missionaries. Though their contact was conceivably more human, though communication was based on a day to day learning of the vernacular, and though mutual trust was a growing reality, still the understanding between the Marist guests and Oni hosts must have yet been shallow at the outset.

However, as their letters recount, the Marists' interaction with the Oni people was a growing reality. Fear and mistrust on either side were demons to be overcome. On their visits to villages, one had to dare the consequences. Risks had to be taken, challenges confronted.

The Marists knew that at news of Bishop Epalle's death, families in France would be concerned for the safety of their missionary sons. Fr Montrouzier in his letter to the Superior General, was at pains to reassure Fr Colin of their subsequent safety. He requested that he should publicise something of the good qualities of the islanders among whom they are about to dwell. 'Would you like to know the dispositions of the tribe with whom we are now dealing?' Montrouzier attests first to their honesty, citing Mahemara as exemplar. He then mentions their concern and kindliness, then tells how two of the brothers, one
day hopelessly lost in the bush, met an armed group, out hunting, who with much hilarity, led them safely home.

Secondly, not only kindliness, but true generosity characterised the actions of these good people. The villagers, inspired by Mahemara showed the newcomers how to make their roof (a process of patience and skill involving the drying and stitching together of sago-palm leaves, which are then placed in neat overlay to make a thick, weatherproof thatch). Having done this, one of the builders then carved a figure-head to adorn the top. Finally, Montrouzier relates how one night a squall hit the ship, breaking the anchor chain. It was Mahemara who came to their aid with superior seamanship and skill, preventing a near disaster.

We have seen Verguet's wonder that a cannibal like Mahemara could have such gentle manners. There were other times when his confreres wondered at the casual value placed upon life among such kindly villagers. The difference between friend and enemy was clearly defined and was often a matter for the menu. The fact that the newcomers' customs were often at variance with those of their hosts was simply a matter of contrary points of view. Adaptation and adjustment to other conditions is part of a missionary's education.

The daily programme kept all busy. They rose at 5 a.m. They meditated for an hour then celebrated Mass. They breakfasted on a menu designed by Providence round nine o'clock. After that, they went their different ways, in twos or threes to visit villages. One was half an hour's walk away, others more distant. Like the apostles they announced their coming from afar. The strains of the French horn always attracted a group of youngsters and curious old folk. From the beginning, learning the local language was a task of primary importance. From words to communication to sharing of ideas was a slow process.
From the halting exchange and mutual learning came a gradual growth of understanding. But here among the Oni, it seemed that even in a year, the frail bridge of common beliefs was not yet strong enough to cross the gulf of cultural difference. Language itself was yet unable to convey to either party the sacredness of the spiritual realities they lived by.

When Thomassin wrote, 'They used to say they had no God, but now they seem to have discovered one...', he was but expressing something of the desperation he felt at the poverty of language. Nevertheless, each used the talents he had, Thomassin his love of singing and music, Verguet his conversation while sketching and drawing. By mid year, Verguet had compiled a basic catechism in Kahua language, and they began to play questions with those who showed good will. They visited those who were sick, giving simple first aid if allowed. Babes in danger of death were baptised, again if parental fear was overcome enough to permit it.

MAKIRA 1846 .. ANOTHER SITE?

The missionaries had initially delighted in the advantages of Makira Bay, its fertile soils, its fresh streams, its amiable people. As a stopping place it was ideal. But before many months had passed, they began to wonder whether it was suitable for a permanent settlement. This paradisal site was troubled not by a serpent, but by the far more lethal presence of the anopheles mosquito. Malaria of which this mosquito is the carrier, was not slow to cause deterioration in the health and vitality of the new settlers. 'We all take turns in suffering from it,' wrote the usually cheerful Thomassin, 'even the natives are not immune.'

In their explorations, Frs Verguet and Thomassin had found a region to the north that seemed more promising. As poor 'ventilation' in Makira Bay was blamed for the humidity, so
conducive to mosquito breeding, this new found area gave better prospects for a station. It was within the territory of the Pia tribe. With people of this tribe they made friends, and through their Oni interpreter, an agreement was made. For a number of axe heads the Pia would not only permit the strangers to settle in their midst, but would also lend a hand to build a house for them. However the decision to start a second station was deferred till later, for it was about this time that Mahemara died. His death was a loss to the missionaries. He had been an affectionate protector to them, giving them a security they were glad to have.

The Oni, jealous for their own reputation, repeatedly told the missionaries to beware of the Toro - a slang term for the bush people of the mountains. Shy of confrontation, the Toro frequently came by night to steal tools and other useful objects from the mission. They had even planned, the Oni told the missionaries later, to kill the settlers, beginning with Fr Fremont. By some happy mischance, Fremont, momentarily breaking his usual routine, had disconcerted the plotters. Fearing someone had disclosed their plan, they returned to their mountain fastness. There would always be tomorrow and tomorrow.

A year had passed, and though little progress was apparent, at least there was a growth of understanding between the Marists and their hospitable hosts. 'We are becoming assimilated,' wrote Fr Thomassin, 'and now they regard us as their own.' They were less afraid when the fathers asked to pour water on the heads of the occasional dying babe. They did not object to their children reciting answers to the catechism that Fr Verguet had translated into their language.
La Papua Nuova Guinea, stato indipendente dal 1975, con le due isole evangelizzate dai missionari del P.I.M.E.: Woodlark (dov'è stato ucciso p. Mazzucconi) e Umboi (una volta si chiamava Rook), dove Mazzucconi ha lavorato.

Nella pagina seguente, panorama aereo della baia di Guazup dell'isola di Woodlark.
Then one day in February 1847, a ship appeared. It was Captain Marceau's ARCHE D'ALLIANCE, and it brought more missionaries. One of them was Fr. Montrouzier who had gone to New Caledonia the previous year. The arrival was an occasion of rejoicing. Three Marists came ashore. With Montrouzier, now fit, were Frs. Jean Georges Collomb, Cyriplein Crey and Br. Optat Bergillon. Captain Marceau was welcomed to the community.

It was Collomb himself who had to break the news to his confrères that he was to be their Bishop. He had received the letter of his appointment in Tahiti. He now had to proceed south for his consecration. He spent much of his time studying the plans and writings of Epalle. He was interested in everything: the garden, the classes, the singing. He was concerned for the health and nutrition of these pioneers. He rowed with them in the whale-boat to explore yet an alternative area. He advised more exploration with an eye to shifting camp. Captain Marceau, sympathetic and attentive, saw that in all this activity, Collomb was anxious to be away and done with the liturgies of his appointment. He ached to get his teeth without delay into the business of bringing light to the unenlightened of his vicariate.

He therefore set sail and ARCHE D'ALLIANCE left Makira Bay on 19 February 1947. Fr. Verguet accompanied the Bishop-Elect. He was uncertain that he was cut out to be a missionary. Yet his fourteen months among the people of San Cristobal would be etched on his mind for the rest of his days, as his subsequent writings reveal. (10)
Fr Collomb was disappointed to find on his arrival in Sydney that Bishop Polding was away in Rome. He therefore sought a ship bound for New Zealand. During his wait in Sydney, he lost no time in getting further information about Melanesia. He managed to meet, among others, two captains who told him about an island in the Coral Sea named Woodlark. One had named it from afar; the second had landed there briefly. 'Its Polynesian inhabitants, numbering about 3,000 showed goodness of character and lived in villages abounding in yams, chickens and other food,' he told the bishop-elect.

Advised by Captain Marceau, Collomb bought provisions, dried meat, medicines, (including sulfate of quinine), timber and building materials. He planned to meet Marceau in a year's time at Woodlark, for he had already set his heart on reaching that destination. He arranged for the ANONYME, also a ship of the Societe Francaise de l'Oceanie, to meet him in New Caledonia's mission at Balade.

All plans in order, the Bishop-Elect and Fr Verguet boarded the schooner SPEC in May and sailed to New Zealand. There at Kororareka, the two were welcomed by Bishop Viard. On 23 May, Feast of Pentcost, Jean-Georges Collomb was ordained Bishop. It was a quiet ceremony, and just as quietly, the new prelate, still accompanied by Fr Verguet, boarded the SPEC and resumed their voyage, heading for New Caledonia.

During peaceful days in New Zealand, Colomb had written optimistically to Pope Pius IX, to Cardinal Franson, and to Fr Colin, outlining his plans for the future. Unaware of storm clouds looming, he envisioned people in Micronesia-Melanesia Vicariate moving swiftly 'from the shadow of death to the bright light of Christ.' This was his prayer, he wrote. The new
Bishop would have a glimpse of Melanesia in New Caledonia. The SPEC arrived at the mission at Balade 29 June.

In the next weeks the two shared with their confreres the anguish of the first mission in this land. Conflict, fire, pillage, a last Mass together where the missionaries prayed for a happy death (thinking this their final day); all this was part of a complex situation. From the array of warriors wielding spears and throwing stones emerged the dedicated catechists and heroic children willing to risk their lives for the missionaries, as Monfat records.

A French sloop, the BRILLANT appeared in the bay on 12 August. To the missionaries its coming appeared miraculous. Their house had been burned down; their provisions disposed of; Brother Blaise Marmolton, speared in the chest, was dead and buried. The BRILLANT was as good as its name. Splendid in its rescue of the fugitive missionaries, it managed without bloodshed to evacuate the Marists. The ANONYME, two months overdue, arrived at the same time.

It was at this stage that Fr Verguet made his decision. Having gone with Collomb to Sydney, accompanied him to New Zealand in painful vacillation about his missionary vocation, he apparently decided to return with his new bishop for a renewed start. But in Balade, the hand of Providence intervened, as Verguet shared the persecution of his confreres. When rescue came, Verguet was faced with a clear choice: one ship returning to France, the other to San Cristobal. This time, he no longer hesitated. He would use his talents to serve the church in more predictable ways. He chose to return to France. It was for him the right decision.
ARRIVAL OF BISHOP COLLOMB  28 AUGUST 1847.

Picking up the pieces of the traumatic experience, Bishop Collomb undaunted by the total loss of his cargo, thanked God for life spared and the arrival of his ship. He boarded the ANONYME, and sailed on to San Cristobal. Was he still dreaming of Woodlark as possible headquarters for the Vicariate of Melanesia? He had already suggested to Cardinal Fransoni that the vicariate of Micronesia be detached from that of Melanesia, to be handled by another.

No canoes swept out in dozens to greet ANONYME, as it came into Makira Bay. No children ran shouting on the beach to welcome the ship. Captain Raballand expressed misgivings. After sunset a lone canoe approached the vessel. A letter addressed to Mgr Collomb was handed aboard. It was bad news from Fr Fremont: One of the Marists had died. Three had been killed. The dinghy was damaged and could not come to the ship. Next day, Mgr Collomb, accompanied by five sailors, who had volunteered bravely after making their confessions, went ashore. Here the details of the headlines were learned. Fr Crey, who had come with Collomb, had fallen ill of malaria six months previously and died within a month of his arrival. The second story was then related. One day in late April, Frs Jean-Marie Paget, Claude Jacquet and Br Hyacinthe Chatelet set out for Wango village on the north coast. They hoped to explore possibilities of opening a station there. Departing in early dawn, they were to pass through the region of the Toro. Late afternoon brought several Oni men running to the Pia mission. One carried a letter from Montrouzier to Fr Fremont. Monfat records the incident:

'Prenom', they cried, 'the mountain people were wicked. They have killed the fathers. Paget and Jacquet and Br Hyacinthe are dead.' They had heard the war-cries in the mountains, they told him in deep distress, adding, 'But we Oni men, father, we are good men. We would never
harm you. We already told your priests not to go up in the mountains, or they'd kill them'. They then invited the missionaries to go with them to kill the Toro, burn their houses and cut down their coconuts. They may have wondered why the invitation was declined.

It was soon afterwards that the rumoured details of the deaths trickled down through the Oni people who told the Marists of the planned attack, the spearings. The dead bodies were taken, it was alleged, to be enjoyed at the celebratory feast. Since that time, the survivors added, even the erstwhile friendly Oni people had gradually become aloof. Now that Mahemara's death had removed his protection from the Marists, the Oni seemed less able to prevent the Toro from night attacks on the mission, including an attempt to burn down the buildings.

These two items of news relayed to the new Bishop only reaffirmed his hope to take the mission elsewhere. In the next ten days much discussion went into the decision. This 'elsewhere' in Collomb's mind was clearly Woodlark. While sympathetic to the regrets of the Makira Marists, the Bishop had already set his heart on that isle closer, and perhaps paving the way, to New Guinea. The Brothers, Charles took plants and seeds, Aristide and Gennade their tools and implements.

As the Marists on aboard ANONYME moved away from Porte Ste Marie, Makira Bay. A small group of Oni friends 'stood on shore showing their sorrow at seeing us depart', the bishop noted.

CHAPTER EIGHT WOODLARK, UMBOI, TIKOPIA SEPTEMBER 1847.

Their death was the only event of their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement.

JOSEPH CONRAD

Woodlark Island was named after his whaling ship by Captain Grimes in 1830. About 450 km from San Cristoval, nearer to
the south-east tip of New Guinea, it had in previous days, provided harbour and food for weary whale killers out of Solomons, before they resumed their hunt along New Guinea coasts.

On 15 September, the ANONYME found anchorage at last on Woodlark. They had been in sight of the rugged isle for a week, but the rough weather had prevented their finding a passage through the reefs. On this day, octave of Our Lady’s birthday, records Monfat, the Marists saw a sign of her favour in reaching land at last.

A few days previously, a swarm of canoes had approached the ship, the men shouting for 'iron'. Obviously this commodity was the passport for gaining admission to their land. They had scrambled aboard and begun to cut the sails and pull down the ropes. Captain Raballand had had to draw his sword as a threat, before they would return to their canoes.

However, now as they beached, the travellers were welcomed by one of the chiefs, Pako, who had met previously with traders. Two lesser chiefs, Etaou and Enai, came forward, and proclaimed their Polynesian identity by rubbing noses with the Bishop. There was an exchange of gifts. All memory of the recent attack on the ship was forgotten.

After three months in Woodlark, Fr Fremont gives a pensketch of their activities:

We are living like lords in a fine wooden house. We study the language; we try to teach a few people some prayers; several children can already repeat the Ave Maria; learning by memory is no problem to them. We have begun to teach them to read too, and this seems to interest them. We don’t think unduly about the future. Our trust is in God.
Collomb had already made a programme for daily visits to villages, allocating two missionaries to each. He himself determined to learn the language thoroughly, and had given himself the task of mastering a number of words daily for ongoing communication.

How did people respond to this interest? It is Montrouzier who writes. 'In general there is no opposition from our pupils...but their light-hearted attitudes and their rude manners often prevent their own progress.' The step beyond language mastery, is to compile a catechism. Montrouzier continues. 'Naturally we begin with creation....they seem surprised to learn that sun, moon and stars did not make themselves, that they have been created by a Great Spirit... When we are speaking of the most impressive truths, they will suddenly ask questions like: What is your mother's name? Or what's happening in France that made you want to leave it? And do they grow taros there? Other times, while appearing to be attentive, they will ask whether you eat yams and pigs in heaven, and whether there is a good supply of iron...'

'You may think that they are like big children. Unfortunately they are not. They have neither the simplicity nor the innocence of children.' Montrouzier sees the Muruans as having been long-time slaves of Satan, but nevertheless amenable to grace. In one respect he compares them favourably with the San Cristovaleans. Woodlark people are more peace-loving, whereas the tribes of San Cristobal seemed to be continually enjoying tribal warfare.'

WOODLARK TO UMBOI 1848

Three months into the new year and Collomb was looking expectantly to the coming of Captain Marceau. A rendez-vous at Woodlark had been arranged a year previously, when the
Bishop and the Captain had arrived in Sydney. Now, March 1848, Collomb was already champing at the bit, impatient to begin a second station.

April arrived, but still no ship. Collomb's best plans seemed ever to be thwarted. Was it that which aggravated his frequent fevers? Marceau was to bring, besides provisions and equipment, another Marist, in whom Collomb had placed his hope for the new venture. What could have caused the delay of the reliable ARCHE D'ALLIANCE?

Meantime, the expected reinforcement, Fr Gregoire Villien was also learning patience. The 34 year old Villien had come two years previously on ARCHE D'ALLIANCE, one of the large group which included bishop-elect Collomb, of whom he had been a classmate. The group had been dispersed to Wallis, Futuna, Rotuma and New Caledonia, before it had reached San Cristobal. Now in 1848, after two years' work in Rotuma, Fr Villien was looking forward to joining Bishop Collomb at San Cristoval, for he had not heard of the Marist exodus from there. True to his plan, Captain Marceau arriving at Rotuma, took Villien aboard, and headed for San Cristobal, hoping to find at least one group of Marists. He had landed Fr Crey there, less than a year before.

'Alas! when we arrived at this island, they were no longer there,' wrote Fr Villien. They learnt from their friendly neighbours at Porte Ste Marie, that the mission had been abandoned after the deaths of four of them. Captain Marceau, mindful of his promise to Collomb, did not delay in setting sail for Woodlark.

From Christmas to March is predictably a time of frequent storms in the Coral Sea. Soon after leaving Solomon waters, the solid ARCHE D'ALLIANCE was assailed by a fortnight of
wild weather, the worst it had so far encountered. So violent were the winds, and so badly damaged the rudder, that Marceau abandoned the attempt to reach Woodlark. The little three masted Ark staggered towards the Australian coast. It arrived in Sydney after two months of what Villien calls an anguished journey. 'I spent a month in the capital of New Holland,' he wrote, 'then I boarded ANONYME. This time, I was luckier, and arrived at Woodlark within twenty days.' It was the Thursday after Easter, and Collomb lost no time bemoaning the delay. Instead, 'he profited from the brig's presence to start a new mission in his immense vicariate, which comprises no less than 1,500 isles. Being the newcomer, I was appointed to this second station, with Fr Fremont and Br Optat (Bergillon). Mgr Collomb came with us as we set sail northwards.'

ROOK ISLAND UMBOI 1848

They stopped at Rook Isle (hereafter to be called UMBOI, its native name.) About 250 miles from Woodlark, it is situated between New Britain and mainland New Guinea. They named their landing place Port St Isadore to honour the saint of the day, 15 May. A village of 400 to 500 people stood nearby. The inhabitants looked at the intruders with an excessive anxiety'. The old people, and women and children had fled to the bush in alarm. The young men and warriors armed themselves and made signs to the trespassers to clear out! When these men from the ship also made signs saying they wished to stay, the warriors looked at their offerings of iron and changed their mind.

Villlien was impressed with the Umboi scene: the luxuriant vegetation, the flora and fauna; the tiny volcano snorting across
the bay. But he was fascinated most by the people, so
different from the Polynesians of Rotuma. These were
Melanesians, their short frizzy hair short and shaven at the back
of the head. They wore shell ornaments in their nostrils,
suspended from ear lobes and around their necks. 'They are
extremely distrustful and suspicious. They chew betel-nut
habitually. They practise circumcision, and entertain
themselves at evening by dancing.

Villien's letter, written in July is cheerful in describing the
novelties of his environment. But as he concludes, a note of
anxiety enters. Everyone suffers from fever, and that is
normal, but Monseigneur is in continual pain from some
stomach ailment.

The sailors and crew of ANONYME helped the Marists build a
house. By 13 July Captain Raballand bade goodbye, and set
sail for the south. It was out of the question for the Bishop,
scarcely able to totter, to think of returning to Woodlark for
the moment. With deep reluctance, he had his bags brought
back from the ship. It would mean another delay to his plans.

Three days later, Frs Fremont, Villien and Br Optat knelt
beside the bed of their dead bishop. Vicar Apostolic of
Melanesia-Micronesia, Jean-Georges Collomb, replete with his
practical plans to bring light into the darkness had sneaked into
heaven by the ground floor as Fremont put it.

'It is wonderful to see how God is pleased to contradict us,
even in the desires that seem most in line with his will"... Collomb had once written. The words were even more realised
in Fremont. Within three years, two bishops had died in his
arms, 4 other confreres were dead, and he was now left, by
default, in charge of a vicariate that took in a third of the
Pacific. Seven Marists in two isles, a fragile canoe in a sea of troubles.

But if tribulation had toughened Fremont's faith and courage, it affected the young Fr Villien differently. The death of his bishop, his countryman and schoolmate left him devastated. Of melancholy temperament and prone to depression, he died victim of malaria in November. Fremont and Br Optat would now carry on alone. They were five sailing days away from their Woodlark brothers, who knew nothing of the death of their leader. They may have wondered for the next ten months why he had not returned.

After Villien's death, the two carried on as best they could. Another language to be learned, another culture to be understood, another people to be known. It was the usual mutual process. The shy Melanesians showed genuine concern at the death of Fr Villien. Fr Fremont had to console and reassure them. As there were neither ships nor any form of communication with Woodlark, neither the Marists in Sydney nor those in Woodlark knew that Mgr Collomb had died till almost a year later.

Fr Rocher, Marist procurator in Sydney chartered a ship early in 1849. The MARY ANN arrived at Woodlark at the end of April, with supplies and 2 young priests appointed to the mission. (11) Fr Montrouzier, superior at Woodlark, after greeting the two, boarded the MARY ANN heading for Umboi, as he wished to discuss matters with Collomb. It arrived in St. Isadore 13 May, exactly a year since Collomb himself had landed there. Disembarking at the St. Isadore station, Montrouzier was aghast to learn of the deaths of his bishop and Fr Villien. Frs Fremont and Montrouzier now decided to leave Umboi temporarily in order to concentrate on the mission at Woodlark. (12)
Difficulties abounded in Woodlark. A wet season that rotted food crops caused a severe food shortage. Fr Montrouzier frustrated by the Muruan indifference to the Christian good news, now became overbearing to his confreres, and harsh with the people. He was recalled to New Caledonia, and the two younger priests followed soon afterwards. Frs Thomassin, Fremont and Brs Optat and Prosper remained to battle on.

TIKOPIA 1851-2

'In fact it is difficult to find countenances more pleasant, more kind, more ingenuous than those of the Tikopians. We are all convinced that not only had the Fathers no danger to fear, but that if any of us returned to these distant parts in the near future, the whole island would be found converted to Catholicism.'

CAPTAIN CAZALIS 1851.

Fr Gilbert Roudalre, born in 1813, ordained priest in 1842, had been one of a band Marist assigned to Oceania in 1842. He had been appointed to New Caledonia, and was accompanying its first bishop Mgr Douarre. Upon landing at Wallis en route, both were present at the consecration of the Vicar Apostolic of Central Oceania, Mgr Bataillon. Bataillon requested that Roudaire stay in Wallis for a time in order to set up a printery. This he did satisfactorily, and two years later, Roudaire was sent to found a mission in Samoa. In 1847, he was reminded by Mgr Douarre of his appointment to New Caledonia. On arrival there, it happened as sometimes does to missionaries transferred from Polynesia to Melanesia, that Fr Roudaire suffered culture shock. Where was the time-honoured hierarchical society? Where the chiefly authority, and the orderly villages? Where the smiling people, so affable and courteous?

In Sydney for a short break in 1849, Fr Roudaire learned about Tikopia, some 1200 kilometres north east of Ile des Pins,
New Caledonia. On the eastern outermost edge of Solomon Islands, it was peopled by a sturdy race of Polynesians. Himself fluent in the Wallisian language, and familiar with Polynesian variations, Fr Roudaire was gripped by a desire to go to Tikopia to preach the gospel to a people scarcely touched by the rest of the world.

He managed to persuade Mgr Douarre to allow the venture, accompanied by Fr Anliard (born 1814) to begin evangelisation in this tiny outpost. The two priests arrived at Tikopia on 12 December, 1851 in ARCHE D’ALLIANCE after a 6-day journey from Ile des Pins, where the priests had been stationed.

Tikopia, though barely twelve square miles in area, can be seen from afar by reason of a high cliff that forms its north-eastern coast. The cliff contains caves and slopes inland down hillsides where food gardens thrive. At first Captain Cazalis was unable to find a landing place for two thirds of the isle is surrounded by coral reefs.

However he cruised offshore, and the usual crowd of canoes appeared. But the people paddling them were timid, and could not be induced to come close, till Father Roudaire spoke to them in Wallisian. Immediately friendship was established. Some leaders came aboard, and the priests were taken ashore, with an armed party from the ship to make a reconnaissance of the place.

They returned some hours later with favourable news. The Tikopian chiefs were agreeable to letting the two priests remain with them. They would care for them. Some unloading of luggage took place, and the captain then accompanied the missionaries to their new abode. His report documents the event.
'I went ashore with the Fathers...and it was agreed with two venerable patriarchs, the premier chiefs of the isle, that a house would be given the missionaries; that each day they would be supplied with food, and they would be given full protection. I gave gifts to the chiefs. I declared the Fathers 'tambu'.

Fr Roudaire was pleased. All the misgivings he may have felt, together with cautions from confreres, melted in the warmth of the welcome he was given. This he told Cazalis, who was worrying about a storm that threatened. At Roudaire's bidding, ARCHE D'ALLIANCE sailed on its way, the captain assured of the missionaries' safety. His only criticism of these superb people was that they chewed betel-nut and wore a piece of wood through a hole in their nostrils. His praise outweighs these trivia when he observes that not one carried a weapon, as he had known all other islanders to do upon approaching strangers. He added, in affirmation of their civility, 'When I spoke to them of Vanikoro, of which the high parts are visible on a clear day, they expressed their horror and fear of these formidable, fierce and cannibal neighbours.'

It was on Tikopla that in 1826, Captain Peter Dillon had found a clue to the mystery of the missing ships of La Perouse. A Prussian sailor, Martin Buchart and his Fijian wife showed Dillon a French sword found on Vanikoro. Subsequently Dillon discovered the wrecks of La Perouse's two ships on the Vanikoro reefs. (In 1960s and 1980s, French and Australian diving teams confirmed the identity of La Perouse's BOUSSOLE and ASTROLABE.)

That no word was heard from the missionaries in the next months was not surprising. It was only by chance that a ship should happen by such an unlikely spot, and its subsistent inhabitants were no incentive to passing traders. In June 1852, Br Michel, blood brother of Fr Anliard, left Ile des Pins with a small crew on ETOILE DU MATIN, hoping to visit the
two Marists in Tikopia. When brother Michel had not returned by the end of the year, Fr Rocher, Marist procurator in Sydney, became alarmed. Hoping to clarify the situation, he chartered the CHIEFTAIN, which left Sydney in January 1953. On board was Fr Montrouzier, who had left Woodlark recently. Among the crew was a Tikopian, with whom Montrouzier often conversed.

On arrival at Tikopia, CHIEFTAIN was met by a spate of canoes. Recognising their own brother, the Tikopians hastened to welcome him home. Fr Montrouzier went ashore with him, and was taken to one of the Three Chiefs. Montrouzier writes of the meeting:

I asked him where the missionaries were. He replied that they had left. How long ago? He could not say. Where was their house? He showed me his own. Who fed them? He did. Why did they leave? They had the fever. Where are their things? They took everything away. These answers to my questions worried me deeply. I believed at once that ETOILE DU MATIN had arrived at Tikopia, that it had found the Fathers ill, that it had taken off, and that it had perished returning to Balade.

But arriving back at the ship, Montrouzier heard fresh news which gave him hope. Some Tikopians had told one of the Maori sailors that the missionaries had left two months before. Montrouzier's imagination, racing ahead of facts, now thought that the Fathers, 'exhausted by fever and without provisions had profited from the visit of some whaler.' Here optimism took over, and he imagined them to be now in Sydney.

Next morning, the chief himself came aboard. Montrouzier and the captain sat and talked with him, and by medium of the Tikopia sailor:

We addressed a series of questions to him, which he replied to most clearly. From his answers we concluded that ETOILE DU MATIN had wrecked before reaching Tikopia, and that our men were in Sydney.
also learned that four Tikopians, among them the son of the chief, had followed the missionaries.

Satisfied with the responses, Montrouzier, back in New Caledonia recorded his conclusions. He had no doubt that the priests were still alive, and would eventually turn up on some passing ship. But he feared that Br Michel Anliard and the crew of ETOILE DU MATIN had been wrecked before reaching Tikopia. He wrote 'only the future will tell whether our confreres are still alive.'

Montrouzier was wrong. The future, at least that of the following century, refused to yield up its secret. What happened to the three missionaries remains a mystery unsolved. There are of course various hypotheses, these, as Laracy says 'varying in plausibility, but equally unprovable.'

In 1858 the Anglican missionaries came, and by the 1920s (when Firth wrote We The Tikopia), the majority of Tikopians were Christians. As for the contribution of the Tikopia incident in the history of Catholicism, it may seem almost irrelevant, but for the Christian belief that in the divine plan, nothing is.

MEANWHILE IN EUROPE...EARLY 1850

Meanwhile in Europe, Fr Colin, disheartened by the difficulties in Melanesia had pleaded with Propaganda Fide to allow the Marists to be relieved of their responsibility for this vicariate. Cardinal Fransoni initially refused Colin's request. It was not until 1852, that Propaganda acceded to the plea, and asked the newly founded Institute of the Foreign Missions of Milan to take over from the Marists. (13)
THE MILAN FATHERS TAKE OVER...1852.

The Holy See has sometimes been accused of inflexibility. Cardinal Fransoni (1775-1856) Perfect of Propaganda Fide, from 1834 to 1856, could not have been convicted for that. Learning early to recognise the contrarieties of time and space, sometimes called 'the Pacific Way', his directives to the Milan fathers are a model of flexibility. Come what might, they allowed for every conceivable mishap.

Fr Paolo Reina was named head of the mission, and humorously 'Prefect Apostolic of Melanesia-Micronesia or of only Melanesia or only Micronesia or of some other mission in Oceania, according to the directives laid down.' Wiltgen itemises these directives in his article, A Difficult Mission.

The missionaries were authorised to choose any of 6 options: They could receive their introductory course in missionary work: 1. in the Melanesia-Micronesia mission, or 2. from the Marist Bishop who headed the vicariate of Central Oceania, or 3. they could take responsibility for both Melanesia and Micronesia, or 4. only Melanesia, or 5. only Micronesia or 6. eventually even Fiji Islands.

In July 1852, Fr Reina replied to Cardinal Fransoni that he had decided, in consultation with the Marists, to choose both Micronesia and Melanesia, as their field of action. The little band of Milan missionaries had stayed, in transit, with the Marists in Sydney. They now made their way to Woodlark with its scoffing Polynesians, and to Umbol's fearfilled Melanesians.

Fr Reina (14) records in his letter:
On October 8 (1852) we cast anchor in the Woodlark harbour, and the Marist Fathers who have been here five years, came to embrace us on the beach. They were surrounded by a crowd already well disposed. The emaciated faces of these two were convincing proof of what we have heard of their sufferings and their virtue.

The Marists introduced the new missionaries to mission life in Woodlark. After a few weeks Fr Reina accompanied by Fr Fremont as guide, sailed on to Umboi. Frs Carlo Salerlo and Timeleon Raimondi stayed at Woodlark under the direction of Fr Thomassin. Fr Reina writes also of his impressions of Umboi. 'We were surprised to find the little house of the fathers that they left three years ago, standing just as it was. No one had even touched the iron latches on the doors.'

The newcomers were even more astonished, when taken to the burial places of Bishop Collomb and Fr Villien. They saw a bone hanging from a branch above the Bishop's grave. When Fr Fremont asked about it, his old friends told him that it was the bone of a stranger they had killed for having dared to touch the house of the Bishop. (15)

It was decided to concentrate on Woodlark for a start. Fr Reina and his companions regretfully farewelled Umboi, and returned to the group at Woodlark, hoping that they might come back to the Melanesian isle when they were better established. Before moving to New Caledonia, the Marists, Fremont and Thomassin remained awhile to help the newcomers on to their feet.

At first the situation was favourable. But within a few months, the population of Woodlark was hit by disaster, first a famine, then a sickness (probably influenza) which killed a quarter of their numbers. Though both drought and illness came and went quickly enough, the consequences were of longer duration. Morale among the Muruans had slipped. The
missionaries, weakened by the epidemic and food shortage, and still acclimatising, were unable to recapture whatever interest the Islanders had responded to in the past. The missionaries themselves were not immune to the sickness. In April 1855, Br Guiseppe Corti died. Two months previously Fr Giovanni Mazzuconi had been sent to Sydney to recuperate. In his absence, the Prefect apostolic, Fr Reina decided that the group should make a temporary withdrawal to Sydney. They left Woodlark about mid-year. The trip was long and difficult. On arrival, they stayed with the Marist Fathers at Hunters Hill, but were dismayed to hear that Fr Mazzuconi, not knowing of their evacuation, had already embarked for Woodlark, 5 days previously. They had left letters at the mission telling of their departure just in case this should happen.

After several months, the Milan Fathers were increasingly anxious since no Mazzuconi had returned to Sydney. In April 1856, when the season was favourable, Fr Timoleon Raimondi chartered LA FAVORITE, and set sail for Woodlark. He arrived in May 1856, about 8 months after the GAZELLE, taking Fr Mazzuconi back to Woodlark, unknown to outside world, had wrecked near the village where they had worked.

There was no trace of any missionary, and when questioned the people had such conflicting stories that finally he called one of the lads who had been friendly to the missionaries, and asked him to relate what had happened. At first the boy was reluctant, fearing the disfavour of his friends. Finally however, Pouare managed to find himself alone with Fr Timoleon and gave his story:

When I saw Fr Mazzuconi’s ship coming, it was dawn, and I ran along the shore with my brother Chonamazu and others. I called out to Father, saying that you had left; you and Paul and Ambrosio. We were afraid for the safety of the ship. It was bumping wildly on the coral bank. Then we
returned ashore loaded with gifts that Father gave us. On arriving at the village, the elders asked if the vessel was at anchor, we told them that it was stuck on the reef. Then Lagojumai suggested that we kill the crew and pillage the ship.

They all agreed, despite my efforts to dissuade them. They boarded a number of canoes from different places. In order not to excite suspicion, they took neither spears nor shields; only their axes which they hid in their leaf belts.

On boarding the ship, they began to express pity for the poor whites, and promised them every kind of help. Three sailors were in the dinghy which was unhooked from the ship.

The captain, afraid of the danger which threatened, tried to stop so many natives from coming aboard. But while he prevented them on one side, one of the bolder men, Avicor, leapt on deck on the other side. Approaching Fr Mazzuconi, he greeted him and shook hands. At the same instant, a crowd rushed from all sides. Avicor gave a signal, and raising his large axe, struck Fr Mazzuconi with a single blow killing him on the spot. He fell against the Captain who rushed to his aid. An axe struck him twice and he too was dispatched. The rest of the crew was then killed including the three in the dinghy. The murderers, now in control of the ship, commenced the pillage.

'Next morning,' Fr Raimondi continues, 'we lifted anchor and unfurled the sails.' They left harbour, taking Pouare who pleaded to go with them. On rounding the point, the travellers saw a multitude of canoes, the paddlers all shouting and signalling that the FAVORITE should follow them to the wrecked GAZELLE on the coral barrier. Pouare warned the captain that this was a ploy to attack the FAVORITE, once it was lured onto the reef. It was then to be plundered in the same way as the Gazelle had been after the massacre of crew and passengers.
Declining the invitation, the FAVORITE set sail for Sydney. It arrived 13 June, having been swept along the Australian coast by a hurricane. The travellers attributed their survival to Mazzuconi, watching over his companions. 'His martyrdom,' wrote Raimondi, 'is already fruitful. We have lost a good confreere, but we have won a soul. This young heathen, who like his companions had resisted the missionaries' teaching, now was eager to learn the Good News. He had in his deceased friend a powerful intercessor. He came with us joyfully to Sydney, without even a farewell to his island, and was ready to go anywhere with us. He begged us to let him become a catechist and a brother. Certainly it is to our holy martyr that we owe this victory.'

What better way to end this chronicle than to use Mazzuconi's own words: Today we have to be missionaries by staying always with the people to learn their language and slowly to accustom ourselves to reason in their way. Then later, when the Lord prepares the time, we will speak to them of him.

Blessed
GIOVANNI BATTISTA MAZZUCONI
1826–1855, (PIME) martyr of Woodlark Island.
ENDNOTES FOR PART TWO

1 Sae la'a. In this region the sae la'a, being wealthier or a better warrior was headman over several villages. He had much influence. The Oni were saltwater people.

2 In 1827-28, Captain Peter Dillon found La Perouse's 2 ships wrecked on the reefs of Vanikoro in east Solomons. The last survivor had died 4 years previously, he was told ships were wrecked on the reefs of Vanikoro in E. Solomons. The last survivor had died four years previously, he was told.

3 Papal approbation for the La Societe de Marie was accorded in 1836 and later for the sisters and teaching brothers.

4 It could be that something providential is awaiting us. Wiltgen cites this remark from Epalle's letter to his Superior General.

5 La Societe Francaise de l'Oceanie, a catholic shipping company run by the business men of Le Havre. Wiltgen, p 455.

6 The formal plea is recorded by Monfat p 89 and Wiltgen p 339.

7 George Bogese. Oceania No 3 1948, p 209. Oceania No 4 1948, p 328.

8 Monfat p 115.

9 Montrouzier and Prosper went to New Caledonia and Chauraln went to Sydney to get supplies.

10 Verguet continued to write about the Solomons during his many years as Parish Priest of Carcassone.

11 Fr Ducretet and Fr Trepenerd.

12 Monfat tells of the decision of Montrouzier and Fremont to leave Umboi temporarily.
13 In 1926, this was renamed Pontifico Instituto Misione Estere (P.I.M.E.), popularly known as the Milan Fathers. Founded in 1850 by bishops of Lombardy, the P.I.M.E. sent their pioneer group to Melanesia. Their first superior general was Fr Marinoni.

14 All references in this account of Mazzuconi are from Annales de la Propogation de la Foi, Tome XXV.

15 Monfat, p 247.
PART THREE   TIME AND PLACE

CHAPTER NINE   INTERIM 1855-1898

You, like other Benjamins, you hear the voice of your father; we, alas! we are condemned to a more rigorous road. Like other Josephs, we must live among strangers far away from Jacob. But what am I saying? In fact nowhere are there alien shores; no strangers whatsoever for the apostolic missionary. He is a citizen of the universe. His heart is at home everywhere with those he loves.

FREMONT 1851

We have, I believe, exhausted every human means. We have lavished our instruction, encouraged by those who appeared better disposed. We attempted to win chiefs, to care for children that they might be raised in piety. All of this has come to nothing.

MONTROUZIER 1850

It appeared to have been total failure. 'Will we ever, after all our trials, see some day, a time of consolation?' Fr Montrouzier's query might well have been echoed by any of the survivors of the Makira-Woodlark enterprise. After the Milan Fathers too departed from Woodlark in 1855, the Church in Melanesia could look back on a decade of disaster; San Cristobal, Woodlark, Umboi and Tikopia....all had been abandoned; nine young missionaries dead, five by violent means; three lost without a trace. Would Christianity ever take root in this jungle of error and contradiction? All that squandered effort....was it worth it? A question for God only, as Job in parable indicates.

And yet, as Montrouzier himself could have asked: Was the record of global affairs in 19th century any more favourable? Europe had shuddered through the first half, with its revolutions, its toppling monarchies, its evolving democracy, not without bloodshed. Its human greed and the thirst for power had spread to the Pacific. The legacy of imperialism,
exploitation and injustice, were thriving in the tropic atmosphere of the new-found isles.

Where was it all leading? For France, Germany and England, their forays into Oceania were leading to the acquisition of islands to expand their colonial empires. Whalers, traders and even missionaries were (inadvertently in most cases) paving the trail for the imperialists. Colonialism with its mixed motives of benevolence and exploitation, was busily oozing into the Pacific.

Tahiti had its forthright royal Pomare family; Tonga its strong hereditary monarchy; Wallis its Queen Amelie, whose long reign paralleled that of Britain’s Victoria. Polynesia coped with colonialism, making its own conditions and decisions. But Melanesia with its diversity, its segregated populations, its variety of cultures and its system of democratic headmanship was no match for invaders, whether kindly or cruelly intentioned.

In New Caledonia, the missionaries preceded these powers. The first group of Marists, led by Mgr Douarre, had wished to make ‘La Grande Terre’ a papal state. When the proposal fell through, they petitioned the French Government to take responsibility for law and order. This France did, in 1853. It was to this part of Melanesia that Fr Montrouzier was sent after his time in the Woodlark vale of tears. He was seldom to experience a time of consolation. He was by nature a battler, and nature's battlers seldom have truce. Unlike his patron, St Francis Xavier, he made few conversions; but like him, he was a man of zeal, inspired by his love for a people for whom lifelong he would fight ignorance and injustice (even his own government's policy of secularisation). One rare solace was his friendship with the Anglican missionary, John Patteson of the Melanesian mission. Laracy tells us, 'the two men, both well educated, and of good family, developed a firm regard for each
other.' It would be the Anglican missionaries, after all, who would bring Christianity to stay in Solomon Islands.

In 1855 as the Milan Fathers were leaving Woodlark, Anglican priest, John Coleridge Patteson was en route from England to New Zealand. He was a lone volunteer, responding to an appeal made by his Church. He was put in charge of the SOUTHERN CROSS, their mission ship, in which he visited New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), and the eastern, outer isles of the Solomons.

When the Diocese of Melanesia was founded within the New Zealand Anglican church, no one was surprised when Patteson was elected Bishop of the new Diocese. Over several years, Patteson, by his good sense and understanding, had won the respect of all who knew him. Nor was it a great surprise in 1871, when Bishop Patteson, visiting the Santa Cruz group, was killed with two other young missionaries. The three were victims of revenge for the misdeeds of others. When news of Bishop Patteson's death reached New Caledonia, it was Fr Montrouzier who wrote a panegyric, honouring the Anglican Bishop. (1)

Montrouzier himself would live till 1897, He died in New Caledonia, a founding apostle of fifty two years among the Melanesians. A hard man, it was said, hard on himself and sometimes on others. 'Quicksilver' had been his name in the earlier days, and if his moods inclined him to be harsh at one end of the barometer, they also rose to a concern for others which constantly drove him to positive action on their behalf.

As for the Milan Fathers, the survivors went elsewhere. In 1856, Fr Reina with three fathers left Sydney for Manila. They had been instructed to resume their work in Melanesia-Micronesia, after finding a base more suitable than
that of Woodlark. They stayed a year in North Borneo, then took up pastoral work in Hong Kong, where Fr Raimondi became first Vicar Apostolic in 1874. Fr Carlo Salerio returned to Italy in 1856. Fr Angelo Ambrosoli remained with the Marists in Sydney, where he engaged in pastoral work till his death in 1891.

Most of the Marists evacuated from Woodlark-Umbol were sent to New Caledonia: Frs Fremont (1810-64) and Thomassin (1818-1891) having spent 6 years in Woodlark-Umbol left with a certain reluctance. Some of the Brothers started schools. (2) The Vicariate of Melanesia and Micronesia was left a fallow field for 16 years. It was not till 1881 that Propaganda asked the Fathers of the Sacred Heart (M.S.C.) to take charge of it. It would be subdivided as need demanded.

THE LABOUR TRADE 1870-1904

For many Solomon Islanders, the Labour Trade was a boon. It telescoped the stone age Melanesian into a different galaxy. From betel nut to whisky bottle, it was a culture shock and an education. It extended his understanding to realities different as bow and arrow from Snyder rifles. In the last 30 years of the 19th century, the 17,000 Solomon Islanders who went to Queensland to cut sugar-cane were regarded as men of status by their stay-at-home brothers.

For Solomon Islanders the Labour Trade began in the 1870s when the sugar industry of Queensland became that state's main means of support. In the previous decade, Vanuatu had experienced kidnapping and murder by certain rascally ship captains, and traders, whose operations were to give the labour trade the derogatory name, 'blackbirding'. The name would stick, despite the fact that though abuses did still occur
sporadically, the trade had become, by the nineties, not only respectable, but a popular means of employment for the youth of Solomon Islands.

The traders and missionaries, generally speaking, were mutually unfriendly at first. Captain Wawn, in other respects level-headed enough, could hardly bring himself to write a good word about missionaries. Mr Paton, a missionary of Vanuatu, ran a bitter and damaging campaign against the trade for years, long after other churches acknowledged the good that it brought about in the lives of many islanders.

'The Church of England,' stated Selwyn, 'had been in favour of the trade, with certain qualifications naturally, since the days of Bishop Patteson. Surely, the poor, heathen islanders could not be harmed by being taken to a Christian country. If they were, it suggested there was something wrong with Christianity as much as with the labour trade.' (3) But as a matter of fact, experience in Queensland and Fiji had made innumerable converts of the islanders. He had seen with his own eyes the changes wrought in them upon their return, and thought these people by far the best instruments for making future conversions. He felt sure that Paton had exaggerated the evils of the trade.

In Queensland itself, little bands of Melanesian labourers began some schooling, encouraged by the churches. Most notable of these were around Mackay, where the Presbyterian, Rev MacIntyre, started classes in at least twenty places. Here Solomon youths, hungry for knowledge, learned to write, read, and to hear the gospel. Near Bundaberg, on her brother's plantation, Miss Florence Young, also noticing the need, started her Sunday School classes for what later was known as the Queensland Kanaka Mission, where recruits from Solomons and
Vanuatu eagerly gathered to become future missionaries to their own 'one-talks.'

In Fiji, recruiting for sugar plantations had commenced in the sixties. The Solomon Islanders' thirst for change had led many to Viti Levu. Their exposure to Christianity resulted in the making of some of Catholicism's first apostles.

It was Bishop Redwood of New Zealand, who recognised the potential role of the Labour Trade as a christianising process. It was he who alerted Marist, Father General Martin, to the possibility that the time was ripe for catholic missionaries to re-enter Solomon Islands. Having discussed the matter with Mgr. Vidal of Fiji, in 1890, he wrote, 'We have been, his Lordship and I, in agreement on this point: that the evangelisation of Solomon Islands offers at this time, new and special facilities which give hope for good results.'

Bishop Redwood reminded Father General of the New Hebrideans labouring in Fiji, who after some years were returned to their homeland, 'as Catholics, and sometimes as catechists'. Fiji had already set up a catechetical centre near Levuka for the formation of catechists, and recently Bishop Vidal had sent five of these to Mgr Doucere in New Hebrides. There were already four hundred baptised to choose from. He continues:

Now it would be the same for the workers from Solomons. There are more than a thousand in Fiji; but the bishop and fathers dare not admit them to baptism, for fear that on returning to their pagan lands, and deprived of missionaries, they would revert to paganism. It is necessary that this mission, wet with the heroic blood of Mgr Epalle be regained. Then Fiji could send them catechists as powerful assistants to undertake the conversation of their tribes. If you would like to provide Mgr Vidal with an extra four or five missionaries, his lordship would be able to make a break-through in this mission, there to make the blood of martyrs bear some fruit.

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Fiji, he insists, being in a central position and because of its labour trade with the Solomons, would be the best mission to undertake this task.

A DISTORTED PICTURE

During the previous fifty years a sketch of Solomon Islands was gradually being filled in. Dabs of colour from whalers' logs, dashes from chance encounters had created a picture, more caricature than correct. During that era, whalers had lingered in Makira waters, attracted by its whales and women. Traders had infiltrated the Isles of the west and Bougainville Straits, where the powerful Shortland chiefs held them in thrall. Tales of cannibalism and headhunting lent a comic highlight to those outside owners who were happy to be ignorant or indifferent.

On this distorted picture, the island of Mala remained a fortress. Both within and without Solomons, Mala was notorious as the most feared and least known of the group. There, no arrows from outsiders had managed to breach its walls. And though divided within, its patrilineal societies were docile to its well organised clan systems, its strict laws and its respect for ancestral spirits.

It was Mala alone whose people would decide the time and the manner of admitting strangers to its shores. It was Malaita, so long resistant to the encroaching tide of global curiosity that now in the 1870s began to move. For like a crocodile lazing in the sun, its nose pecked by a bird, Mala was at last winking in response to intrusion.

MALAITA AWAKENING

Two intrusions were noted by Malaitans as favourable. Since the sixties, the Anglican SOUTHERN CROSS had become a
familiar sight as it cruised through the islands of New Hebrides and those of the eastern margin of the Solomons: Santa Cruz, Vanikoro and Tikopia. Small Mala had also been visited. From some of these places, young men were taken for schooling, first to Auckland, later to Norfolk Island.

The second happening became public when in 1875, Australian readers were startled by newspaper headlines: 'White Headhunter'. Jack Renton, a Scottish lad had been brought from Mala to Queensland, having lived eight years as a tribesman on Ada Gege of North Mala. Renton's story was too strange to be fiction. Shanghaied into a Yankee 'jill-ship' trading in guano, Renton and four others had attempted escape in a whale boat. Suffering starvation, sunburn and remorse, they at length were wrecked on a reef near Ada Gege, north Malaita. Of the three survivors rescued by islanders, Renton alone was allowed to live. He became first a slave, later, adopted son of headman Kabau. Initiated at length into the tribe, he had entered into its gory expeditions, its ritual feasts and customs. Finally his 'rescue' was effected when a labour trading captain bought him for a high price from his 'father protector,' Kabau. From Queensland, Renton was repatriated to his family in Orkney Isles.

Both visitations to Mala had far-reaching results. When in the 70s, the boats of traders seeking recruits became a familiar sight round Mala shores, the occasionally brutal behaviour of these did not delete the good impression made by the SOUTHERN CROSS and its carriers of good news. As for the tribal involvement of Jack Renton, the news shook the colonial world. It may be that some minds clamped in racial prejudice, momentarily opened to the realisation that if all men were not brothers, there was ever the frightening possibility that they might become so, after all.
The Vicariate of Melanesia and Micronesia still existed on the maps of Propaganda Fide. That institution, anxious but patient, watched the shy emergence of Melanesia into the global scenario. European powers too were now looking beyond Polynesia to further trading possibilities in Melanesia. They were to become even more aware of the dark side of its splendour through the utopian project of a personage who called himself the Marquis de Rays. The years between 1879 and 1881 saw the ill-fated attempt of this perhaps well-meaning con-man to sponsor The Free Colony of New France in the New Guinea isles, today known as New Ireland and New Britain. There, hundreds of gullible colonists died of malaria and starvation, while the survivors fled to Australia. The Marquis remained at home in his armchair, but had not forgotten to have Propaganda Fide approve a chaplain, Fr Rene-Marie Lannuzel, who in good faith, was also fooled.

The Marists scattered in various missions across Polynesia were also regretfully aware of the Vicariate of Melanesia and partner. It dangled like a fruit out of reach, over isles that had defeated them. It was such concern that had urged Bishop Redwood to bring the matter to the attention of the Marist General, Fr Martin.

In Sydney, the Marists' Villa Maria at Hunters Hill had become a transit house for Pacific missionaries. In 1880, Fr. Joly and his community had a visitor whose official designation was 'apostolic missionary', operating in the Vicariate of Melanesia. He was Fr Rene-Maria Lannuzel, erstwhile official chaplain to the Free Colony of New France. Fr Joly listened to his story with sympathy. Fr Lannuzel had arrived at Port Breton to find a shambles of unused bricks, rusting machinery by the many
graves and a remnant of desperate settlers awaiting a ship and escape. He had now come to the Marists for advice.

Fr Lannuzel returned to New Guinea in 1881. By that time the site was abandoned. What now to do? He had after all been appointed by Propaganda Fide for a two year term, and had been given all the faculties necessary to operate in the Vicariate of Melanesia. (5) There were, he had learned, missionaries of the Methodist church already settled in the vicinity. He crossed the channel to the more habitable isle of New Britain, and landed where later the city of Rabaul would be built. The headman of a nearby tribe, To Litoro, approached the lone foreigner, offering hospitality and protection in his clan. Good as their word, they helped him build not only a hut, but also a church that would be another Villa Maria. The clan of To Vitoro would become the nucleus of Catholicism in New Britain. They would be the first neophytes of the Sacred Heart Fathers of Issodoun. It was to this Congregation that Cardinal Simeoni, of Propaganda Fide in 1881 handed over (once again) the responsibility of the Vicariate of Melanesia and Micronesia.

This so far unco-operative vicariate seemed destined to be a chronic headache to Propaganda Fide. Its secretary, Cardinal Simeoni had laboured during the 1880s to assure that the peoples of its vast area (1,800 by 3,400 miles) of scattered territories would be served by Catholic missionaries. Political interests in the Pacific had made difficulties. It was hard enough in anti-clerical Europe to find missionaries; the problem was aggravated when colonial powers put limits and conditions on their activity.

When in 1881 the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Issodoun (M.S.C.) had accepted the vicariate, Cardinal Simeoni had promised that the gift he had landed in their lap would
soon be sub-divided into self-governing areas. Taking over the small flock instructed by Fr Lannuzel, the MSC Fathers were also responsible for the various isles of east New Guinea, and for the Gilbert Isles of Micronesia. Ten years later, Simeoni must have breathed another sigh of relief. The two vicariates formerly of New Britain and of New Guinea, owing to political annexations had now become the Vicariate of Niue Pomeran in the responsibility of the M.S.C. and the Vicariate of Kaiser Wilhelmisland in the care of Divine Word Fathers.

But what of Solomon Islands? Simeoni in his concern for them, asked the Sacred Heart Fathers if they could start there as well. But Father General Chevalier replied to Propaganda Fide that 'his order could not take over responsibility for them without abandoning the Gilbert Isles in Micronesia.' So be it, Simeoni had decided. He preferred that the Gilberts be not abandoned, and that somebody else provide for the Solomons. 'That someone else,' wrote Wiltgen in 1968, 'was the Marist order, whose Bishop Epaule had been killed there, and this order has worked successfully in the Solomons down to the present day.'

The Holy See works unhurriedly. In the Pacific too, all things take their time. Bishop Redwood's letter to Father General had caused movement, discussion and assent to the suggestion of a new start in Solomon Islands. Bishop Vidal of Fiji was eager to start, as his letter to Monseigneur Morel, Director of Catholic Missions in France, indicates. 'You have doubtless heard that the Holy See has just confided to the Society of Mary the task of evangelisation in the Solomon Islands still totally pagan, and even cannibalistic...' In this appeal, the Bishop paints a colourful history of the territory into which the Marists are to go. He presents in equally glowing terms his dreams for the future conversion of its inhabitants. The proposed new venture must not repeat the failures of the past. Preparation will be of
paramount importance. He will be accompanied by a well instructed band of about twenty Solomon Islanders. Before such competence their fellow countrymen will surely be attracted to the light of the true faith....and so on.

Bishop Vidal's lurid description of the Solomons is more imaginative than accurate, just as his dreams for its Christianisation owed more to optimism than to reality. Perhaps he did not believe in his dreams enough to make plans. Or perhaps Mgr Morel did not believe in them enough to give funds. What is recorded is that when Bishop Vidal set out late in 1847 towards re-entry into the Solomons, the reality was but a shadow of his bold demands. (7) Some stir and rearrangement were also afoot among the Marists in Fiji, and in Samoa, where young and veteran missionaries were faced with the possibility of a shift to Melanesia proper. To some, the prospect was not an appealing one.

There was one however, in France, who had never been missioned, and he, it seems, felt loud and clear, the call to go to where fifty years previously, his predecessors had tried and failed, tried again and failed again. Bruce of the Scots had seen a spider undismayed by failure. Fr Pierre Boullion, a quiet seminary professor of philosophy, believed that success and failure were irrelevant. There was something greater than these.
1st group of Fijian Catechist with Fr. Vidal and Brother Bonifasio 1898

EARLY DAYS

Father Bouillon and pupils Sulio, Luka, Kanuto
MALAITA MAN

School girls & Sister at Tangarare 1907
FR. MENARD, MGR VIDAL, FR. GIUTET
FR. BOUILLON, FR. ROUILLAC, FELIX PIEUX
BOUND FOR SOLOMON ISLANDS 1898.
PETERO SUPARA and FAMILY

Hill people of East Guadalcanal
Father Josef Halbwachs and neophytes
QUAN HONG FAMILY 1961.

Kakabona Village
Crew of Eclipse' with
Father Rouillac; Petero, Iosepo,
Patrick and Saverio
CHAPTER TEN
ASHORE ON RUASURA

Tomorrow, Sulukavo had heard with growing gloom, the steamship would arrive from the outer world. It would bring, on its 6-weekly round, the old warrior had been informed, yet more Christian missionaries. Sulukavo scowled. To one whose livelihood depended on killing, missionaries were bad news. They kept on talking about peace.
NIHIL DESPERANDUM. The Unwriteable History.

Sulukavo was disgruntled. And no wonder. Sulukavo of Ngai, the most powerful, the most feared warrior brave of north Guadalcanal was having a moment of vertigo. He suddenly felt powerless, fearful and no longer 'malagai'. What was happening? Gazing from the coral beach across the waves to Savo, he recalled those triumphs of the past. Above the brooding form of that isle, there hovers always a white cloud of steam, as if protecting Savo's sleeping volcano. Sulukavo's father knew stories of its last eruption. How the people had fled in canoes to the nearest point on Guadalcanar...how a pregnant woman, too slow for the last canoe, had sheltered in the hollow trunk of a tree, there to deliver her child. He remembered in recent times the long head-hunting canoes from Savo, Ysabel and the West. His retaliatory expeditions had won him a hero’s halo along the north shores of Guadalcanal, from Lavuro to Kakabona.

But things were changing. Anger welled in Sulukavo as the erstwhile terrorist reviewed his decline in popularity. When had it all started? Was it when that pale man from Britain came chasing butterflies in the bush? Or was it when that same man came with his troop of Fijian police, sent to wipe out headhunting? It was said that the British would from now on 'protect' the islands from the evils of mankind.
One cannot but imagine the resentment of Sulukavo. He was one of many like-minded leaders. They saw that the Resident Commissioner knew little about the complexities of Melanesian law and order. The balance of power, hitherto so excitingly maintained with raids and headhunters, now seemed in danger of capsizing like a badly laden canoe.

**MARIST RE-ENTRY  MAY 1898**

The Marist missionaries arrived at Tulagi, 21 May, 1898. The arrival of the steamer TITUS in the Solomons was still regarded as something of a cosmic event. Its appearance on the western horizon would be greeted by the blare of the conch shell. The harbour where the steamer took on a water supply would hum with the splash of paddles as small canoes nuded the sides of the big ship. The inhabitants would saunter along with curious minds and hungry hands. The pith-helmeted temporary residents would come, avid for mail, grog and possible visitors. The missionaries, peering from the deck would see all these, as well as the Ngela men in loin cloths, the ex-Queensland labourers smoking clay pipes, and innumerable small boys frolicking along the shore.

The Resident Commissioner, Mr Woodford, was there with his smartly clad Fijian troop, in the name of law and order. Was he this time, though previously notified, a trifle nervous at the influx of missionaries? The Anglicans he could cope with, but these Roman Catholics were Frenchmen, and the nine youths with them Fijian.

Bishop Vidal wrote of the meeting to the Marist General Fr Martin:

We were well received by this administrator and he gave me advice as to our foundation in these parts. On his recommendation, we have decided to look for a place on Guadalcanal mainland, or on one of its offshore isles.
Fr Rouillac, less impressed, also described the encounter:

The Resident Commissioner was kind and polite as could be, but he made it clear that he couldn't possibly take us in....or even have us near his house. While willing to give us any assistance in his power, he would rather not appear to be doing so.

He added:

This stands to reason, since there is already a Protestant mission established close to his residence.

That Bishop Vidal's group had arrived, 13-strong, with no plans whatever, seems hard to believe. Had he learned nothing from the disasters of ignorance recorded in the Makira-Woodlark venture? Was he now relying too much on the hospitality of strangers? These questions worried the two senior priests. Rouillac, who never did see eye to eye with Fiji's bishop, had already voiced his dismay at what he saw as Vidal's lack of due preparation. Bouillon stood by quietly embarrassed.

From the perplexing situation, they were rescued by Lars Neilsen, a trader who lived close by. The kindly Norwegian gave temporary accommodation to the stranded missionaries. Not only were they able to celebrate Mass in his house next day, but they also gratefully accepted his offer of space in which to store their cargo till they had a place of their own.

A fellow-passenger, Charles Butchart, invited the group to his plantation isle, Vulelua, 28 miles from Tulagi. From there, the travellers could view the hinterland of Guadalcanal, south of them. Along the coast from a narrow beach and a bushy plain, foothills rose against a backbone of navy blue mountains, swathed in cloud. Up there was Mount Tatuve, place of spirits. To encroach on their domain would bring disaster, they learned. Alas for the three Austrian scientists, brave men but heedless of the people's warnings. Two years previously, they
had climbed on regardless and were slaughtered half way up. The rest of the party, chastened, returned to their ship, mission unaccomplished.

Thanks to Butchart, during their stay on Vulelua, the Marists celebrated Mass under a large banyan tree. They talked with Solomon Islanders. They were surprised to find these fellows quiet, and even polite. ‘They have pleasant features, and the young ones are alert and apparently intelligent’, wrote Fr Rouillac. He does not like however, their habit of chewing betel nut.

Meanwhile Bishop Vidal and Fr Bouillon were still aboard the TITUS. As it cruised from island to island to pick up copra, they were in quest of a place in which to settle. Bishop Vidal, long accustomed to the Polynesian scene was becoming disenchanted by a different one here. He was shaken at witnessing ‘a cannibal feast’ in a Rubiana village and was gradually whittling down his dream for a missionary Utopia in Solomon Islands.

HAPPY CHANCE? IDLE COINCIDENCE?

What happened next might have been called the poetry of circumstance. Usually the steamer from Sydney and the sailing ship from Fiji showed up in the Solomons at alternate intervals, roughly every six weeks. This time, May 1898, by some disarrangement of those variables that mark the divine sense of fun, the TITUS and CHITOOR happened to coincide in their respective landing time at Aola, the administrative post in Guadalcanal. Bishop Vidal, already homesick for Fiji, rejoiced at seeing acquaintances from his vicariate aboard the CHITOOR. Captain Samuel Keating was a friend. The Bishop told the captain of his anxious search for a place to settle his missionaries.
From where they stood on deck, Keating pointed to a couple of wooded isles about five miles north of Aoila. These, known as Rua Sura and Sura Kiki (8) are clearly visible from Aoila, and Keating must have thanked some lucky star to have met the Bishop. He had bought the twin islands two years previously from Vulea of the mainland Thibo tribe who owned it, through headman Taramae. (9) Keating had never occupied Sura, which was uninhabited except by ghosts. He was now glad to offer it to the Bishop for 100 pounds. Vidal, tired of seeking, was delighted to make the purchase immediately.

Within the week the missionary contingent was landed on Sura. Fr Boullion wrote about it:

Search, if you can on the map of Oceania, the Solomon Islands Group. In the group, you’ll discover, with less trouble than Mendana, a large island called Guadalcanar. About the middle of the north coastline, you’ll perceive, with the aid of a microscope, three minute dots, one a little larger than the others. These are the Rua Sura isles. It is here that, since the beginning of June, we’ve been in the process of settling in.

Landing at 5 am in the rain, our first thought was to shelter in a leaf shack...on this uninhabited isle, visited from time to time by fishermen. The rain passed, prayers were said, we breakfasted, then work began. A tent for us, another to use as a chapel and that was that. In half an hour it was all finished.

Do you think we’d need ropes or such for that? Not at all! The Solomon vines are worth all the ropes of France. Do you believe we need knives and forks with our food? No need whatever. A piece of bamboo split in four has the advantage of being used but once, having no need of purchase and upkeep.

You think of us wanting for a bed. Mistake! Four forked stakes in the ground, some branches placed diagonally across the stakes, a mat on the branches, yourself on the mat, a sheet over you. If it’s a bit hard, you don’t feel it while you sleep. (10)

Soon came plans for clearing and building a more permanent abode. Vidal had appointed Fr Boullion as Superior of the community, but Fr Rouillac the practical man, directed building
operations. The Fijians, Lazaro, Romeo and Atanasio, cheered on their homesick countryman. Everyone threw himself into the undertaking. Guilette, who would rather be preaching, took up his axe; and Bishop Vidal too gave a hand. So we learn from the letters home and thus writes Bouillon:

The isle measures three km in length, and one in width. The vegetation that covers it! Enormous trees, incredible vines that lose themselves in the hair-do of these giants. For two days we hacked through this foliage, for we need a place of air and sunlight. You’d see me every morning, knife in hand; I dare not call it an axe. So far, I have not acquired the art of being a butcher. But one must despair of nothing. Metaphysics leads to everything......

Clearing, cutting timber, building, exploring and discovering - the programme of settling in required plenty of exercise in problem solving. After work, Rouillac would take some of the boys and go exploring. A dozen young men from Tangarare had signed on for a year as hired labourers, according to government regulations. The missionaries had from them their first lessons in Gari, the mother tongue of west Guadalcanal. Soon even the Fijians were conversing with the Tangarare boys in their Gari which was to become the official language of the Catholic mission.

Fr Bouillon, again a humorous recorder, gives his impressions of this people, the host tribes of whom the missionaries are the guests:

I have seen in passing, these terrible Solomonese; they have a smiling appearance; they seem pleasant, kindly...not all however, nor everywhere. They say you mustn’t take much notice of appearances. The very best, we’ve been told, are likely to let you down the moment you least expect; and they’ll kill you, smiling, it is true, with their little air of gentleness, but then the deed is done. I don’t believe however that with us it will come to such extremities. For what reason would they kill us? For they do not act without reason, untaught as they are.
Up till mid August, Felix Pleux had acted as medical advisor and doctor to the Sura community. When after a disagreement with Vidal, he quietly decided to leave, everyone was sorry. Rouillac was irate with His Lordship, and wrote to the Procurator complaining. (11)

Pleux, with Mgr Vidal, left the Solomons in August aboard a passing French steamer L'EURE on its return to France via New Caledonia and Fiji. Fr Rouillac remarks in a letter to the Procure:

I believe that Monseigneur is a bit fed-up with things in general here, and that I am one of these things. His Lordship seems to be dropping everything, far from happy with what has been achieved so far. Still, I couldn't help telling him that it would be better for him, wiser and more prudent, to agree with the plans of the Society to which he belongs, and not to act too independently. Up here, we've just about settled down, but it hasn't been easy.

CLASSES BEGIN AT RUASURA

Vidal had called them 'the captain, the scholar and the saint'. Pierre Rouillac was complemented by the other Pierre - Fr BOUILLON (1854-1934), his junior by 2 years. Rouillac's active and practical nature was balanced by Bouillon's quiet competence. More or less bound to the isle by his managerial duties, Bouillon found his apostolate on the spot. A dozen 'youngsters' from Tangarare, who had signed on as labourers for a year (according to Government regulations), were eager workers. Soon, even the Fijians were conversing with them in their language, Gari, spoken by many in West Guadalcanar. Bouillon was already writing it down, analysing its grammar and creating an orthography. Conversation was no problem to him, and his playful way with children enchanted them. He wrote to Procure in October about the labourers and their children, saying, 'the new mouths we've got to feed, we intend to make the basis of our future school'.

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Bouillon had once joked, 'Metaphysics leads to everything.' For him, the heart of education was a sense of the holy. By putting in practice this principle, he was building on a value, precious to Melanesian culture and varied in its forms of expression.

In order to help his listeners to appreciate the sense of the holy, he uses a commentary on Chapter 4 of the Book of Revelation. Who can tell what diamonds flashed in those infant minds as the old philosopher in his new-found language, haltingly explained? What did they see as he told of a hidden God who reveals himself in rainbows and stars? Did they thrill to hear that this mysterious God is truly here? The lesson of respect, dear to the hearts of Solomon Islander is reinforced by the missionaries. Respect, 'kukuni'...for elders, for spirits, for the holy...is learnt by infants on their grandparents' laps. Fr Bouillon too receives it as a favoured grandfather. He goes on to say of the children:

Are these little ones, the children of the cannibals who killed and ate our confrères fifty years ago? It is hard to believe. They are gentle, affectionate and lovable. If you let them, they would talk with you all day, laughing, playing with you, just like the children in France.'It is through the children, he believes, that salvation will arrive.

As for Rouillac, that son of Breton fishermen, it is certain that for him the mission ship would be the key to the apostolate. It would open the way to every shore, every village, and via God's grace to every heart. His first trip, as far as Savo, confirmed in him this belief. He had suffered claustrophobia on the isle of Sura. Once the buildings were up, he was champing at the bit to be off and away to the people for whom he had come. In September the mission acquired a small, uncomfortable and slightly unseaworthy boat for the princely sum of £70. Rouillac was exultant. He engaged a provisional skipper, Jacques Beugnin and within two days of the purchase,
set off to visit Gavutu, home of Lars Neilsen; then on to Savo, at last. Rouillac's direct approach, his ability to sit and talk with people, his eagerness to learn languages, seem to have won the hearts of Solomon Islanders whenever he went.

Savo, isle of about 25 square miles, home of a sleeping volcano and of a people speaking a non-Austronesian language, welcomed the missionary. With Jacques and a couple of catechists, Rouillac landed into the house of an Irish Catholic, who had been living there several years. 'This man, Jack Newman has been a great help to me. He gave me a lot of information, introduced me to chiefs, and made me optimistic about the future.' For a small isle 5 miles in diameter, Savo was well endowed with chiefs. Rouillac met another, Perevike, with whom he stayed two days. 'I have every reason to believe that he and his tribe are favourably disposed.' Not so successful was Rouillac in another village, where two shared sovereignty. Beku and Torolala repeated what he heard before he came, 'We don't want missionaries or schools. We want to be left in peace as we are. That's enough!'. He finally visited chief Kela. 'He couldn't have been nicer to us. He wants us to call at his village first, when next we visit Savo.' It was on this trip that they met Are, who told them about the Moli district of South Guadalcanar.

Of Fr Joseph GUITET, we learn in his eulogy (13) that he found mission life difficult. During his two years in Fiji, he was initially surprised that many Fijians had not yet reached the standards he expected of Christians. Moreover he wondered why his confreres seemed over-involved in building, sailing, growing food gardens, rather than in the direct preaching of God's word. 'When it was pointed out to him that work of this kind is part of a priest's life in spreading the faith, he gradually changed his attitude, though it cost him much to do
so. As time went on, he occupied himself as well as any in physical work, that God might be glorified,' wrote his eulogist.

It may surprise us to learn from the same source that when word got around that priests were needed to go to the Solomons, he asked not to be sent. It is even more surprising that his Bishop refused the young priest's unusual request. 'Yet he was the first to be chosen. He went in obedience, but also happily. His lifestyle did not change in that difficult and fearsome land; it remained the same,' continues his biographer.

At Rua Sura in that 'fearsome land', Fr Joseph Guittet was the younger in the community, nearly 20 years younger than his two confreres. Shy by nature, he was apprehensive too, of 'Malaita men' of whom he had heard horror stories in Fiji. In fact, his first letters express surprise that so far, 'the Solomon Islanders have shown themselves to be anything but hostile.'

He liked travelling, and Fr Rouillac took him on his second visit to Savo. As he had done in his 2 years in Fiji, he made efforts to overcome his timidity. He was happily rewarded, as he sat with Rouillac on the beach at Savo, surrounded by people teaching one another the language with much talking, laughter and gesticulating.

After Felix Pleux had left, the next steamer brought Fr Louis Menard, completing the team of four. He seems to have been a man of decision, though Rouillac has little time for him. He very soon began to study English, in preference to Gari and just as soon, it appears, made up his mind that the Solomons was not for him. To his credit it must be said that in his 18 months of exposure to Rua Sura and Avuavu, he applied himself to his task, despite intermittent sickness.
The fifth religious member was Br Bonafasio, one of the Fijian diocesan brothers. Leader of the Fijian catechists, he came with the first group of missionaries. He taught at Sura the Tangarare labourers and later for a short time was headmaster at Tangarare, assisting Guilloux. Succumbing to malaria, he was repatriated to Fiji, where he died in 1902.

LOQU - TO BE NAMED ÁVU-ÁVU

By December, Skipper Jacques Beugnin had taken Fr. Bouillon to explore the weather coast of Guadalcanal. At Marau, a number of weather coast people had come, and recognising the little boat with Fr Bouillon aboard, made contact with him. They loaded his boat with food, and told him to come and visit their part, the region called Moli, taking in about 20 miles of the coastline. On this trip, Fr Bouillon looked at a small piece of land offered for sale by headman GONA.

Early the following year, to Fr Rouillac’s delight, a larger schooner was bought from M Pratt. It was better able to withstand the open sea of the weather coast than the one they had lost. On 28 April, this ship, ECLIPSE, landed in front of Loqu. People welcomed Fr Rouillac and Bouillon. It was about this time that the sale of land was finalised. The purchase was made through Papari, who signed the paper for Lapikiki, the chief of Loqu at the time. Within a few months, Fr Joseph Guitet reports:

A new station has been opened at Loqu, on the south coast of Guadalcanar. Fr Menard and myself have been here since the beginning of October. The people seem to quite friendly. A pre-fabricated house has been landed, and some boys have come to have a look at us.

Three Fijian catechists led by Elia, had prepared the place for a house. Elia was an excellent caretaker, and was liked and trusted by the people. Fr Bouillon came to encourage the two
young confreres. He marked out rows and distances between coconuts, for a future harvest of copra. Some young men from nearby came to observe the missionaries. Fr Bouillon soon had them happily helping. Over a hectare of coconuts was planted. While some planted kumara (sweet potatoes) others cut down trees to clear land, and dug water holes to irrigate. The women levelled the ground under the house.

IN TRIBULATIONS MANY

By the Rule of the Society of Mary, its members are enjoined not to complain of hardships, rather to put up with these, manfully regarding them as the part of the apostolate. Was that reticence regarding sickness carried to an extreme? One morning in December 1899, Fr Bouillon collapsed during mass. Fortunately Fr Rouillac was at hand. Indeed from the candid camera of Rouillac's letters we have snapshots that make us glimpse something of the misery, apathy and depression caused by malaria. "We have all been sick, but the Fijians were the worst hit." Some were even affected by cerebral malaria, which results in temporary insanity and often death.

Perhaps a worse ailment than malaria for a missionary to suffer was a sense of discouragement. When Rouillac went with provisions to the new settlement at LOQU (later called Avuavu), where Father Guitet and Menard had been holding the fort, he was dismayed to find that Father Menard had 'cleared out' with a number of school children on a passing whaleboat. Menard was totally discouraged, and wanted to quit, Rouillac discovered on his return to Sura. Fr Bouillon, wise and gentle, listens to the young Menard's distress.

A few days later, Rouillac brought back Guitet who was also in a state of anxiety. He seemed to make nothing but blunders, he told Rouillac, and Rouillac heartily agreed. The mission at Loqu
was left in the good care of Fijian, Elia, and the ex-convict, Joseph Legal from New Caledonia. The missionaries were gradually coming to comprehend something of the diversity of the archipelago. The appearance of sameness, dark forested hills, surrounded by ocean quickly melted away to reveal the complexities and contradictions. The name Solomons seemed the one thing held in common. It was an umbrella in whose shade each island throbbed with its six or seven distinctive languages, its discreet groups with varying customs, beliefs and traditions.

The people too of many migrations of different eras, varied from place to place. Some lived amicably with their neighbours, others like those of the West, revelled in inter-village warfare and raids. The salt-water people of Malaita lagoons were necessarily seafarers of wide ecological knowledge and skills. But in the hills of the larger islands lived bush tribes who had never wet their feet in the waves.

It was soon enough that those at Sura knew that they must first become seamen if they were to become effective apostles. Concurrently they had to master the language of their listeners, if they were to understand and be understood.

We hear little enough about the Fijian 'catechists' in the first days of Sura. They are a silent presence, and a group to be respected. Two or three always accompanied Fr Rouillac on his ship sharing the basics of navigation. Others helped in Fr Bouillon's little school. Malaita men, when they dropped in occasionally, must have been impressed by these distant relations, for the Fijians had undergone an excellent 2-year training in Wairiki. We can imagine the respect they inspired and instilled in the Guadalcanar pikininis. There would also be a sprinkling of Fijian children, for among the second Fijian group of catechists were families, wives and children.
accompanying their husbands. In 1899, malaria, until then under reasonable control, attacked the Rua Sura community with dire results. No one escaped it, as we read from Rouillac's letters, but the Fijians seemed particularly vulnerable.

It was probably cerebral malaria which made one in a fit of temporary insanity attempt to jump off the rigging of a ship into the sea, so that he had to be forcibly prevented by his companions. There was a suggestion that after this group was repatriated, no more Fijians should be asked to come. It would appear there was a moratorium on their coming for a year or two. But in 1903 Fr Bertreux brought a group of older men, whose names are often mentioned in the Fijian TALANOA, or later on, in Solomons' own periodical TURUPATU.

In TALANOA of August 1904, we read:

Please pray constantly for the Solomonese. The light is growing, but there is still a good deal of ignorance and darkness. Last month another man was speared. The bush men killed him. The coastal people were then very angry, and their warriors went up and shot at the bushmen. They killed two, and cut off their heads. They later danced for joy in the water. We don't know what's going to happen next. The name of the place where the chief was speared was Malaked, near the priest's house at Avuavu. Iosefo Rasiga.

There was also Brother Venasio, who was not a Fijian was born in Malaita. When a boy, he sailed away on a ship with a mane sere to work on his plantation at REWA, FIJI. In Fiji, the boy came in contact with Catholic mission, was instructed and baptised. Later he joined the Little Brothers of Mary. When he heard that Bishop Vidal was going to take Marists to start a Catholic mission there, he asked if he too might go with the Bishop in order to help convert his Malaita one-talks. He arrived in 1899, on Vidal's second trip to Rua Sura.
He often accompanied Fr Rouillac on his boat trips to Savo, Loqu and Tangarare. He longed to go to Malaita, but so far the mission had not reached there. Venasio also helped to teach the children at Sura their catechism, (published in Gari language in 1901..Fr Bouillon's work). Though a healthy and hard working man, Venasio succumbed to malaria, and about 1904 he died at Sura. He offered, as he died, his pain and disappointment for the conversion of his people in Malaita, so Fr Bertreux's letter tells us.

YEAR OF HOPE 1900

'It is my dear and firm conviction that this mission will succeed,' wrote Rouillac. He had landed at Loqu, and gives a glowing account of what he sees. Rouillac was feeling happy. After a trip round Guadalcanal on his beloved ECLIPSE, he is on his last lap to home sweet Sura. 'No one was sea sick. The youngsters on board were a lively and bright bunch, singing and having a great time.' Despite the deafening racket, Rouillac wrote of this moment of grace, 'This looks good. This modest start seems to have Our Lady's blessing. Let's hope that this is the embryo of the future church in the Solomons.'

Indeed a renewal of hope came with the first year of the new century. During Rouillac's voyage several incidents lifted his heart. In Tangarare district, a blind chief came asking to stay with the missionaries. At Longu, some parents begged him to take children to school at Suva. A plantation already started at Moli gave promise of food for the future. There a further piece of land was purchased, for things were going well there too. JOSEPH LEGAL, the ex-convict from New Caledonie had been supervising the planting of coconuts for the mission. Rouillac was surprised and pleased with the result. Joseph was respected and well-liked by the people. Rouillac remembered
when he had taken the poor fellow, a lump of malarial misery to Rua Sura the year before, and how Joseph, healed, had asked to work for the mission. 'He has never been so happy in his life,' Rouillac now writes as he sees his good work at Moli.

Early in February, a new missionary turned up. He was waiting at Aola and surprised Rouillac who had come for the cargo. The newcomer was Fr Ferdinand GUILLOUX. Rouillac, impressed with the cheery newcomer, decided to put Guilloux's seamanship to the test. On a forty day journey aboard the ECLIPSE, he experienced squalls and an equatorial sun, torrential rain, and alarming landings. But he also met people, joked with them, despite his lack of language, mourned the death of a chief at Ovi, joined in building operations gardening at Loqu, and soon had a trail of youngsters following in his wake. Rouillac was well pleased with the new confrere.

Back at base Rouillac swings into a mood of optimism:

The station at Sura looks prettier every day and is full of promise. The coconuts planted by Fr Bouillon look healthy and we have started native food gardens. Large patches of sweet potatoes are flourishing, thanks to recent rains. Our little school is bubbling with keenness and good will.

To everyone's surprise, the Resident Commissioner approved the purchase of a piece of land at Marau by Catholic Mission. Rouillac notes that the Resident Commissioner also 'expressed the wish that Guadalcanal be evangelised exclusively by us.' Rouillac does not mention whether this wish was conditional. Charles Woodford was a believer in the concept of mission Comity. (15) Though Catholic mission never agreed with this policy, it was happy enough when it occurred in its favour.
It was while still in his mood of optimism that Rouillac wrote of the mission:

Our ship sails well like the wind.... Anyone familiar with sailing knows that this does not necessarily mean swiftly, but rather, capriciously.

The historian Tippett has commented on the strategy of early Catholic mission in its gaining a foothold on Guadalcanal. In fact, Tippett's barbed praise is unfounded. On this island, the spread of Catholic faith owed far more to chance than to planning. If much space has been spent in describing the pioneer missionaries, it is precisely to make this point. This early era of trial and error, of small triumphs and large disasters was necessary prelude to the scrambled unity that emerges from chaotic beginnings.

At Sura about a hundred men are working. Receiving food and wages, low wages, it is true for the mission is poor, but the objective is to become self-supporting. Some of the men have already worked on sugar-plantations in Queensland for higher wages. Do they come simply for the enjoyment of social life, a good pipe to smoke? or is there something beyond?

TANGARARE

Before Christmas, a piece of land was bought near Dumu. It was the head man Bili who arranged the sale, and welcomed the two Fijian catechists who came to get acquainted with the people of the district. In June 1900 Frs Guilloux and Guitet were appointed to set up a mission there. With his genial confre in charge, Fr Guitet regained the confidence he had lost at Avuavu. Together the two shared the ebb and flow of launching into the deep. Together they rejoiced at the first class of boys, learning the truths of the catholic faith which they sang to the tunes of French madrigals. Together grieved when that promising class one day was no longer there.
Together they learned through trial and error that too much rain rotted the root crops that fed the class, who would rather be home than go hungry.

The people continued to be supportive. The headman Bili was ever at hand sending his helpers with bananas, yams and pana to plant. He sent boys to help with building. Soon a group of youth had gathered round the two priests, who joined them digging the ground, cutting sticks to support the growing yams, fishing by day, and by night catching turtle at new moon.

Meanwhile Rouillac was having his disappointments. When ECLIPSE first went on the rocks in January 1901, the ship was badly damaged. The story of how Rouillac with a Fijian crew and four Solomon boys sailed the crippled ship to Queensland, and thence down the coast to Sydney, is epic. In Sydney, the voyage was hailed as a triumph of navigation, and Rouillac and his sailors enjoyed the acclaim. The four boys were baptised by Archbishop Moran and Rouillac managed to bring back the repaired ECLIPSE to Solomons by August.

At Tangarare the malaria season had come. There were delays in building as workers fell sick. Sudden deaths were not infrequent, for malaria is no respecter of persons. Few escaped its fevers and subsequent states of lethargy. Again Fr Gultet seemed unable to shake off the ‘low fever’ which today’s doctors call ‘drug-resistant’. Fr Guilloux missed his confrere when he was sent for medical treatment to Sydney and Fiji.

Tangarare was not the first mission in Guadalcanal, nor was it the headquarters. But it was to become in a sense, the heart of Guadalcanal Catholicism. Tangarare’s Gari-speaking people make up the largest linguistic group in the island. Many aspects of its social organisation, its traditions and its religious beliefs are shared by other societies in Guadalcanal.
The first Marists in Guadalcanar were not professional anthropologists, nor were their first neophytes ready to formulate their ideologies. The fragmentary knowledge gradually picked up and learned by experience and discussion would remain a rather piece-meal treasury, till mid-century specialists emerged from among islanders and missionaries alike to ask the right questions.

Rouillac on ECLIPSE, in transit at Tangarare in March found the district in mourning for their headman, Bill, who had just died. It was he who had approved the sale of land to the missionaries at Dumu, near Tangarare. 'He was hardly middle-aged,' wrote Rouillac. 'Feared and respected by all, he had appointed himself our protector.' Sudden death is not rare in Solomon Islands, but this illness which in two days caused his death was a shock to Rouillac. He had heard of the 'Vele', and of other forms of sorcery, but had not yet encountered an example of it. He knew that the death of a healthy person was often attributed to the disfavour of a foe, or to that of a slighted ancestral spirit. He had also seen in the deaths of two Fijian catechists, the swift effects of cerebral malaria. He now comments on the cause of Bill's demise:

Several people have suggested to me that jealousy may not be ruled out as the source of the illness which in two days caused his death. There could well have been some element of sorcery involved. That is their explanation when a strong man is snatched away without apparent cause. Bill was well disposed towards us. When he felt that his end was near, he called his successor and asked him to take care of us, as he had done himself.

Newly arrived Father Pellion was appointed to Tangarare to aid Fr Guilloux. He found about 40 catechumens gathered, learning as they worked with Fr Guilloux, whose 'bright temper, good humour and infectious high spirits led him to be with them as much as possible'. The children who had run away now began to come back to school. A letter written by
him in April 1902 tells of his pleasure when some were baptised and had received their First Communion. "God, you see, is pleased to bless our efforts....he sends us consolation for he pities our weakness. He knows that we have need of small joys so that we won't let discouragement overwhelm us." He looked forward to hearing from Guitet. A letter from Fiji arrived. It announced the death of his former co-worker.

For Guilloux, the bereavement simply moved him to even greater ardour as pastor. He wrote soon afterwards;

> It seems that the moment of providence has truly come for our Solomonese. The action of God's grace among these souls is visible, even one might say, tangible. Just a year ago the majority of these people regarded our religion as a bad thing. Our presence, they said, attracted the anger of their spirits. So it was not without fear that they came to us. We looked on them then as being far from the moment of baptism, but the good God wants to show us that, after all, our action counts for little in the conversion of a soul.

The two Fathers were assisted in their teaching by Br Venasio, the Mala man who had become a Little Brother of Mary in Fiji, and Benedito, a Fijian catechist. It is probable too that Aloisio Alokwao, also a Mala man and his wife Veronika were supervisors of the gardens and kitchens at this time. Tangarare was beginning to stand on its feet.

A visit from Rouillac in his now famous ECLIPSE was an event. On the last day of April the ship bobbed on the horizon. The children yelled with excitement awaiting its arrival on the morrow. But tomorrow's bay was empty of schooner. What had caused the delay? Round mid-morning, some breathless runners arrived with the news: 'The ECLIPSE is in trouble. The schooner is wrecked on the reef.'

It was true. The proud ECLIPSE had run aground. A strong south-westerly had flung it against reefs. The anchor chain
broke, the breakers lifted the drifting vessel, dashing it onto a rocky outcrop where it caught fast. The crew, including the skipper, Rouillac, managed to get ashore.

The ECLIPSE, Rouillac's pet, in the stormy days following, refused to budge. The Anglicans of Maravovo, hearing of the plight of their Catholic neighbours, sent their stronger SOUTHERN CROSS to the rescue, but even their might failed to dislodge the vessel. With impatient resignation, Rouillac awaited calmer weather and had sent a message to Tulagi in the hope that some more powerful ship might come to their aid.

Towards the end of the May, Guilloux decided to try at least to get provisions from the stranded vessel. Benedito, the Fijian and two local boys went in the canoe with him. But nearing the rocks, not far from the damaged ship, they were suddenly swamped by a wave, which capsized the canoe. Benedito struggled to right it, while the boys began swimming towards the beach. The sea was choppy, but Tangarare men are strong swimmers. The Fijian noticed however that Fr Guilloux was caught in a current that swept away from the shore. He struck out after the priest, but becoming exhausted, let himself float. Benedito was later flung on the reef, half-alive, whence the boys brought him ashore. Some hours later, the battered body of the young priest was found on the sand, returned by the current which had carried him away. (17)

At Tangarare, 'the death of Fr Guilloux, however dreadful it might appear to those with whom he had worked, was, we may assert, the starting point of conversion in the district of Tangarare,' Fr Raucaz was later to write. Before the end of the year, the first two married adults were baptised, the man taking the name Ferdinado, after Fr Guilloux's patron. Thereafter in the next two years several villages asked for instruction leading to Baptism. Chapels were built by the
people in many villages. 'From that date', wrote Fr Raucaz, 'there was no halting till the whole district was Christian.'

Not only in the Solomons did the early death of Fr Guilloux have repercussions. In Italy a young diocesan seminarian read an account of the drowning of the missionary in the Solomons. Making a resolution to take his place, he joined the Society of Mary, and in 1909 with a dozen other Marists, left Europe for Oceania. His request was granted and his first posting was to Tangarare, where, apart from 6 years at Visale, he would spend most of his missionary days.

TANGARARE....WOMEN AND SISTERS....

Fr Bertreux wrote to his Superior General at the end of 1904:

It gives me joy to tell you at last of the conversion of a number of Solomonese women. Six months ago, there was only one in our little group of faithful, and that was Sesilia, a poor slave bought for fifty francs from a cruel master. Today more than a hundred women and girls are learning their catechism and prayers. The number of conversions among the men has been about 300 since the beginning of the year.

It was earlier that year that Sisters Irenee and Bartolemy TORM had arrived. (18) The Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Mary had originated when a daring Frenchwoman in 1845 had decided to go to the missions. Her aim had been simply to aid the Fathers by teaching the women a little about God. The Marist priests and brothers were handicapped in being male. The custom of that isle forbade females to approach these holy men, or even to listen to their instruction. They wrote begging for a woman to come to their aid. Francoise Perroton had travelled on Captain Marceau's ARCHE D'ALLIANCE, on the same journey that had brought Frs Collomb, Grey and Villien to the Pacific and to Makira. She herself worked for the rest of her days in Wallis and Futuna.
The venture of Francoise Perroton had inspired a small band of other like minded women who, during the next fifty years would be auxiliaries to the Marists in the Pacific, in their apostolate with the women. The story of their efforts to achieve pontifical recognition as religious is told elsewhere. It is likely that Sr Irenée, fresh from Brittany and Fiji, was unconcerned about such matters for her hands were full at that moment with sick babies and mammas hopeful for help. Sr Bartolemy would not live the thirty years that would see the sisters approved by Rome as religious Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, or more popularly called Marist Missionary Sisters.

In a letter written in December, 1904 Bertreux mentions the sisters who had come to Tangarare. The station consists as yet of several leaf houses, which serve as chapel, class rooms, boys' and girls' dormitories, Fathers' house. There is also a timber house, built in Guilloux's time as a house for the Fathers. This has now been given to the Sisters. They have been acclimatising. Father Duclos, Visitator of the Marists in the Pacific also went to Tangarare. He wrote:

I went to see the two sisters of the Third Order of Mary, here now for several months. They came to start a class for young girls, and since its commencement they are filled with hope. I found the good sisters full of courage and lively with a devotion which outmeasures their physical strength. Needless to say, they too have had to pay 'like everyone else, the price as passport to this place, with its debilitating climate and its periodic attacks of malaria.'

VISALE CAPE ESPERANCE 1904.

It was Kokobi himself who had walked to Lambi Bay and canoed to Tangarare to ask the missionaries to come to his region, about 20 miles north. In time, it was Fr Pellion who in response to Kokobi's invitation, came with a few boys to build a leaf house on the white coral beach at Visale. It was a
pleasant harbour with steep hillsides, sloping from the shore, with flats of garden land close by.

Kokobi, Headman and ancient hunter of human game, and the young priest became friends from the beginning. Pellion, fresh from Gari-speaking Tangarare was fortunate to be able to converse with the old chief from the outset. He was impressed by Kokobi's curiosity to know more of the Christian notion of God. To Pellion, this was the more surprising since Kokobi had told him that he was a high priest and devotee of Tsopi, the spirit protector of Visale. (19)

Tsopi's shrine was on Pupuraka, a mount close by Visale, at whose foot nestled a seashore village. From long before the days of Sulukavo, the headman told the missionary, Tsopi had been worshipped with a yearly sacrifice and celebration. When Pellion dedicated the mission of Visale to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he told Kokobi, who never ceased to question the priest for more understanding. He was quite prepared to have father teach the young people the new lotu, he declared, but of course he himself had his own commitments to Tsopi.

The little school begun by Pellion soon attracted boys from Savo, and later from Cape Marsh, for Visale was a harbour common to both neighbouring isles. The Tangarare teachers were kept busy, and the Visale youth were willing helpers as well as learners. More classrooms and a little chapel arose from the clearings. In 1906 Sr Irenee was invited to Visale by the wives of Kokobi and a little later had begun a school for girls there.

**SAVO**

In 1908, the seven chiefs of Savo presided over about a thousand people. Some of these had become Christian.
Others, like Torolala were loyal to their traditional beliefs. Yet all, Christian and pagan alike, were pleased to have a priest resident in their isle. That priest was 'old man' Fr Bouillon (he was a venerable fifty-four), gave them even greater cause for joy. He had been sent to Sydney a few months previously to be treated for eczema, and now on his return, Savo was regarded as the ideal place for delicate feet. Rather than walk the jagged volcanic rock that formed tracks between villages, he was able to paddle his canoe from place to place, around the circle of coastline. About five miles in diameter, Savo with its fertile volcanic soil was a self-sufficient kingdom. Its healthy food gardens, its boiling springs and its megapode birds, whose eggs hatched in the warm sand gave its people a proud independence.

Fittingly Fr Bouillon could write, 'I am the richest man in the world - I have six castles on Savo.' At each stopping place, the villagers had built him a leaf hut, complete with bamboo bed and empty case to sit upon. Though an itinerant, Fr Bouillon made his base at Kalaka, the village directly facing Visale looking south. At night one can see from Kalaka, across the passage, village fires winking along the Guadalcanar coast.

The language of Savo was non-Austronesian of an ancient migration, and it bore no trace of resemblance to that of Gari, by now adopted as the official teaching language of Catholic mission. But Bouillon was a linguist and spent evenings in studying the intricacies of grammar and the old vocabulary till he had mastered it. Perhaps it was from this 3 year sojourn in Savo, that some of its peculiarly individual customs have come. When instructed in the importance of the Lenten preparation of fast and prayer for the Paschal season, Savo people understood that Friday was a Fish-day in the Roman calendar. They therefore proceeded to make Lenten Thursdays penitential days of fishing, while Friday became the feast day of
the week, with all manner of fish on the menu. This quaint custom survived into the fifties and perhaps beyond.

Torolala of Sisiaka, though a determined pagan, gave encouragement to his people to learn the new 'lotu' though not wishing to do so himself. Other headmen were happy to discuss the teachings of Jesu Kristo with Fr Bouillon and to allow their children have classes with the old man. Both priest and Savo people missed one another when in 1911 Pellion asked Bouillon to assist him at Visale.

Fr Bouillon had already heard of Tsopi, protecting spirit on Pupuraka. He knew of the once traditional festival that took place during the sixth moon of each year, of the procession up the hill, of the music and dancing that went on till sunrise, and of Kokobi's role as high priest. The story of Kokobi's painful struggle between his loyalty to Tsopi, and his attraction to Jesu Kristo, he also knew. Kokobi's conversion would have meant the loss of his long-held status and power, the fear of revenge from evil spirits, the probable wrath of his people if Tsopi withheld his usual gifts of fertility and affluence. It was not only Jacob who wrestled with an angel to prevail with God. However the old warrior was not wanting in courage. Perhaps all his life had prepared him for this grave decision. He went in fear and trembling to Fr Pellion.

When he was at last baptised, Kokobi threw all his energy into the building of the stone church that made Visale famous. The people had gathered stones from river and beach, the cement was made from coral lime and sand. The Visale church was opened amid much celebration and rejoicing in 1910. Chiefs such as Torolala from Savo; Samu from Tangarare, and Sulukavo, now a devoted Christian, all came to add splendour to the occasion.

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INVITATION TO THE WEST

Bertreux had much to contend with: malaria, shipping trouble, shortage of personnel and always a nostalgia for the greener field of Fiji. It is probable that he preferred not to be involved in that 300 mile scatter of isles and lagoons west of the Visale sunset, beyond which at a further remove of 300 miles, Poporang housed the nearest Marist community.

True the Cape Marsh people paddled their canoes to Visale, but they were friendly. Not so, that wide region beyond, whose inhabitants still prided themselves in their reputation as converted anthropopagists and sons of headhunters. Bertreux felt that his hands were full with more immediate problems. So he was not thrilled by several requests from expatriate traders in New Georgia (or Rubiana as its region was called) inviting the Catholic missionaries to establish a post in their midst. 'For some time the settlers of Roviana have been writing to Fr Bertreux asking for missionaries. This request was not taken seriously. Most of these were Protestants, and only wanted our presence to counteract the influence of the Wesleyans,' it was alleged.

It was not until a small group of people themselves asked for a Catholic mission, that Bertreux reluctantly sent Frs Louis Raucaz and Jules Vigne on a quick reconnaissance, to assess the feasibility of such a venture. They took advantage of the monthly steamer from Sydney to Bougainville to make the trip. During 2 days travelling to Gizo, Raucaz wrote to his brother: (1)

Here it is like another world. Strictly speaking it is more of an archipelago than an island. The main island, New Georgia, is a fairly level stretch running from SE to NW. To left and right, there are hundreds of tiny isles, all fertile, truly bouquets of palm on the ocean.
The two landed at Gizo where the various traders had assembled for the arrival of the steamer. They were pleased to see them. Raucaz tells how one of them immediately lent a little canoe such that 'in two days, we were able to look at different places, to visit the principal chiefs and to ensure that they are not opposed to our coming.'

Raucaz's enthusiasm may have induced Bertreux's decision to start a station in the west. Within two months, Fr Vigne first, followed soon by Fr Raucaz, were back at Gizo. The missionaries were welcomed by Mr Norman Wheatley, the trader who had been so hospitable on their first visit. He took them aboard his ship, made an 8 hour trip to Roviana, and put at their disposal a small boat and a tiny islet, Himbi which he owned.

'Mr Norman, who has been in the country over 25 years, gave us the most generous hospitality; we are at home with him. Only one thing was wanting: we were unable to celebrate Holy Mass.' With their five helpers, assisted by some of Wheatley's labourers, they soon had their dwelling completed: 'It is not a palace. It's a leaf house 6 metres long and 5 wide, divided into chapel, workroom, dining room and a bedroom for us and our youngsters.

At last Mass could be celebrated. Raucaz was exuberant. The islet of Himbi was small indeed, intended to be a temporary launching pad. Raucaz, man of vision, but ever ready to hammer dream into reality, is soon assessing the situation:

The islet on which we are living is too small for a permanent station. I hope in time to be able to purchase a somewhat larger area. Then it will be necessary to have a strong motor boat to visit the different parts of the island which altogether is nearly 200 km long. I would like to do this as soon as possible for the Wesleyans are fidgeting.... One of the first things
I intend doing is to build a church, a pretty little church, a presbytery, a convent, a school house each for girls and boys...

No gallant steed, champing at the bit, ever had a smaller field in which to gallop. 'We are like vegetables on our tiny island,' he writes to Procure in February 1912.' To the two missionaries, inaction is far more painful than failure. Their 12 foot whale-boat was scarcely adequate for missionary trips. Fr Bertreux had not made his promised visit, and was reluctant to allow JOAN OF ARC to take them supplies. There seemed 'no chance of getting land. We have the Wesleyans against us, with the Resident at Gizo in their wake.' (20)

Yet they did not waste time: the children were already repeating the Lord’s Prayer and Ave Maria in Rublania language. One consolation was the purchase of a mission ship, HAMBIA (Morning Star in Rublania language). It was the sole reminder of the failed attempt.

Raucaz, was deeply disappointed when Resident Commissioner Woodford gave the final blow to his hopes. He would allow no land sale to take place to the Catholic mission, as far as New Georgia was concerned. However, no time was wasted in replning. With Teytard, Raucaz returned, ready to take over a new station in Langalanga lagoon, Malaita. Teytard was sent to help Jean Colcaud at Rohinari, protected by the notorious warrior, Harisimae.

VISALE

At Visale, all the people round the coast were mourning the deaths of their old chief, Josepo Kokobi and their young priest Joseph Pellion. Yet the mourning was not completely sorrowful. Everyone knew that God had blessed them both and that the God of christians had replaced the benevolent deity Tsopi generously. For the yams continued to thrive, the
pigs to proliferate, the turtles and fish to abound. As the 'lotu' had increased at Visale, a sign on Easter Day, after the church blessing, had confirmed it.

On that Sunday while all the villagers were celebrating Mass, the old Tsopi of Pupuraka decided to take his leave. With a low rumble and a clight earth tremor, a landslide rippled down Pupuraka's steep slopes. Trees and stones fell with it over the village and gently into the sea. After the event, everyone saw it as Tsopi's farewell. The memory of it was celebrated for forty years in song and dance and has passed into the folklore of Visale's church history.

VICARIATE APOSTOLIC OF SOUTH SOLOMONS

In June 1912, Fr John-Ephrem Bertreux was appointed first Vicar Apostolic of South Solomons. Fr Pavese with his flair for drama, records the moment of his return to Rua Sura after his consecration in France. 'Alas, he was welcomed with tears, even as his ship cast anchor. JUXTA CRUCEM TECUM STARE! It was the cross of the many crosses already his that greeted him, sombre and austere as the mountains and coral reefs. News of the death of two missionaries awaited him.'(21)

Once he had taken off his robes and mitre, he was the same quiet leader as he had been during the previous ten years, patient, kind and a little slow to take advice and risks. Theoretically, his vicariate stretched from the eastern outer isles of Santa Cruz across the 800 miles to the west, where the straits of Bougainville became part of the sister vicariate of North Solomons. In reality and especially since the Rubiana sorties has proved futile, his field of action was confined to the islands of San Cristoval, Guadalcanar and Malaita. He regarded these places of mission with mixed feeling: in San Cristoval, the young woman Selina had virtually converted her village. It was
a head start for any mission. But would others be receptive to
the Word as those of Selina's village, Kahua? It was a question
that the missionaries of Wainoni would answer in the course of
time.

Looking back the Bishop could review a decade of activity, if
not of progress. At Avuavu there had been a succession of
priests, Frs Guitet, Menard, Vigne, Chatelet, Babonneau,
Bouillon each of whom had spent several months before
succumbing to the sickness of that swampy area - malaria, black
water fever, dysentery. But Aloisio Alukwao, faithful Malaita
man and his wife Veronika, later joined by helpers from
Tangarare, were the guardians and evangelists of the period.
The school and gardens were kept going and the succession of
Marists were always encouraged and edified by Alukwao's
devotion.

Bishop Eperemo, as he was known, was pleased that the couple
who had already adopted a niece of Alukwao had now taken
another child as their own, thus saving the infant from burial in
the sand on Avuavu Beach. This young Emilio accompanied
the family to Wainoni Bay when Fr Babonneau had opened a
mission there in 1909. He could be pleased also that finally a
sturdy young priest, from Alsace-Lorraine had taken up
residence and promised to be of a more permanent nature than
his predecessors. Fr Jean-Marie BOUDARD (1881-1956)
scorned the fevers and swamps, and revelled in mountain
climbing to the bush villages. By his cheery determination and
strength he was to become the apostle of Avuavu, forty years
among the weather coast people.

Another occasion of rejoicing was when in 1909 the mission
ship JOAN OF ARC arrived. With its captain, Toma Lenox
from Fiji, seaman Enoke and an efficient crew of Solomon
Islanders, it would do many years of service for the Catholic mission. The Bishop was pleased too in his investment of a printing press for Rua Sura. Already with its by monthly newsletter, TURUPATU, it was a wonderful means of literacy, adult education in Christian knowledge, and a means of exchange of ideas among its readers. An Australian lay missionary, George Dwyer, had taken over operations, later becoming a brother of the Society of Mary and as we know now, he too was to spend thirty years at this work, training many local lads into the skills of printing. (22)

These fortunate events counterbalanced the disappointments in failures of missionary life. The Bishop may have sighed in later days as he thought of Malaita. The church seemed certainly to have got itself involved with and been befriended by bloodthirsty warriors and wanted murderers. Well, he had learned to leave that in the capable hands of the two brothers, Jean and Donasiano Coicaud. After all, Christ was accused of hobnobbing with publicans and prostitutes.

By 1915 Tangarare had become the region of the largest number of baptised. The church building was enlarged by willing Catholics to hold 800 to 900 people. Village chapels abounded, each vying to outdo the others, and there was a fervour among the faithful that showed itself in generosity and a willingness to be missioned to other areas. In 1918 five families went to the neglected land of San Cristobal, to assist Fr Babonneau in evangelising. Other teachers went to Russell Islands and others still to Rohinari, forming the vanguard of Mala's catechists.

TURUPATU of this era records a Tangarare happening. At Christmas the Taovia of Ravu, Samu-Tupolia was about to die. An old time heathen Chief, he now sent a message asking Fr Pavese to come that he might baptise him. Fr Pavese arrived.
Samu told him that he had decided to take one of his wives only and to send the rest home to their families. The priest briefly instructed the old man on the truths of the Creed then as he lay dying, he gave him the four sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Matrimony and Extreme Unction. After that, the old Chief sat up, thanked the father, and lived a holy life for five more years. He, losepo-Marla Samu-Tupolla, died in 1924.

As for Rua Sura itself, it appeared to be a prosperous settlement. Copra production was thriving. It helped support over a hundred people, mission personnel, plantation labourers, Fijian catechists and their families, as well as Jack Newman (a retired alcoholic from Savo), two or three ex-convicts from New Caledonia and of course numerous children.

The death at Sura in 1919 of the first Vicar Apostolic came as no surprise. For several years his frequent attacks of malaria had diminished his health. Some of his confreres used to say that he had left his heart in Fiji where he had toiled for twenty-four years. During his seven years of episcopate, Bishop Jean-Ephrem Bertreux (1853-1919) had agonised over his small flock, but was criticised for having achieved little.

The criticism was a little unfair. History like a hovering frigate bird can see wider perspectives than do those limited by proximity to the then and there. It had been a decade of pioneering and blazing a trail is not a matter of trimming primrose paths. That two foundations were made on Mala and one sustained in San Cristobal was no mean achievement. That a delegation of Russell Islands labourers had come to Visale to request catechists to instruct them, was a pleasing surprise. That Solomon Islanders themselves were becoming mission-minded says much for the training, often blamed but apparently sound, that they received at Sura. The war on the other side of the globe left missionaries not only bereaved but
also without reinforcements. In the decade following 1911, nine missionaries and several catechists had died, and two priests had left the Marists. (23)

Bishop Bertreux then had been the right man for Sura, the launching pad for mainland missions. His efforts, often halted by sickness and indecision, had planted seeds for a future expansion. The printing press with its widely read Turupatu, his courses for married catechists, his role as 'pater familias' to the large rag-tag groups at Rua Sura, testify to this. His grave at Sura lost its cross to a bombing during the battle for Guadalcanal. But it remains today a memorial to his aspirations, and those of his co-workers, fathers, brothers, sisters and catechists with families, whose graves lie under the coconuts close by.

Fr Rouillac had once said that the infant mission was sailing like the breeze, capriciously. He might now have well said that Bishop Bertreux had set the small ship steadily on course.
ENDNOTES

1 Laracy, Marists and Melanesians, p 41.
2 Brothers Aristide Brun, Charles Vincent, Claude Besselles, trained in La Hermitage (as also Br Hyacinthe Chatelet who died in San Cristoval) all worked subsequently as teaching Brothers (FMS) in New Caledonia.
3 E. Docker. The Blackbirders p246.
4 Bishop Redwood’s letter, 1890. APM OSM
5 G. Delbos. The Mustard Seed.
6 R. Wittgen. A Difficult Mission.
7 Vidal to Morel. c. 1897 PMB 208, nos 21, 28, 29.
8 The two islets previously belonged to the Thibo tribe landowners and it was through Vulea that Captain Sam Keating had made his purchase.
9 Captain Keating was accidentally killed aboard ship in 1899.
10 Bouillon Letters to Procure.
11 Felix Pieux, a seminarian who had done medical studies, had been persuaded by Vidal that by going to Solomon Islands he would be doing invaluable service to the mission.
12 Bouillon.
13 TALANOA, No 112. Nov. 1901 OMPA Suva
14 L to P from Gultet, October 1899
15 COMITY in mission parlance: delineated spheres of influence for specific denominations e.g. Ysabel for the Anglicans.
16 Australian Catholic Record c. 1903 records the baptism by Moran of the 4 boys baptised Petero, Iosepo, Fransisko Saverio and Patrick
17 Death of Guilloux, account by Pellion. Raucaz, p 134.
18 Srs Irene and Bartelemy TORM. Annales de la Propagation de la Foi.
19 Guy de Bigault. Drames de Salomonais.
20 Raucaz. Letter to Procure, p 126

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21 Deaths of Fr Pellion SM at Visale and Sr Salome TORM at Avuavu.

22 George Dwyer (1892-1957) lay missionary printer at Rua Sura, became SM Brother in 1919, and continued in mission printery, producing Turupatu and training boys Januario, Melkioire, Roberto and others as printers.

23 Frs Guitet, Guilloux, Pellion, Bertet, Bertheux, Teytard, Allet and Srs Salome, Pierre and Bartelemy. Frs Chatelet and Vigne left the SM.
Where Dominicans are in the Western Solomons
Headhunting was central to the religious and social activities of the New Georgia people. It necessitated the building of large war-canoes, the manufacture of weapons, the preparation of feasts and the performance of rituals; all of which increased social cohesion and pride. It promoted martial skills, nautical ability and leadership.

JIM BOUTILIER

Tanutanu means 'maker' and must have been the Alu's natural awareness of a creator. The concept slipped easily into the Christian idea of God. A story I have often heard is from the Aleang and Pirumeri people: Tanutanu was a chief's son. A rival envied the child and poisoned him with a stake embedded in a sand beach where the child played. After his death he would communicate with the Pirumeri people at a tree near the village. The Tanutanu tree still stands but it is very tabu. In one of his communications Tanutanu said, 'There is another son of a chief who like me, was killed. His men will come to Pirumeri. His sign is a cross. Receive them well.' The villagers put a cross at the entrance of the village. When the Marists came in 1899, they were surprised by the cross and by the acceptance they received. Father Boch used to tell the people that they were Christians before the missionaries came.

FATHER MAURICE KEATING OP

HEADHUNTING 1890s

In the grand old head-hunting days, as the grandfathers used to recall, there were none more feared than the warriors of the Bougainville straits... the men of the west. The carved 'nguzu nguzu' staring cold eyed from the prow of each war-canoe was symbol of their ruthless power. The small human head nestling beneath its equine jaw represented the hope of returning with fortyfold. It was a fitting symbol for a proud and powerful chiefdom trapped in overlapping boundaries.

From mid-19th century, as we have seen, the Germans, French and British had vied with one another to be first in establishing trading posts in the Pacific. Of these the Germans were the most active, first in Polynesia, later extending to Melanesia. In
1884 Germany and Britain had already made an agreement establishing spheres of influence in Melanesia for subsequent protectorates: German New Guinea, 1884 and British Solomons, 1893.

By this arbitrary division, Bougainville was separated from its sibling isles of Solomon to the south. The isles of Bougainville Straits lay midway between and this was the domain of Head Man Gorai. It was the see-saw of power on which he maintained, by adroit diplomacy, an exciting equilibrium between expatriate traders and his equally power-hungry neighbours.

Big Gorai was chief of the isle of Alu (Shortlands). Over other notable chiefs of neighbouring Isles, Goral exercised a kind of sovereignty, by sheer force of personality and a reputation as the most successful of headhunters. To be known as his friend could be an asset or a peril. For Captain Alex Ferguson of the RIPPLE, it was both. By the beginning of 1884, Ferguson was pleased to have the friendship of so powerful a patron. He could look back on several years of peaceful and profitable trading in the redoubtable Solomons, thanks to the favour of Goral. On his part, Goral, man of complex motives, favoured and trusted this honest Scot as he traded goods between the Bougainville Straits and Sydney.

But the villagers of Numanuma, coastal tribe of Bougainville, hated the head-hunting Goral with a hatred that extended to any of his friends. Alas for Ferguson. When the Numanuma saw the ship of Goral's ally in their harbour, they did not hesitate. Within a matter of moments, it is recounted, a contingent of Numanuma warriors had leapt aboard, axes swinging. The captain and most of his crew were slaughtered without delay. Some hours later, the few wounded survivors
were picked up by a passing Methodist ship and tended by Dr Brown.

The well known story was related to another friend of the Big Gorai, Dr Guppy, by Gorai himself surrounded by several of his wives. To Gorai, the sequel was the most significant part of the happening. Guppy quotes:

On hearing the news, the chief mustered his men and dispatched them in canoes under the command of his eldest son, to the scene of the massacre. The natives of the offending village were surprised and about twenty of them were killed, men, women and children 'all same man o' war', as Gorai too truly observed.

Goral continued to wield power with considerable ability and a flexible set of values into the 1890s. He died in 1894, passing on his authority and much of his shrewd wisdom to his sons who continued to exercise these qualities into the twentieth century.

Before his death, old man Goral had a dream. The gist of this dream was bequeathed to his sons and has come down through his descendants in various versions. Some strangers would come with news of a Great One. Listen to them. The sign would be one stick crossed against another. Mysterious, and as yet unravelled, the prediction was kept alive by the sons of Gorai, till some far tomorrow might bring revelation.

ISLES OF BOUGAINVILLE STRAITS

After Gorai's death in 1884, business went on as usual. His sons continued their benevolent control in the complexities of an expanding trade between Sydney and the Solomons. A few traders (i) and their families had already settled in Bougainville Straits. The German firm, Hernsheim, became their agency in
Vunapope extending its activities from Bismarck Archipelago, down to Alu (Shortlands). Since Germany had officially moved into New Guinea, it had not been slow in its initiatives. Scientists, anthropologists and linguists went side by side with traders, welcoming this newfound region as fertile field for further investigations into enlightenment.

It was more difficult for Charles Woodford, who in 1896 built his leaf house on a hill in Tulagi, as Resident Commissioner of British Solomons. His small troop of Fijian ‘police’ supported by an occasional British man o’ war did little to endear him to headmen. His stern message of ‘pacification’ proclaimed that the might of the headhunter must now give way to the mightier might of their ‘protector’.

In line with the political division, Propaganda Fide constituted two apostolic prefectures. It was reasonable that the one named Iles Salomon Meridionales (South Solomons) be entrusted to the Catholic Bishop of Fiji, recently become a British colony. Similarly, that of Iles Salomon Septentrionales (North Solomons) became the responsibility of German speaking Bishop of West (German) Samoa. Bougainville (North Solomons) had been part of German New Guinea since 1884. Thus it happened that a year after Bishop Vidal had settled his missionaries on Rua Sura, a second mission sponsored by Bishop Broyer of German Samoa, headed for Shortland Islands in the Bougainville Straits.

Was it at this point in history that the separate stories of the two territories began to diverge? Was it the more positive approach of the German colonial policy that made Bougainville the prosperous, developing land of industrious, motivated people that it would eventually become? In the century to follow, other factors would influence the course of history that differentiate the north and the south from each other. At the
end of that century, some of its own people would be asking: How did Christianity go wrong?

In March 1899, a missionary coasting along Bougainville from Vunapope, jotted notes for a letter:

A canoe appeared paddled by five men. On seeing them, my heart beat with joy ... were these to be part of our future flock? One of the men wore clothing. He spoke a few words of English. I asked him if he had been a labourer, and where. He told me he had been in Fiji. I then spoke to him in Fijian. You should have seen the way his face lit up with pleasure.

Fr Karl FLAUS ever had the happy knack of making friends. This new friend took advantage of the moment of grace to ask and receive a stick of tobacco. On small sticks is built the kingdom of God, he noted.

These first missionaries were German Marists and two Samoan catechists. They had travelled a roundabout journey from Samoa, via Sydney and Vunapope, New Guinea. By the end of March they were nearing their goal as THREE CHEERS rounded south Bougainville to see in the early dawn the silhouette of Alu. On its east coast nestled the isle Falsi and here the ship cast anchor.

Running across the beach came the English settler, Nicholas Tindal. He knew THREE CHEERS, a trader from Vunapope en route to Sydney, bringing mail and fuel. Coming on deck he was surprised to see four passengers. Two of these were obviously clerics, one of whom appeared to be ill. The other, hale and healthy, handed Tindal a letter of introduction from M Tiel, the shipping agent in New Guinea. It told Tindal that the priests were Fathers Karl Flaus and Eugene ENGLERT; the catechists were Lino and Karlo. ‘Everything you do for the
missionaries, we will regard as having been done to us,' his friend Tiel, had written.

Here is how Flaus described the encounter:

Immediately he gave us the most hearty welcome. Begging us to come to his house, he added that the whole isle was at our disposal; that he would be pleased to care for us till we had found a place to settle. This first welcome was but the prelude of a happy relationship that has not lessened since our arrival.

Indeed the Tindals played a significant part in the establishment of this first Catholic foundation in the overlapping boundary between North and South Solomons. It is fitting that history should not forget this kindly family, whose praises Fr Flaus never ceased to sing.

Monsieur Tindal is a true gentleman. Son of an admiral, Nicholas did well in his studies at Westminster College, London. It was here in Solomons that he found Mme Tindal, widow of a first marriage with three children, and here he married her. The respect he shows her and the truly paternal affection he has for her children witness to the fact that he is an honest man in every sense of the word. Though baptised protestant, M Tindal has no bigotry. The proof is that when his three beautiful children wanted to become Catholics while at Mgr Coupee's school in Nieu Pommern, he gave his full consent.

Mme Tindal was a daughter of one of the first expatriate traders, John Champion MacDonald. (3) She too had accepted her children's decision to become Catholics and it was she now, urged on by Teddy, Clara and Ethel who asked the yet hesitant Fr Flaus, if the priests would like to celebrate Mass. Fr Englert was still sick with malaria but Fr Flaus shared his delight with the three teenagers.

A room was set aside and the children joyously bustled about decorating the modest oratory. Though it was Holy Week, I celebrated this Mass, perhaps the first ever offered in this region, in the midst of a magnificence of flowers and greenery. This was but a preparation for that of Easter
Sunday, by which time Fr Englert had recovered, and the whole family attended the Mass of the Resurrection

On Good Friday, Tindal took Fr Flaus by canoe to inspect the Isle of Poporang, owned by Chief Ferguson, son of Goral. Climbing a small hill, they beheld a wide plateau, covered with lush vegetation, huge trees, and a water source, fresh and clear. Fr Flaus was enchanted by its possibility. Advised by Tindal he also looked at an alternative place on Alu mainland. Accompanied by the chief Ferguson and the 15 year old Teddy, Tindal's adopted son, Fr Flaus found this site less favourable.

Within a few days Ferguson had agreed to the sale of Poporang, and it became the property of the Catholic Mission, as Ferguson became its protector. Thanks to Tindal and his boss boy, with about 40 energetic men, a house was built on Poporang in two weeks. The boss boy had been in Queensland and could converse in English with Fr Flaus, who also knew a little. Indeed to learn the Alu language became the next objective of the missionaries. The children were surprised to see father writing some of the words they were saying. He promised to teach them. He immediately had candidates for his future 'faculte des belles lettres'.

With reason, Flaus was pleased with his little class. From early May, there were 11 pupils. The number included 7 from the family of the Chief Master, and friends of the workers. Flaus introduced the novelty of literacy. While daily increasing his knowledge of the Alu language, he worked out its orthography for his eager pupils, young apprentice builders. Each morning they spent an hour mastering the alphabet. After work finished for the day, the two Samoan catechists taught them new melodies and strange words. They were soon singing O Salutaris and Tantum Ergo as well as a variety of Samoan hymns.
Taro, yam, sweet potato, bananas, a whole variety of food was brought to the missionaries and their pupils by Tindal, ever concerned for their welfare. He also brought two youths from Choiseul and five from Bougainville. Other learners came from the homes of the chiefs, Ferguson and Ouari, so that the number had soon reached 30.

On 31 July, Monseigneur Broyer of Samoa arrived. He brought from Sydney a cargo of provisions, and a great load of timber, Australian ironbark for building a permanent house. With much excitement, the young people helped unload and carry the cases up the slope of Poporang to the mission site. The two chiefs lent their own boss boys to oversee building operations when the real work began.

The Marist house at Poporang was completed by early September. A procession preceded the Mass of Blessing. Already the Bishop's affability had won the people; now his splendid robes and tall stature topped by a mitre attracted such exclamation that the Chief Ferguson actually allowed his wives to come and see the grand Lalaha Bisope. This was an event hitherto unknown, for these wives were regarded as so sacred, that no one but their husband was permitted to see them.

The lengthy epistle of Flaus goes on to chronicle those early days of mission at Poporang. The next steamer brought two crates from France, gifts from the family of Father General. They contained three statues representing Our Lady of the Rosary, St Dominic and St Catherine. The people stood around, gaping at the marvel writes Flaus, 'It is beautiful! beautiful! magnificent!', the Alu words ascended to the superlative. Frs Englert and Estienne helped design and build stands fitting the magnificence. The prophetic significance of such a choice of saintly representatives would be seen by certain Alu Catholics, more
than fifty years later, when missionaries of the Dominican Order would arrive to take charge of the Western Solomons.

EARLY DAYS IN POPORANG

From all I've written so far, Reverend Father, you'll see that Providence has admirably cared for us, or rather, it is Providence that had directed everything.

Flaus lists the many blessings of the foundation: welcomes from New Guinea missionaries; the kindly family Tindal; the Shortland islanders, the friendship of their chiefs and leaders. 'We've been here scarcely six months, and already these people trust and treat us as close friends.'

His optimism is not, however, blind to the fact that there is another side of the coin. This is but the beginning, he knows. He is simply thankful that kindly people and events inspired by a kind Providence have eased the start of an undertaking that may be long and arduous.

CUSTOM AND CHANGE.

Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the peoples to change their manners, customs and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy or any other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them, but only the faith, which does not despise or destroy the manners and customs of any people.

Instructions from Propaganda Fide to Vicars Apostolic 1659

Bishop Broyer (1846-1918), practical and wise, had no delusions about the task to be faced. In his 70 days at Poporang, he saw that underlying the Shortland-Bougainville customs, from polygamy to addiction to betel-nut, there was a proud people, threatened by change and fearful of losing
power. Peace-maker in Samoa, he realised that here too, peace-making based on deep understanding, had to be the primary emphasis in Christ's message.

Peace-making demands action, and Broyer did not hesitate to begin the process during his stay. As one Big-man to another, he readily conferred with Ferguson, chief of Poporang, and with Ouari of the region nearby on Alu mainland. Between himself and each of these there grew a mutual respect, which enabled him to speak with directness and diplomacy on possible obstacles to the spread of the gospel.

Among these were the obvious social ones, headhunting, kidnapping, slavery and polygamy. Already the chiefs were angry with the British Administration. Headhunting was now being discouraged with no diplomacy. Woodford's assistant, the redoubtable Mahaffy, had been sent to the west with the specific task of wiping it out. Golden goes into detail:

The policy involved punitive raids upon offending villages wherein natives were killed or arrested, villages burned, gardens destroyed and perhaps most effective of all, the destruction of war-canoes, which not only provided means of transport, but were of themselves symbols of the strength and status of a chief. (5)

CONCERN FOR WOMEN

Bishop Broyer, pleased by other indications of progress, was however concerned at the plight of women. In a letter written on his return to Samoa, he mentions his impressions to Mother Denyse, superior of the novitiate in Lyons where women trained before becoming sisters of the Third Order of Mary. These Sisters worked in Oceania with the Marist Fathers, aiding them especially in the apostolate with women.
SR MADELINE DISPENSING MEDICINE
MISSION AT WORK
FIRST PRINTING PRESS
DUTCH MISSIONARIES who worked in Solomons from 1930 on...

BACK: EMERY DE KLERK, BR. GERARD POT
FRONT: BERNARD VAN DER WALLE,
FR. ALOIS BRUGMANS
FR. PIET VAN MECHELEN

BELOW:
Fr Ambrose O.P. and Choiseul friends
He asks Mother Denyse if she could spare some sisters to send to this new mission, so different from those in Polynesia. Kidnapped into slavery, or brought unwillingly into huge chiefly enclosures, many of the women of Bougainville Straits spent lives in misery and restriction. At least that is the way it appeared to people of other races and customs, Broyer writes.

Another reason which calls for the coming of sisters as soon as possible is that the missionary is unable to have any access whatsoever to the women.

I was over five weeks at Poporang before I saw a single female. To fill in this gap in the knowledge of our new flock, I took myself one day to see my friend Ouari, great chief of the tribe of the Pigeon in the village of Maleal. At my arrival, every man awaited me on shore, not a single woman to be seen. I asked for the Chief Ouari. His son, a handsome young man came forward and offered to take me to his father.

He went through the whole village. The women were standing around at the end of the section. Some peeped through the palm leaves which formed the partition of their shack in order to see us, but no one offered greetings. We arrived at Ouari’s dwelling. A hedge, also of palm leaves hid the entrance and divided a little courtyard in two. Behind this hedge, thirty to forty women, all wives of Ouari, were busy making pottery. I approached through this unusual opening. At the sight of a stranger, all immediately dropped their work, and raced into their house. I was grateful to Ouari, who putting his hand on my shoulder drew my attention to a splendid basket of taros which he offered me as a gift.

Thereafter, the Bishop did not hesitate to speak to the men and to the odd small girl yet at large, of his hope to send the sisters, 'holy women', who would instruct their daughters. It was not long before Mother Denyse had responded to his plea, and in 1901, two sisters arrived at Poporang. But at first the
chiefs refused to send their girls to school. 'They say that we are holy women and so we will be sure to bewitch their females and steal them away.' The sisters' first amusement ceased when time showed that the men were serious. (7)

Srs Marie-Claire ROCHETTE (1948) and Marie IGNACE SCHAAL (1959) arrived in 1901. Sr Claire, writing home, as one in the first phase of culture shock, describes even more graphically the condition of the women. She and Sr Ignace, now healed of swollen limbs, were allowed to visit the women's enclosure in the tribe of Paramata:

A huge shed, dark inside, its dirt covered with mats on which thirty to forty women of all colours crouched stagnating (pardon my word) naked to the waist; the majority having teeth red from chewing betel nut and shaggy hair bleached with lime. Poor dears, yet they are creatures made to the image of God. I was moved to tears. (8) A little later, they met the chiefess, a poor young girl about 17 years old, stolen from Bougainville. All powerful for the moment in this kingdom of misery, she thanked us for coming. She promised to come to see us and to support our pleas.

A later letter of Bishop Broyer to the Procurator in France states reasons for further concern for the Shortlands women: infanticide, kidnapping and slavery are but some of the by products of polygamy.

In Shortlands, the chiefs have sometimes ten, fifteen or twenty wives. Goral, one of the greatest high chiefs, was said to have had more than a hundred when he died in 1894. According to custom, at his death these women would have to be killed, but this polygamist was not a barbarian. Therefore, he commanded their parents to let them live and to distribute them when he should no longer be.

During my stay at Poporang, the son of this Goral was about to die. He had fifteen wives. Like his father, he granted them their lives, but he nicked the ears of each of the six youngest, just as one cuts the ears of pigs. He also wanted to cut their noses, but their parents intervened. In Bougainville, the chiefs have two or three wives at most. The children are numerous but alas, the allure of money has deafened parents to the cry of nature. They have no shame in selling these poor little tots. The day will
come, I hope, when our schools of boys and girls will be for them houses of sanctuary.

Furthermore, often these infants are stolen and sold at once in distant villages. It was in this way that Mme Tindal bought a little girl of Bougainville, and gave her as a present to the sisters. The chief Ferguson said the other day, 'We others, we old people, we have our wives, we would not know how to part with them, nor how to abandon our traditional customs. But take our children and instruct them in the faith. May the sisters hurry up and come. They can instruct the young girls and then you can marry them in the European style.'

POPORANG FIRST DECADE

The sea has a laugh and the cliff has a frown
But the laugh of the sea is wearing him down.
OLD RHYME

If, as it is often held, good can overcome evil or that the positive is more powerful than the negative, then we may, by a leap of imagination, see the eventual acceptance of Christianity in the west, as the gradual conquest of the laughter of reason over the scowl of fear. Thus Sr Claire would see the nameless slave-child quivering with fright change imperceptibly to the little Maria able to play and work in school with companions. The fathers, notably Flaus and Forestier, in those first years, were able to sit and converse not only with sons of the chief, but also with families and school children. The warriors of previous years, forced to abandon the old thrills, were at length able to take pride in other ways of employing their energies.

The women oppressed by the old custom of polygamy, the privilege and status symbol of headmanship, were at length
released from that bondage, as the chiefs began to allow their children the alternative of Christian marriage.

A letter from one of the brides to the Sisters TORM in France describes some of the outward splendour of that Christian celebration: (9)

Our Mother in France: I, Maria-Teresia, the eldest daughter of the school, I write to thank you and to ask many prayers for us that the good God will give us many graces, so that we’ll all become better and will go to heaven. It has been decided that we will get married: Agnes with Pitue of the fathers’ school; myself with Siu; Elisabeta with So Biera; Kalara with Torosi; Etienette with Ouari. All these young men have built us houses, near the church, between the fathers’ house and the sisters. We are very pleased.

After working in the plantations, we have made new clothes for our marriage. Dear Mother, when you come to Poporang, you will see our houses. Agnes was married 23 January; myself, Teresia and Etienette, on 2 February. We received Communion at Mass, and our husbands too. Afterwards we all went to dinner at the sisters’ house. It was so nice. For this great day, we sat on chairs, in front of a table, and we had a tablecloth, plates, spoons and forks. We each had a large helping of rice with some bread. We laughed a great deal. Father took our photos. After all that, father blessed our houses and the sisters helped us to settle in.

“That was all very well,’ Sr Matthieu adds, ‘but you wouldn’t believe how hard it was for Father to get from the brides their sacramental Yes. When the hand was supposed to be held out for the ring, the poor girls appeared ashamed and hid their faces.

So marriage (Christian marriage) is regarded as a goal achieved in the process of evangelisation? Two instructed, baptised Christians agree to live together and to make a family dedicated to Christ’s attitude towards life, which they still live according to traditional externals. Baptism is the initiation. Marriage is the token of a shared understanding of Christ’s life within,
ready to be shared with one’s dearest first, our children next, then with others.

The well being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life. **GAUDIUM ET SPES**

**CHOISEUL**

The larger islands of Choiseul and Isabel lie east of Bougainville Straits. For fifteen years, they were politically, part of German New Guinea. In 1899 Germany ceded these to Britain in exchange for certain trading rights in West Samoa. Though henceforth part of British Solomons, Choiseul remained within the overlapping boundaries of the apostolic prefectures of 'north' and 'south' Solomons. For the next 56 years, the Catholic mission of South Solomons would centre itself on Guadalcanal, looking eastward, while the prefecture apostolic of North Solomons, its headquarters in Poporang till 1910, would take responsibility for evangelising the isles of Bougainville Straits and Choiseul as well as its proper territory of Bougainville. The story of Bougainville Church we leave to its own historians but as Shortland and Choiseul will eventually become part of Solomon Islands, its story belongs here.

In 1903, Fr Joseph FORESTIER (1856-1918), newly appointed Apostolic Prefect, made a reconnaissance trip to Choiseul. Though Isabel was already being evangelised by Anglican missionaries, Choiseul had not as yet heard of Christianity. There are no records of this first trip beyond the fact but of the second, some time later, there is a detailed
It is written wryly by Fr Albert BINOIS (1880-1950) who obviously had it from Forestier himself.

It is a typical story of missionary non-success. This man dragging himself up the jagged cliff face is Father Forestier. With him are two Alu men, one of whom will act as Interpreter. Father’s appearance in the village at the cliff top is greeted with cries of alarm as terrified women and children run screaming into their houses. Father, almost as frightened, follows his timid Alu guides to the men’s meeting house.

Standing at the entrance, he sees all the males squatting in silence, chewing betel-nut. A chief in their midst sits so high that his head nearly touches the roof. He wears numerous bracelets, decorated with local shell coinage. Father, through his hesitant interpreter, gives the reason for his visit. He proposes to start a mission station in that area (Tambatamba). In the meantime, he would like to take some children with him so that they might begin schooling at Poporang.

There is no response whatever to the suggestion. Only a gesture is needed to break the silence, which despite the heat, is as cold as ice. In this case it was a presentation of tobacco which in Solomon Islands must always be carried around. At sight of this bribe everyone suddenly springs to life. The Chief himself, losing all sense of dignity, puts out his hand for the lion’s share. In a trice, all pipes are out of their cases, that is to say taken from the pierced lobes of ears, from which they dangle. An expert with two sticks, one hard and the other soft, rubs these together vigorously, according to the customary mode, thus producing the flame needed to kindle every fire.

The moment now seems favourable for Father to repeat his request for one or two children. The chief this time deigns to listen, and to reply loudly with a very definite ‘No!’ The poor priest, seeing his hopes vanish, can do nothing but return the way he came. While sliding down the slope to his canoe, he hears himself saying, 'Whosoever soweth tobacco, will harvest but smoke.'

In the following years several children began to attend school at Poporang. They went home with good reports, but as Fr Binois continues, ‘we learn that in a society where the word of elders
is law, that of children is of little worth.' Priests from Poporang continued to visit Tambatamba from time to time, but that was not sufficient. The Methodists already had resident pastors, who did not look favourably upon Catholics. They were even less pleased when the Government granted the Catholic mission permission to purchase a small piece of land in the Tambatamba region.

By 1914, it was high time, Fr Forestier decided, that a resident priest should be named to dwell at Tambatamba with its little group of Choiseul Catholics. Fr Joseph BERTET (1885–1914), who had worked in Poporang since 1911, was chosen. He sailed to Choiseul during the octave of the Epiphany 1914. Father Joseph, alive with joy and energy helped his eager neophytes to complete a leaf chapel. He celebrated his first Mass there, 12th January, with thanksgiving to Our Lady of Victories, to whom the mission of Choiseul had been dedicated.

His first weeks were spent in acquainting himself with his new land. Accompanied by some of the youth whom he had taught at Poporang, he made his way over hill and valley to hidden villages; along beach and shorelines, where marine turtles were hauled in from fishing boats. The language, different from that of Alu, also was learnt little by little, with his pupils' help. The novelty of things different buoyed him up over the first months. Though we have none of Bertet's letters written this year, Fr Binois gives us a glimpse.

There is every reason to believe that the young priest's faith expanded with his difficulties. How else could Father Joseph have wrestled with the devils of heathen indifference, Christian hostility and bouts of fever that were henceforth to hound him?

That Choiseul people were indifferent to Christianity at the outset, is not surprising. This was their first exposure to it, and
naturally they found it simply irrelevant. Curiosity there must have been however. For by now Tambatamba dwellers were aware of two groups of intruders: the Methodists, led by a fervent Tongan and the Catholics, represented by a few lads from Alu with a youthful Frenchman. What could Tambatambans have inferred, keen observers as they are, trained by a thousand years of survival? Did they wonder at the lack of friendliness between the groups both claiming to be followers of Christ!

Once during the year Fr Bertet boarded a passing French trading ship to visit his confreres at Poporang. In October news of the World War arrived and Fr Boch asked Bertet to return to Poporang for the time being. On his arrival, the superior, this time shocked by Bertet's condition, put him on the next steamer for Sydney to have a medical check.

A letter from Father Eugene COURTAIS SM at Hunters Hill to Fr Boch says, 'I write to give you details of the death of our dear confrere, Fr Bertet.' He had died 30 December, 1914, after a long struggle with pneumonia up till Christmas. The young priest had refused to believe that he was dying, and often spoke of his plans for the future of his little flock in Choiseul.

CHOISEUL

That little flock, strong in faith and visited occasionally from Poporang was seven years without a resident priest. It was Fr Binois who went in 1921 to Choiseul to begin his 25 year residency. Fr Maurice BOCH (1875 - 1953) and Fr Binois had both arrived at Poporang in 1907. These two were to become the cornerstones of the church in the west for the next 40 years. Fr Forestier had died (1918) and Fr Boch had
succeeded him as Prefect Apostolic of Bougainville. The headquarters had been shifted in 1910 from Poporang to Kleta, but Poporang continued to serve a devoted Catholic community in Shortlands area.

In his article, 'L'île Choiseul', Binois tells little about his own work. More significant in his eyes is the small group of strong catechists who aided him in his ministry among 800 people scattered across 100 km of Choiseul's northern coastline. Called a 'wandering Jew' by one biographer, he moved constantly from village to village along the coast, having the luxury of two leaf houses, one at each end of his trail. His never failing sense of humour heartened his confreres, one of whom wrote:

He is the possessor of two plates, a jug and two pieces of cutlery. No more can fit on his table. In place of a stove, he has a kerosene primus. His cook with some basic home science knows how to boil water and, on occasion, open a tin of jam. An empty case makes a good chair and a few bamboos a comfortable bed.

No spectacular events are recorded in his apostolate. Conversions were slow and not numerous. The Methodists had gained many Christians in the early days and those who had resisted Christianity longest were to become, by and large, the Catholics of the era of Fr Binois. Perhaps his was the mission most lacking in resources in the whole of Solomons Islands. Yet by his patience and his person to person approach, he built up in this community a faith that matched his own. He was to his people, as occasion demanded, doctor, lawyer, judge; but above all, wrote one of his contemporaries, 'he was their father. He was a lover of souls; he hunted them by land, in his long walks over the island and by sea, in his voyages round the coasts.' (12)

The same writer continues:
I was away from Choiseul when I got news of his death. On my return I sent word for all to come for a sung Requiem Mass for Fr Binols. I was astounded by the response. They came from 30 miles down the coast in heavy seas; they came from 20 miles up the coast. They walked over mountains from the other side of the island. Mostly men came, for it is the custom here that in times of sorrow the men must show themselves strong while the women wall in grief. I am not ashamed to say it made me cry to see the old chiefs and tribesmen coming to my house, crying their hearts out.

PROPHECY IN ALU

Fr Boch died in Bougainville 1953 and some months later Fr Patrick O'Reilly SM, Editor of Missions des Iles recalling his first visit to Solomon Islands wrote of the veteran who had introduced him to Faisi where the first missionaries to the west had landed. At Faisi Fr Boch found himself truly at home amidst his beloved Alu. A profound spiritual bond existed between this priest and his people.

O'Reilly had been particularly impressed by the catechists, two of whom he mentions in particular: Maeke of Goral's line and the blind Bitiae, Boch's right hand man for many years. O'Reilly continues:

It is in the process of interminable conversations round a gramophone, an illustrated magazine, while smoking pipes together, that Fr Boch has this remarkable empathy with the Alu. It is based on a knowledge of their language, their mentality and their attitudes. With that he has been able to counsel knowledgeably this or that marriage, judge such and such a difference in a piece of land, carry here and there a word of peace or reconciliation, in a word to preach Christ and his love in a favourable atmosphere.

THE FIFTIES - ENTER THE DOMINICANS
The 1950s world wide was characterised by a spirit of transition and expectation. Even the western Solomons was affected. Maeke, headman of Shortlands, might well have remarked to Fr FINGLETON that the old priests were dying out and were not being replaced. And if the priest had replied that it was high time that Solomon Islands produce its own, one can be sure that word went around. In Choiseul, Ponge, veteran catechist, could point to a steadfast group of teachers and catechists trained at Rigu Marist Brothers School in Bougainville. One of the teachers was Laurence Isa who would one day become the first ordained Solomon Islands priest of the west.

In Gizo, George Chai, chinese businessman and owner of trading ship KING HONG, looked at his growing sons and hoped that the rising generation would have better opportunities of education than the previous one had. In Honiara, Dominic Otuana, student of Fauro, had completed his post primary schooling with the Marist Brothers. He was now moving down the road to the quonset hut called St Steven's seminary. There with four others he would become one of the first aspirants to the priesthood under the guidance of Fr Karel Leemans.

In Sydney, Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Carboni looking at a map saw a vacant area between Shortlands and Honiara. He knew that the Marist personnel at that time were thin on the ground. He noted that a second vicariate in BSIP had already been suggested in 1937 by Bishop Aubin in his report to Propaganda Fide. He decided to talk to Jerome O'Rourke OP, the Provincial of the Dominicans in Australia.

GIZO 1956
Post war Gizo differed from 1900 Gizo by the fact of a dozen or more chinese stores in the main street. Among these was that of George Chai's family. The story of the Chai family is fairly typical of that quiet component of Solomon Island society, the Chinese.

From the early 1900s, the occasional Chinese builder or housekeeper had been employed by the big companies, Levers and Burns Philp. As individuals, for they seldom came together, they were noted for their frugality and industrious ways. Having saved their small block of land and set up a trading store, the first Chinese store opened in 1914 at Gavutu in Gela. Initially the European traders tolerated the Chinese presence, but over time, they began to see these low-priced traders as a threat to their sales' monopoly.

The Chinese were more patient with local customers, gave better prices for beche-de-mer and copra and sold goods more cheaply than other expatriate traders. During the thirties when copra prices dropped and many European planters had to leave, the Government belatedly recognised the fact that the minority Chinese were 'a more efficient and less troublesome replacement' of their former competitors. Permits were given, reluctantly at first, for their trading stores at Aola, Tulagi and Gizo, the stopping places for steamers.

George Chai had been one of those who began to operate from Gizo in the thirties. His ship, the KING KONG plied between the surrounding islands, servicing the villages, and buying their copra and tortoise shell.

When the war came to the west, the chinese traders were sent to Kirakira. It was not until 1947 that Chai and his family, now greater by three, returned to Gizo. The chinese community was sold a strip of rocky land beside the shore.
Here they reclaimed some coastland and built their houses and stores which form today's main street of Gizo. In 1954, Chai sent his two eldest sons to school in Australia with the Sacred Heart Fathers at Bowral.

On January 21 1956, a band of Dominican friars, sisters and terriers set out from Australia to begin work as missionaries in central Solomon Islands. Fr Peter MACDONALD led the group which included Br Dominic MAHONEY and Sisters BONAVENTURA, (Prioress), AMATA, STEPHEN, PHILOMENA and nurses Valda SALMON and Marie EBLEN. As they had no place in which to stay at Gizo, George Chai offered them hospitality, giving them his new house till they had somewhere to build their own.

At that time, Lever Brothers owned the small isle of Loga, eleven minutes by canoe from Gizo. As it was up for sale, the Catholic Mission bought it and thanks to assistance from George Chai, they began to build there.

The Dominicans were soon active in Gizo. They arrived from the Australian Province in two groups, in 1956 and 1957. Their coming exemplified a new surge of missionary activity in Australasia, inspired by its Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Romolo Carboni. Man of vision and of common sense, Carboni was in advance of United Nations in their encouragement of Third World dependencies which were striving for self determination towards Independence. Colonialism and Paternalism were becoming derogatory words, while the newly coined Localisation was to become the aim of colonial and Christian development mission.

Carboni never tired of promulgating the idea in his own inimitable phraseology. 'Don't kill yourselves with work,' he said to missionaries, 'allow others to kill themselves.'
The Dominicans incorporated Localisation into their plan of action. In one of their newsletters the question is asked: What is the main concern of all missionaries?... The endless work, the frustrations, the loneliness of a remote outpost? No! The main concern is that there will be others to follow them in their work for souls.

LOCALISATION

Bishop Crawford, arriving in his new field of action, would have been pleased to see the various ways in which this counsel was already being implemented. A second step in the Dominican programme had been the arrival of their mission ship, SALVE REGINA in June 1957. On board were Fr Dominic MEESE and Br Paul PURCELL, engineer Andy Quail and a complete crew. The recently baptised ship was a general purpose vessel, retired from the Australian navy. In Gizo it was handed over to Captain Bariri who would pilot the newcomers round their territorial boundaries. Br Paul would learn from him the hazards and beauties of reef and isle. Bariri and Br Paul soon made the Salve Regina a useful servant of the mission, carrying timber, copra, supplies, workboys, sick folk and so on. 'Every trip becomes a mission of mercy, one way or another,' wrote Fr MacDonald some years later.

1947 - 1950 saw a large increase in mission personnel. Srs Christopher, Paul Frances and Francis Downey were each to spend seven or eight years in the west. They were accompanied by large groups of lay helpers, builders, electricians, handymen and young fellows versatile and eager to fit in helpfully. These were pleased to find that many of the western people, already trained as teachers, catechists and medical aids were keen to continue their roles as mission...
helpers and to initiate the Australian volunteers into their new environments. (13)

In 1948, Frs LOUGHNAN and Cyril O'GRADY arrived. The former joined Fr Peter in Choiseul while the latter took up residence at Nila where already two sisters and two nurses were busy in the clinic. CHRISTINA, daughter of Silverio was running the dispensary and helping the sisters. It was at Nila that Sr PHILOMENA would eventually open St Anne's school for girls whose graduates were to become some of the women leaders of the church in the west. Fr O'Grady from Adelaide would spend 14 years as pastor of Nila and his territory included Fauro and other isles of Bougainville Straits.

Fr Peter soon decided to shift the Choiseul headquarters from Malanari in the north to Moli further south. Moli was more central and accessible. There Sr Stephen paddled her canoe across the passage to the mainland for classes while the nurses Marie and Valda, Dominican tertiarries worked in the clinic for their first two years. The usual health problems were treated: malaria, rickets, ulcers, hookworm were common in babies while yaws and T.B. affected many adults. Sr Paul Frances later worked here training girls as nurse aids. It is noticeable that some of these later became qualified nurses in Honiara and some even joined the ranks of the Dominican sisters who gave them their first lessons.

In 1959 the western district became a vicariate apostolic in its own right. The announcement was made by Cardinal Agaginian of Propaganda Fide and the district already familiar to the missionary Dominicans of the Australian province was officially confided to their care. In the following April, Pope John XXIII appointed its first vicar apostolic, Very Reverend Eusebius Crawford OP, native of Warren Point, Ireland. The
bishop elect had been working in formation in the Australian province for some years.

In the fifties and sixties, localisation meant 'to lead people to become masters of their own destiny'. This implied a fostering of a sense of solidarity among the diverse cultures in a scatter of diverse islands which had never been a united entity. It implied moreover that individuals should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own decisions: a slow change from tribal responsibility that only the brave might achieve.

It was an ambitious aim for the small class that began quietly in 1958 as St Peters School in Gizo. Daily the two Dominican Sisters made their 11 minute canoe journey across the channel that separates Loga from Gizo. It was a cosmopolitan enough group of youngsters, offspring of civil servants, traders and refugees. Besides the Gizo Islanders, there were the odd two or three Choiseul lads, tall and hungry faced; the Alu from Shortlands, proud of their ebony skins and their royal lineage; the 'red-skins' of Mala of serious mien and sun-bleached hair. Then there were the laughing boys and girls from Titiana, the nearby settlement of Gilbert Islanders, as well as the children of British district officers, and those of chinese business men. That leaders would eventually emerge from this heterogenous group, one could only hope. But in fact, from the Dominican schools in the West would come a wealth of Christian leaders. Twenty five years on, a host of them would be proud to own their Dominican beginnings long after their first teachers had gone, having accomplished their task in training others to replace them. These included a Governor General, several Ministers of Government, heading departments of education and justice and others. A museum curator, a director of the national archives would also remember Srs Bonaventure and Dolores as would numerous teachers, policemen and other
men and women whose families would bear witness to their strong beliefs in Christian values.

There would, of course, be the usual proportion of exceptional characters whose presence among their fellows confirmed the rule. The clever con-man who would some day be notorious for his ability to sell and re-sell his beautiful tropical isle to unsuspecting tourists, the meticulous artist who would spend time in Honiara prison for his delicate skill in forgery, the murderer who could never be released from gaol for fear of local retribution.

EDUCATION AT EVERY LEVEL

To the Bishop, education at every level was the key to effective localisation. In each area of the west the needs differed. The distinction between 'school' and 'education' is not always clear to the illiterate. The early missionaries with their small classes of young labourers or chiefly daughters were more concerned with the basics of literacy in the local language. The parents on their part saw this novel means of learning as a kind of magic, opening the way to the skills and science beyond the horizon. Indeed it was a means of going beyond their domestic education. The missionaries themselves soon recognised their own ignorance in face of that Melanesian education which, as in every culture under the sun, begins at mother's breast, grows in company of parents and grannies and matures day by day till death. Missionaries knew that their preaching and teaching would always be a transaction, based on mutual teaching and learning, learning and teaching. As the respect for knowledge and ignorance in one another grows, so the understanding of extra-cultural matters becomes clearer. Education, a mutual process, is no longer a case of the blind leading the blind but
rather that of two fishermen in the same canoe launching out into the deep.

'The emphasis,' Fr Ambrose Loughnan often explained, 'is on teaching the islanders to manage their own affairs.' The principle of localisation, earlier stated by the Dominicans as one of their primary aims, was never allowed to become a mere tinkling cymbal of a forgotten ideal. Bishop Crawford's decision to open a mission station at Moli, Choiseul was but a well planned step towards a programme that catered for people at grass roots level, those who, under the existing systems, never did and never would have opportunities for a formal education.

Moli would become a stopping place for that indispensable missionary, the SALVE REGINA. The ship carrying tools, timber and equipment to Moli, would enable this mission headquarters in Choiseul to become an effective centre of adult education. Choiseul is a land of few resources. The less than 10,000 population get their living mainly from a meagre subsistence economy. When Fr Loughnan came, he hoped to encourage people to raise their standard of living and to aid them in developing a desire for economic and social independence.

On his arrival, he must have wondered if anything about village visiting had changed in the fifty odd years since the first Marist there. Fr Forestier had struggled up a cliff to find himself unwittingly in the midst of a group of elders. Very little of the exterior circumstances, it would seem, had changed. Fr Forestier had been given a downright refusal; in the fifty years since, the Choiseul people had at least accepted and usually made their own, the beliefs of Christianity. Inwardly they had experienced conversion; outwardly, all remained the same; small scattered villages, far from one
another; food gardens of little variety, often remote from the village where pigs and starved pups scrabbled among coconut husks for nourishment. In such unhygienic places negligence made every child's life a hazard. One in three survived birth in the 1950s.

Stationed in Sirovanga in 1959, Fr Loughnan encouraged his people on the north coast to make a road that would facilitate land development. Village people were to experience the wonder of a tractor and a trailer. Better still, some of them would be trained to drive and control this magic. In areas where food is the main concern of life, the development of better food gardens became a realistic goal. Assisted by some funding from Oxfam, certain areas of tribal land were surveyed. This enabled 80 families to be settled on five-acre blocks. According to plan, each block would support 1,600 cocoa trees and 400 coconuts. Fr Loughnan had spent time in Fiji to study their Credit Union system. During his twelve years in Gizo Diocese, he trained selected leaders to set up five credit unions in the west.

A business-like overview of the vicariate of western Solomons was given in the Dominican newsletter of August 1962. The 155,000 square kilometres of the area had a population of 29,400 of whom 1,870 were Catholics. The remainder was mainly protestant, there being very few pagans. There were 21 Catholic schools attended by boys and girls. Staff consisted of 5 priests, one brother, 9 sisters and a small group of lay missionaries.

THE GILBERTESE COME TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islanders had a first encounter with people from the Gilberts in 1956. One early morning in February as the
'koburu' was gustily blowing, two runners arrived at the mission of Avuavu on the weather coast of Guadalcanal. They gave Fr de Bloch the news that a strange ketch was drifting off the coast and that a dinghy with 12 people had arrived from it near the coastal village of Malageti. Father sent a couple of boys on a day's run to Marau where a radio sent a message to Honiara.

The ARIKARIMOA, a Gilbertese fishing vessel with a crew of 12 and 8 passengers, had left Tarawa in December 1955 for Maiana, 19 miles away. Soon after departure, engine trouble left the ship in the grip of strong winds, which blew her off course. The bereaved families of those on board gave up hope of seeing the Arikarimoa after the first month. The story of their thousand mile drift, ending on the weather coast of Guadalcanal, is told elsewhere. (14) The starving survivors were fed and cared for at Avuavu till a government ship took them to Honiara, to be billeted with families of Kakabona. They were repatriated to their home isles some months later. This was the first introduction of Gilbertese (or I-Kiribati, as they are now called) to Solomon Islanders. It would not be their last.

The need for the Kiribati to migrate began before World War II. The British decided that, as the Gilberts - the islands - were becoming overpopulated, some of the people should be moved to the uninhabited Phoenix Islands. But soon resources there also proved to be insufficient for the newcomers. The migrants had to be shifted once more. In 1958 the Administrators looking round their Pacific possessions decided that Gizo and Wagina in the then British Solomons Protectorate were suitable for the influx of another migration.

Titiiana village, near Gizo and Wagina off the end of Choiseul were the centres chosen. The migration from 1958 to 1963
took about 2,500 from the Gilbert atolls, split by the equator. There, people accustomed to fishing and living from the sea were dropped off in Solomon Islands in "lush garden settings where they could maintain a tradition of being absolutely hopeless gardeners." (15)

About a quarter of the number were Catholics. The Dominicans were faced with another challenge. How minister to this exiled people? Micronesian, of different languages and way of life, uprooted twice in half a century, how would these people settle into a Melanesian situation?

In the Dominican newsletter of March 1968 Fr Peter wrote: In 1962 it was decided that the people of these Isles should be resettled on Manning Straits group, at the eastern end of Choiseul, in the diocese of Gizo.

Wagina, about five miles square, appeared to the sea-faring folk of Kiribati, a rugged land with a swampy inland. Over 1200 people were settled there and resettlement was a difficult task. Unaccustomed to forest, they found it hard to clear the undergrowth and cut down trees to plant gardens. But survival is a motivation that makes of hard work a necessity and soon the hungry seafarers were doing their best to make the land produce.

The Dominicans made visits from time to time to be present to the 700 Catholics and to encourage the growing of a successful settlement. In 1968, Fr Peter became resident priest in the Catholic village of Kukutin. He noticed that because of the large number of women and children each man had to support about ten people. In Wagina, I-Kiribati had the isle to themselves as there were no Melanesians on their isle. So it did become, despite the humidity and the work to be done, a small
home from home where customs continued as adaptations in work took place.

There were then about 630 Catholics in Kukutin and their leaders planned to build a church. They carried out their task in the absence of their priest to surprise him on his return. The little school had some trained teachers and the catechists too were active.

NILA SHORTLANDS

There was a Kiribati settlement also in the Shortlands, Kamaliae. Fr Cyril O'Grady, now appointed director of Catholic education in the Gizo diocese, found himself in charge of the planning of several training groups. As director, his job was to look at the opportunities and options that varied sources offered the young people.

Primary schools in general were doing well enough, O'Grady saw on his visits. Many of the teachers had gained qualifications at the Marist Brothers Teacher Training College at Rigu, Bougainville. After 1960, some went to teacher training in Honiara. The village schoolchildren were keen and responded well. A small percentage of these pupils were lucky enough to do some rural training.

The enthusiasm of the Choiseul people for their new methods of farming was not the only factor that urged Bishop Crawford to open a Rural Training Centre. The nation-wide exodus of children from primary schools caused Government to consider the establishing of vocational schools in each district. The Dominican's concern predated the implementation of these schools.
It was decided between the Dominicans and the Marist Brothers to open a school for Standard 7 leavers. Its aim would be three fold: to initiate young adults to a strong sense of Christian and community responsibility, to develop qualities of leadership and to help the young learner to attain a better standard of living, for himself and for his fellow villagers. St Dominic’s Rural Training Centre at Vanga Point would fulfil these aims in later days. But that is yet another story.

The minor seminary at Rabaul had 4 western candidates in the mid-sixties, preparing to enter the major seminary at Bomana, Port Moresby. Fr Laurence Isa of Aleang in Shortlands would be ordained in 1969 as the first catholic priest in the west.

At St Annes's girls' school at Nila, young women were learning about nutrition, child care, sewing, cooking and other skills that would make many a husband happy. Some of these, encouraged by Srs Dolores, Philomena and others went on for further studies in nursing or teaching, in Bougainville or Honiara. Later the senior students of St Anne's would do leadership training, going out to remote villages to teach other women further home skills that would make life more interesting and creative. In the later sixties, St Paul's Aruligo opened in Honiara diocese to provide secondary education for boys and girls.

Meanwhile on the SALVE REGINA, Br Paul continued to help aspiring sailors to cross the many passages and straits that make the west such a network of relationships. Over at Sirovanga, Choiseul, Fr Meese, looking out from his veranda over 7,000 miles of Pacific, taught young lads and lasses the prayers and catechism he had translated into their language.

Thus in their different ways and at different levels, the Dominicans were fulfilling their first mandate: to ensure that
there would be many to follow in the spreading of the Good News. Already a procession of these had begun. Much rejoicing attended the blessing of St Peter's Pro Cathedral in Gizo. The celebration of a Solemn High Mass preceded a day of festivities. People of several denominations were represented among the celebrants. From Honiara came Fr Wall and Fr Cheung while Bougainville was represented by Bishop Wade. It must have rejoiced the heart of Bishop Crawford to see such harmony in the diocese of Gizo where just a century before such conflict had reigned.

With St Peter as patron of this territory of seas and fishermen, one could see the church that day standing as sign and hope for a vibrant future among the people of the Diocese of Gizo.
ENDNOTES

1 Among these were the Tindall and MacDonald families.
2 Flaus to T.R.P General. Most of the passages from Flaus in this section are from this long letter written in 1899.
3 John Champion MacDonald was one of several brothers who settled in Solomon Islands in 1870s, probably from Canada. Minnie Tindall, daughter of John and Linda MacDonald, was born in N.Z. and brought up in Solomons. She was the widow of Edward Austen, an English trader, when Tindall married her. Graeme Golden. pp 365-7.
4 Flaus, p 299-300.
5 G. Golden, p 79.
7 Sr M.Claire In Annales des Missions de l'Oceanie, p 622.
8 Broyer, Aug 1901, Annales des Missions de l'Oceanie.
9 To Sisters TORM at Ste Fol les Lyon. Feb 1907.
10 Fr Albert Binois. L'Ile Choseul in Les Missions Catholiques.
11 Binois gives the account of Fr Bertet.
12 Marist Messenger, Jan 1951.
13 Names of lay missionaries are in Appendix.

NOTE: For much of the information about the Dominican apostolate in the Gizo diocese we are indebted to 'Dominican News from the Solomons', excellent newsletters issued monthly from 1956 to 1968.
CHAPTER TWELVE  MALAITA

Christianity had already reached Small Mala before the Catholics arrived. The SSEC lotu was brought by two men who had returned from Queensland. This group was very radical and wanted to get rid of all custom connected with pagan religion. Because of this the chiefs disliked them and when Fr Coicaud came, they asked:

Chiefs: What are you going to do for us? Are you going to uproot all our customs like the others?
Coicaud: What is good will remain; what is not good you and I will get rid of.
Chiefs: It's O.K. You will stay.
ORAL TRADITION. DONA HOUA'A TO SON HITE'E.

The Old Testament tells how Joshua sent spies into the Land of Promise. After 40 years wandering in the wilderness, the Hebrews needed to know something of the land they were about to enter. In the account of early Christianity in the Solomons, it is the men of Mala who, like Joshua’s spies, take the first initiatives in entering the land of promise, the 20th century, an era of strangers and change.

It can be stated too that the Catholic church came to Mala through its own initiative. This land of Mala, so careful of its cultural traditions, so guarded in its customs, this Mala cleverly utilised a passing storm to send its advance guards to investigate the Christian missionaries at Rua Sura.

Some flash-backs in history will display a small gallery of persons and events through whose mediation the Catholic faith first appeared in the island which other islanders held in awe. How long Mala had enjoyed fame as a land to be feared is unknown but it is a fact of long standing. (1) It has been noted
that it was the strength and discipline of the social organisation of Mala's diverse groups which made it fearsome to outsiders. It was its reputation of harsh retribution for breach of those customs which caused whalers and other traders to keep well away from its shores for so long.

Within those shores it was its own stern respect for custom and the fear of spirit retribution that caused Mala people to be such strict guardians of tradition. Intruding island neighbours had told of how adulterers were cut in strips and mothers who ignored child-birth customs were clubbed to death. Rigid taboos prevailed, as they always do where survival is thought to depend on good relationships with one’s ancestral spirits.

When the British warship CURACOA had steamed through the Archipelago in 1893, planting Union Jacks and proclaiming the establishment of a British Protectorate to mainly uncomprehending villagers, it was the Mala people alone who voiced protest.

MARAU - MALAITA CONNECTION

In 1905, when Fr Jean Coicaud started a mission at Marau, east Guadalcanal, he discovered two interesting facts. The Marau coastline has sentinel isles. Of these isles, that called MALAPA (Marapa) was ‘the abode of the dead’ for the people of Guadalcanal, south Malaita and Ulawa. While Raucaz calls it the paradise' and Ivens ‘the Hades', J.Bennett gives a clearer explanation:

The ancestral spirit-beings were of universal importance. With death a person passed into another dimension. One aspect of a person's being, the 'shadow', remained around the village. The other aspect, 'soul', passed to one or other of the abodes of the dead, such as Marapa off east Guadalcanal or Laulau off Isabel.
Secondly, canoes heading for Guadalcanar from south Mala invariably landed at Marau. In fact commerce between the two was frequent and it was soon clear to Fr Colcaud that the numerous canoes bringing Are'are people to and fro across the strait indicated an insertion point into the land of Malaita. Could this be where missionaries might enter? It was worth thinking about.

He soon found too that the Are'are folk, eager and energetic, had long been intermarrying with Marau coastal people. Marau language owed much to the influence of Are'are. It is not surprising then that it was via Marau and its visiting Are'are group, that Catholicism entered the South on Small Malaita. It is also, Fr Colcaud reflected later on, like God to have chosen a rascal of deepest dye, who once converted, would be his ambassador to the hard-headed clans of Are'are in the South.

**ARA'IASI OF TARAPAINA......**

Ara'iasi was a formidable 'ramo' (warrior) from Tarapaina, of Hauvarivari Passage, Small Mala. Feared by many, he was a man of courage and strong will. Loyal to his chief lava'u and faithful to custom, his name was known far and wide. After 1910 he was to become a thorn in the side of the government. His skill at eluding his pursuer and his quick temper gave rise to many stories of his exploits and trickery which made of him a kind of local hero of the Are'are.

The name and fame of Ara'iasi lives on in the folklore and stories that have come down to the present day via his legion of children and grandchildren's children. The following account and excerpts come from Donasiano Hou'a, a contemporary of the ramo.
Ara'iasi, the ramo employed by the Araha, was always ready to attack, fight or take revenge for his chief whenever called upon. He had no need of using spear or arrow; he simply killed with his hands, so great was his strength. People feared him because they believed that he was possessed by the spirits of ancestors who gave him such power. The government first started to take notice of Ara'iasi after an incident at Ugi.

An Australian trader there had refused the usual price for the copra brought to him by some men led by Ara'iasi. At the refusal, Ara'iasi killed him. The Government, hearing of the murder, directed a passing war ship to Tarapaina. Being afraid to land, its officers shelled Ta'aru village, destroying every house. The villagers fled to the bush. When the police came to arrest Ara'iasi he had disappeared.

WARRIOR AND MISSIONARIES

Christianity had already set foot in South Mala. Many of the workers returning from the sugar plantations in Queensland had brought it with them, together with their luggage of plant samples, clothing, utensils and well-concealed Snyder rifles. Some of these had become adherents of the Queensland Kanaka Mission. This group, begun by the valiant evangelist Florence Young, would eventually link up with London Mission Society and in time would evolve into the South Sea Evangelical Mission. (SSEM)

Miss Young also visited her little flock in Small Mala. Both the SSEM and Anglicans were in Small Mala before the Catholics. The SSEM lotu was brought by two men who had been to Queensland. Ara'iasi came to the assembly to 'supervise'. To the consternation of many, Miss Young denounced the warrior for his killings and other wicked ways, including the smoking of tobacco in church. Laracy suggests that Ara'iasi was incensed by the reprimand and consequently turned to the Catholic missionaries. It would seem more likely that he laughed off the
incident (she was only a woman, anyway!) and that it was soon afterwards, he found himself at home with the baptised of Marau (who happened to be Catholics).

It was sometime during 1911 that the warrior Ara'iasi met the missionary, Fr Jean Coicaud at Marau. Inconspicuous among his Tarapaina men, Ara'iasi was curious to see this tall black-bearded man. Each had heard of the other. Now there was a mutual summing up. Apparently each had the gift of seeing the kernal within. The spark of trust enkindled in that meeting was mutual too. It would glow in the breezes of future years.

The immediate result was an invitation from Ara'iasi to Patere 'KWAKO' to return with him to Tarapaina, where his Araha, lava'o exerted power. Paddled by Ara'iasi himself with his henchmen, Fr Coicaud was escorted through Maramasike Passage. Perhaps on this journey, perhaps later, he was told the story of Rapauna'ate, the legendary hero who had cut this passage which separates Big Mala from Small Mala.

Fr 'Kwako', noting the welcome he received at Tarapaina and the eagerness of people to listen, visited the village several times in the next months. With his small band of catechists, notably Peter Supara of Marau bush and Iuliano Kauhoa of Pipisu, he spoke with men curious to listen to stories as new as the gospel and as ancient as human nature.

It was not long before Fr Bertreux, informed of this God sent opportunity to open a mission in Mala, was also being paddled with him to Tarapaina. Ara'iasi was keen that the chief of the Mission should himself see Tarapaina as a possible site for a foundation. But Bertreux, looking with critical eye on this village situated on a cliff of red clay, slippery even in dry weather, glutinous in the wet, could not for the time being, accept the offer. The anchorage was poor, the space for food
gardens scarce. In consultation with the big men, Bertreux decided against building a station here. But from that time, two catechists resided there.

It was Ara’iasi, stubborn pagan as he was, who persisted. If Tarapaina was not suitable for a foundation, perhaps another site in Are'are could be found. We next see the warrior piloting Fr Kwako into Rohinari lagoon, along the west coast of south Mala. Past Uhu's hidden entrance, which the Spaniards had called 'Escondito', they headed north along the land-locked lagoon. Soon their whale boat attracted the attention of some unfriendly fellows waving spears and signalling the intruders to be gone. They speedily moved on. Eventually reaching the northern end of the lagoon, they landed on a small island. Here lived the famous headhunter, Harisimae, fellow ramo of Ara’iasi, who introduced the priest to the old man and was reported thus by Raucaz.

The old man-eater had already met him at Marau. But he wanted details about his generosity: the quantity of tobacco, pipes and matches that he would bring with him. Religion was of no account to him; he would not touch it at any price; what would his spirits think of such an idea? He therefore questioned the crew and also Ara’iasi, his rival from the south isle. The report must have been favourable, for the old bandit immediately agreed to sell the small isle of Rohinari with a good portion of ground on the mainland.

ROHINARI FIRST MISSION ON MALA 1912

It was soon after his meeting with Harisimae that a purchase of land was made and Coicaud with young assistants settled in Rohinari. (2) Petero Supara, the laughing catechist from Marau, was leader of the group. Harisimae, true to his word, remained the protector of the Catholic mission at Rohinari. He claimed from the beginning to have no interest in their religion and this showed itself in positive ways. He never interfered
with their worship nor did he place restriction in their instructing whom so ever would listen. The Big man, however, did exercise his privilege as sponsor to show a mild curiosity in the novel ways of the newcomers. In the back of the chapel he often squatted, observing the Mass celebration. What did he see? What meaning could he made of it all?

The oft-repeated story of his going up to the altar at the beginning of Mass can tell us something. The celebrant, sensing his approach with beating heart, wondered: Would some desecration occur? Should he cease the opening psalm and face the intruder? Would he be axed from behind as Epalle had been? Or it was all in a day's work? Swallowing his fear in a dose of faith, the priest went on: Quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea. The old pagan now beside the altar lifted the candle from it and lit his pipe. Then replacing it reverently, he crunched back to a place outside. If there is significance at all in the memory of the event, it was that the big man felt at home with the lotu.

The historian can merely mention the fact that Harisimae, despite his record of villany, was continuously generous and helpful to the missionaries in that region with its reputation of tribal rivalries, pay-back killings and joyful massacre of outsiders. Harisimae continued ruling as araha-ramo but it can be said that his warrior role diminished as his leadership expanded. No doubt this was due to an increasing 'respect' for the police as much as for the small but growing groups of Christian influence in South Mala.

ROHINARI AND HARISIMAE

'Deep in the hearts of all men and women there exists already an inward religious experience.' Thus writes Fr Michael AIKE,
born in Rohinari district, son of a pagan priest. When we read of the great 'pagan' leaders, who in the early history of Christianity, were themselves powerful apostles, instrumental in spreading the faith, it is possible to see parallels and patterns recurring in modern missionary chronicles.

Harisimae of Are'are and Ara'iasi of Tarapalna, as araha and ramo, were not basically different from the emperors Constantine, worshipper of the sun and Clovis of the Franks. All were warriors and killers; all had great hearts; we can assume that there existed within each of them this 'inward religious experience.' Like Constantine, Harisimae continued to live unconverted to Christianity till the day before he died. The baptism, perhaps long desired, was demanded and Christ claimed his own. At some point during their long and active lives, they had welcomed this stranger and, unconsciously perhaps, encouraged his emissaries, perhaps for their own ends; but who can say of human and divine that the ocean waves and the sea-shore do not intermingle?

It is recounted that at the baptism of Clovis, three thousand of his soldiers followed suit. While allowing a certain mystical transformation of number that may have taken place over the centuries, it is possible to see in Ara'iasi a resemblance to the king of the Franks. When the police at length did succeed in arresting the old trickster, it was Colcaud who requested of the resident commissioner that he hand over Ara'iasi to Catholic Mission, on parole, instead of jailing him. The resident commissioner was only too happy to be rid of his embarrassing prisoner. Converted by kindness, as was Clovis, Ara'iasi, though having no legions of warriors in his wake, did indeed become the patriarch to whom his many children and children's children attribute their inherited Christianity.
There were no instant baptisms in Mala. The process of evangelism was long and arduous for both catechist and catechumen. The 2-year period of instruction for those interested in Christianity required more than a grasp of the truths Christ preached. The aspiring Christian needed the courage to commit himself body and soul to live according to the new conviction. But while the mind assented to the 'good news', it was the emotion of 'fear' that put hobbles on the heart.

Nobody knows better than the anguished missionary that faith, hope and charity are gifts that no apostle can give, no mass-kit contain. The work of conversion, of the acceptance of a love that casts out fear, is a task of cooperation, given to the missionary who acts as one engraced by Christ.

As the missionary, then, squelched through swamps, cut his way through jungle undergrowth or paddled his canoe through mangrove lined lagoons, to teach these or those villagers or to reach this or that dying pagan, he went with a trembling trust in the presence of the divine in hearts that hungered.

The TURUPATU, published periodically from January 1911, gives us glimpses of each mission. Let us not underestimate the announcements of those first days. In 1915 there were two baptisms recorded at Tarapalna. (3) Teana ni Maramasike took Ioane as baptismal name and Kaiona became Petero. The parents and two sisters of Petero Kaiona were also taking Instruction, the Turupatu notes. 'Other villages in the district are asking for instruction. Who will volunteer to come?'

Indeed young volunteers were generous. In 1913 six boys from Visale had accompanied Fr Teytard and Br Jean-Claude to join Colcaud at Rohinarl. These young fellows, like all good volunteers, became both learners and teachers. With Br Jean-
Claude they extended their skills in house building with sago palm and bamboo to include that of the hammer and nail. With Sotere and Bernardo, their 'one-talks' of the original team, they learnt the Are'are language and customs and ways of instruction.

Fr Teytard was a fellow pupil with them. After the futile stay in Rublana with Fr Raucaz, he had spent a few weeks at Visale before taking up his new appointment as assistant to Fr Colcaud at Rohinari. A new set of customs, a new way of speaking, another tribe of people...the third in his three years. The mosquitoes, always hungry for fresh blood, welcomed him too. Within a few months, his continual bouts of malaria caused Bishop Bertreux some worry. Fr Pellion's death in 1913 confirmed the Bishop's resolution to shift the young Fr Teytard to the healthier climate of Visale. Fr Teytard was learning rapidly the lessons of adaptation, of patience and wisdom in dealing with all God's creatures from anopheles to vicars apostolic. (4)

NORTH MALAITA

We Langalanga people are perched like birds on branches. We have no land of our own, except our hand made isles. We take off to do our fishing, to go to the garden or market on the mainland, to barter and to find bride price for marriage. Then we fly back to our nesting branch, and perch there till the next need arises. ORAL HISTORY: OLD MAN TO FR ARKWRIGHT

It is always a country of islands and to get from one to the other, the sea is the only link. The missionary in these regions must then be a sailor, must have his boat, large or small according to his needs; he has to learn to rig it out, see to its upkeep, repair it. Then accompanied by a few boys, who form his crew, he sets sail or rows away out on the waters wherever his ministry may summon him.

While Colcaud was finding his feet at Rohinari, his brother Donatien was appointed to take over from Fr Raucaz at Buma
on Langalanga lagoon, about 30 miles north of Rohinari. In 1914, Langalanga was soon to become to Fr Donatien a familiar part of his parish which included the Kwalo bush tribes as well as the saltwater people of the lagoon.

Mala's long lagoons are matched by those of Roviana, but nowhere else have people built their own "artificial islands that are unique to Mala. In its northern lagoons there are about 25 islets all made by the hard labour of the saltwater people of the lagoons. It was, as Raucaz wrote in 1924, a country of islands where to get from one place to another, the canoe, the dinghy or the launch were one's daily transport. The HAMBIA (Morning Star in the Roviana language) became the mission ship of Buma and the two fathers Coicaud - Donasiano (1884-1957) and Jean (1875-1943) - were to become the pioneer apostles of Catholicism in North Mala and the South respectively.

In this lagoon, wrote Fr Raucaz, live a curious and peaceful people. The islets on which they live have been enlarged manually with stones and coral from the sea. From afar they look like fortresses. These isles are thickly inhabited. The chief industry is fishing but the occupation of women and girls is the manufacture of shell money. For this a rather rare shell is used. It is broken into small pieces. A sharp flint tool, fixed on to a drill, is used to bore a hole in the fragments of shell. These small pieces are threaded and the string thus made is laboriously smoothed and formed into a work of art, indispensable in a bride price.

Fr Dona was soon to learn from his neophytes about their beliefs and customs. Ancestral spirits had great influence on Langalanga life and were considered to be offended if neglected. Rules governing daily work and routines were governed by respect for these "agalo'. As the agalo were of a
capricious nature, sacrifice of pigs had often to be made to placate or to plead their favour. 'Survival called for a high level of skill and self-reliance in dealing with other people as well as with the spirits whose favour was deemed to be the ultimate source of temporal well being', writes Laracy.

THE BIG FIGHT LANGALANGA 1942

Laulasi is a village on the north west coast of Malaita, unique for its shell-money industry, which for generations has occupied betrothed maidens and their families-in-law. On 7 August 1942, its people ran excitedly to see seven U.S planes hovering overhead. The airmen, mistaking the village for a Japanese camp further north, bombed it, killing twenty-four, damaging the village and disrupting its vital industry.

Such was the introduction of the Mala villagers to the foreign form of battle. Apart from this incident, tragic to Laulasi families, embarrassing to the Americans, the Pacific War did not touch Mala. That is not say that Mala men, Solomon's most famous warriors were not involved. On the contrary, many had already joined the Japanese in constructing the airport which the Americans took over, immediately upon landing on Guadalcanal. The victors invited volunteers from the Solomon Islands public to leave the Japanese and join the Americans. In the terrible land fighting on Guadalcanal that followed where Japanese and American youths fought hand to hand in jungle and in swamp, the Solomon Islanders were the audience, not the actors. As auxiliaries and assistants, many flocked to join the Solomon Islands Labour Corps.

The Malaita canoe maker knows that to know is useful and that to put that knowledge in action is everything. To know the wind is to fit the canoe to the curl of the wave. So he knows that to learn is to change. If Malaita culture is strong, it is
because it is not diminished, but animated by change. That is
to say that many traditional customs are still in force because
leaders have known how to adapt to changing situations and
hence to a changing world, without bending their basic
principles.

Mala people have known how to adapt, to initiate action and to
protest as far back as their history tells. In modern times, we
see in 1867 how the chief of Adagege chose to save a Scottish
sailor from a wrecked ship and, changing a social law, adopted
him as his son. In the 7 years of sonship as servitude Jack
Renton too learnt not only to be a valuable head-hunting
tribesman but also to be able to see through the eyes of his
adopted salt water people and to own their values. Thus he
became a sign of good will in a time of violence and
misunderstanding. His island brothers learned anew that a
stranger may be human too.

In 1903, in Queensland, it was a Mala man Jack Malayta who
complained by letter to the Australian government when it
legislated to discontinue the Labour Trade which for over 30
years had employed thousands of Solomon Islanders to work
on Queensland’s sugar plantations. The same right to protest
was involved when some Kwalo took the initiative in 1927 and
killed the District Officer Mr Bell and his troop of police. They
had been paying head-tax to the government but what was the
government doing for the people?

The question was reiterated in the next decade by Dr Richard
Fallowes. A pastor of the Anglican Church interested in people
and their rights, he organised a series of meetings in Ysabel,
Ngela and Savo, where islanders discussed problems and
proposed solutions. Though Fallowes was deported for his
dangerous ideas, his Mala disciples would recall these ideas in
future times. After the eye opening experience of the war
years, it was Mala men whose broadened attitudes derived from that event. It was in Mala the nationalist movement that was to be called MA'ASINA Rule began to stir Mala to a consciousness of their common identity and their needs.

Malaita born Sam Alasla defines the goals of the movement:

It was characterised by the twin desires of having the Solomons ruled by a government that would be more responsive than the colonial one, to the wishes of its people and by an ideal of brotherliness that should link its people.

If a lesson had been learned from the Japanese-American conflict, it was that violence is not the best way to achieve victory. Thus self-reliance and solidarity were set up as ideals in a territory where hitherto these had operated only within the confines of a given tribal system. It was now being said that these had actually hindered true development and the recognition of a wider brotherhood.

The Ma'asina Rule that emerged in 1946 and lasted about 5 years brought together thousands of people (5000 at Auki) into a common striving for these ideals. Forgetting tribal rivalries and religious differences, the Ma'asina created an island-wide enthusiasm that expressed itself in the building of orderly village and organisation of welfare groups.

Ma'asina Rule was first seen by government as a threat to its authority. But it soon saw too that many of its leaders were dedicated Christians and that their claims were reasonable. While the Church of Melanesia was hindered by its allegiance to a British Government, it was initially reluctant to allow its members to join the movement. Other churches, notably the Catholic with its French and Dutch priests and the SSEC with its own Malaita pastors had no such inhibitions. In the north, SSEC leaders were strong. In the south the movement was
encouraged by the Marist Fathers Piet Geerts, Bernard van de Walle and Dona Coicaud as a healthy stand for better conditions. Certain 'pagan' araha joined the Catholic leaders in their bid for official recognition of their objectives.

When the District Commissioner, concerned that the Ma'asina enthusiasm might turn to bloodshed, sought the help of Fr van de Walle, the priest promised to negotiate. He tried to persuade the leaders to submit to the conditions laid down by the Government. Their initial response to van de Walle's pleas was a refusal. But second thoughts prompted them to ask their priest to consider an alternative. The result of this request was the forming of the Catholic Welfare Society which the Marists of the south together with their headman and catechists implemented. The aim of C.W.S. was to improve the standard of living both materially and spiritually. The C.W.S. proved to be popular and gained many members. But its very success seemed to threaten the administration. Bishop Aubin was asked to use his authority to suppress it.

Sadly this was done. Another attempt to resurrect the society in 1953 had an initially favourable response and consumer-cooperatives became the replacement. The success was not to last, for the one-talk system of 'Kaonl' is stronger than the harsher and fairer business sense which is not a noticeably Melanesian talent. It took the energy and creativity of Fr John Roughan who arrived in Rohinari some years later, to recreate the society under a different form. To guide the Are'are gift of initiative into ways of self-reliance became Roughan's life-long task.

Just as the Mala people were discovering the existence of a world beyond the Pacific as demonstrated by the overseas armies, so too the dwellers of that world beyond were discovering that there was a Pacific Islander. There had been a
moratorium on the movements of missionaries during the war but the beginning of the post war era saw a rebound in numbers of young recruits from Europe and in 1947 Solomons saw the first of these; three tall gaunt Dutchmen. The Netherlands in fact was one of the few countries whose neutrality had provided pockets of human goodness to operate despite the lack of due brotherliness on all sides. It is said that at this time the Netherlands sent two out of every three Dutch priests to the missions.

The three Dutch Marists, Frs Chris Kamphuis, Karel Leemans and Piet Geerts arrived as forerunners of a steady stream of their fellow countrymen to the Solomons in the next two decades. Fr Kamphuis was sent to north Mala where Takwa station was making small inroads into the pagan fears of the old days.

Fr Leemans was launched into missionary life at its most prehistoric, Manivovo, at the dead end of San Cristobal. Fr Piet Geerts went to open a residence at Tarapalna, amid a Catholic population of two generations, sturdy in faith, eager for knowledge. The catechists had held the fort here since the days of Ara’las and Harisaimae and had done their work with a will. Both priests had a few day at Rohinari with their veteran father, Bernard van de Walle. Here they saw the Are'are people at the most active for the Marching Rule was at its peak and the Are'are were deeply involved.

While the Ma'asina Rule was struggling for better conditions with its government, other Malaitans were struggling for the same goal of 'Improvement' by different means. In 1946, the ex-students of Marist Brothers' school of St Peter Chanel, Marau, were busy sharing their knowledge with the youth of Langalanga. At Buloabu, Pilipo Kakasi took over a school of forty children when Toma Anisimae died. When the Brothers
arrived back in the Solomons in 1946, Fr Dan Stuyvenberg, parish priest of Buma, asked Brother Ephrem to come to Langalanga and assist Kakasi. The two teachers soon had a thriving class and from this little flock came the first students for the new school opened in October at Tenaru on Guadalcanal where the mission had bought a block of land from Lever Brothers.

BUMA MISSION STATION

Meanwhile Buma station was becoming a centre that attracted large numbers of pupils to its primary school. For many years too, the Sisters had run a clinic and maintained a nursery. Here orphan or ailing infants or one twin would often be brought to Srs Laurent or Jude to be cared for. Sometimes these children were claimed as soon as they could walk, at other times they remained to become mission children who went to school, enjoyed a companionable bringing up till they reached a marriageable age. Then the girls would be reclaimed for some bridegroom whose family would pay a handsome bride price.

In 1960s Father Jim Wall wrote of the non-formal education that so many islanders were receiving:

Technical training has been on an ad hoc basis... work had to be done; building, plumbing, ships to be crewed, engines maintained and repaired, books printed and bound. The young men learnt these on the job and, depending on the ability of the individual priest or brother supervising and their own natural ability, they became more or less skilled. At the present time (early 1960s) the mission employs about 150 Islanders in forestry and sawmilling, shipyard-engine repair shop, building and construction, printing workroom, plumbing shop, mechanised farming and plantation, ships and motor maintenance, joinery and cabinet making.

Buma was the largest centre of training, where Brother Chanel DIXON, a crusty old humorist from New Zealand, supervised
a successful slipway for the repair and construction of small ships. Here, two generations of young Kwalo and Langalanga men received training and experience under the eagle eye of Br Chan.

Nearby, the sawmill, begun in the thirties by an Australian expoliceman turned Marist, Brother Anthony BURKE, employed several boys. In the 60s it was Br Colin CAMPBELL who trained and supervised the work and training. There would come a day when both slipway and sawmill would be put in charge of the Buma Association, run by Kwalo men. (Though the slipway no longer exists, ship building is carried on in the Langalanga lagoon, many of the builders being old apprentices of Brother Chanel).

NEW ARRIVALS

Fr Bernard (Barney) LAARVELD of Netherlands arrived in 1951 at Sydney. Brother Gerard POT was also awaiting a boat at Villa Maria and Fr Noel FOX had just arrived from New Zealand. All three were destined for Solomons. They travelled on the MORINDA. Fr van Mechelen was holding the fort for the Bishop in Honiara. He sent Fr Noel Fox to Wainoni and Fr Laarveld to South Malaita.

At that time, the Are'are of South and Small Mala were ministered to by two Dutch priests, aided by catechists Patrick Waihahao, Venseslasi Roho’la’a and their helpers. The white haired Fr Bernard van de WALLE had long worked in Rohinari district, while 4 years previously Tarapalna got its first resident priest, Fr Piet GEERTS. Recently the Marching Rule had just been quelled, but was still so to speak, smouldering. The Catholic Welfare Society started by Fr van de Walle and Geerts was acting constructively in Areare districts.

Fr Laarveld henceforth would be the itinerant, visiting villages by bush tracks up the hills and by canoe through Maramasike
Passage and along the east coast. During 1955-6 he was the guest of Hautonima people, staying for six week visits in various villages. Just as he was almost proficient in the language, he was appointed to Uru, up north, to found a mission among the East Kwalo tribes.

At Uru with a new group of catechists, Seraldo Mal'abu, Ioane Tenten, Steven Lenifaka and others, Fr Laarveld’s work was mainly among pagan bushmen. One of these, a small schoolboy at the time, would many years later pay tribute to the missionary who taught all about a world beyond and beyond:

Fr Barney Laarveld came to Uru in 1956. He brought with him three good things: Christianity, Peace, Education. Almost everywhere were still pagans. He travelled among the pagan villages; he was also a doctor treating children with scabies, bakwa and other sores of the skin. More villagers came to the station to be treated for other sicknesses too. Fr Barney did a very great work among the Uru people of East Kwalo. First hour he was in the classroom; next hour he was in the church teaching catechism. The next hour he would be giving out medicine and dressings. Next hour he would be mixing cement with the labourers. For his great effort and sacrifices, the young generation and the young ones to come will still remember his years and the fruits he planted at Uru. Today we are moving, though we are not wealthy, but the fire is burning. With great sincere heart, we the people of Uru want to thank you Father Barney very much and may God bless you too. (Speech of Kalisto Koke at farewell celebration for Fr Laarveld.)

In later years Fr Laarveld was transferred to Guadalcanal. In Honiara he was active in SICA as well as in Christian education and as hospital chaplain. Despite his absence from Malaita, he was and is still regarded as the Father of East Kwaio.

CATECHISTS OF NORTH MALAITA

No account of Mala church history would be adequate without some mention of the part played by the Catechists. Though
the following confines itself to but a few of the north, it is needless to say that those of other regions have been urged by the same charity of Christ in their generous contribution to the growth of the church.

Of church leaders and catechists to whom every missionary is indebted, Bishop Raucaz had written in 1923:

They are our most precious helpers; they keep alive Christian life in villages already converted; they open the way for the apostle in villages still heathen. Having the advantage of a more accurate knowledge of the native tongue and of the manners and customs of their fellows, they are able to succeed where the missionary might easily fail.

In recalling the early days of the first Christians in Takwa and Dala of north Mala, Fr Chris Kamphuis who has lived over fifty years in that area praises the work of catechists and church leaders:

The church in rural areas consists of many small and bigger communities, where the catechists are co-workers of the parish priest. They are responsible for the church, the growing of the Catholic faith and the spread of Catholic teaching. In every community there are also men and women who assist the catechist in looking after the church. These keep the community together and build up Catholic family life.

How do catechists emerge? In ways as numerous as the fingers of God’s hand. In 1914 Langalanga was a stronghold of paganism. Its priests were powerful and in many ways dominated their people. One day a mother took her 2-year old boy to be baptised at Buma. The baptism of Abaramo OSIFERA was recorded as the tenth on Fr Donasiano’s register. Though both parents were pagan, the boy went to school at Buma, grasping the faith as a baby grasps his mother’s hand.

In the late 20s, Samuele a catechist from Wanderer Bay was sent by Fr Dona to Auki Island. Samuele in the midst of
pagans began a small prayer school. A curious small boy WALEILE attended the class and wanted to know more, understand more. When the boy lay apparently dying of malaria, his pagan father ran to Samuele for help.

Like Samuele, catechist Kiristiano QARO also came from Tangaragre district to aid Fr Josef HALBWACHS in north Mala. At Buma Kira met and married Senoveva HEKOIA, precocious mission ward of Rohinari where Fr Jean Coicaud had saved her from burial before death. Kira and Senoveva lived at Dala for 3 years evangelising and preparing young people for baptism. Aristido of Ruavatu replaced the couple when Kira returned home with his young family. (9)

Alfonso GANE'A in 1927 came down from his mountain village in the Kwalo bush with his parents to west Kwalo coast. His father was in trouble. He had been accused of being one of the murderers of district officer, Bell. He was actually innocent of the charge and this was proved in the Court case by a witness, Mlkale Ma'ara. At the Auki Court in west Kwalo, the accused was found not guilty and was acquitted. In gratitude to Michael Ma'ara, Ganea's father gave his son to him in payment. Michael Ma'ara accepted the boy as his own. Finding him to be a bright lad, he sent him to Fr Donatien Coicaud's school at Buma.

Other young Kwalo fellows like Filip KAKASI had come to school through curiosity. Once they learned to read and write, some of these remained to use their skills assisting in parish work. Filipo was dispensary man for four years, learning a little about first aid and helping to dispel the villagers' fear of it. As for Alfonso Ganea, often urging two bullocks to pull the plough in the food gardens, he was also asked by the priest to write some of the Kwalo custom stories in his own language. Later he helped in making a Kwalo prayer and hymn book. He
was also sent at times to assist catechists in their work, at Tauba, Takwa, Dala and other Catholic villages in the north. He helped Kristiano Qaro and his wife Senoveva when they went to Dala with their first born. He also spent time on Auki Island with Sale Baba'animae as a catechist aid.

Blinded in childhood after an accident with scalding water, at Takwa, TOMA DOLAIASI was trained as a catechist by Fr Chris Kamphuis. Despite his disability, Toma’s blindness enabled him to see and hear things beyond the scope of those endowed with all their senses. In his many travels and enterprises, Toma never forgot anyone he had ever spoken with.

In time, all these mission helpers were in demand for government jobs, or tasks of responsibility on sea or land. All did further training of one kind or other and picked up a handful of skills. The older men were sent to Fr Pavese’s Catechist Training Centre at Tangarare; many of the younger went to Fr Moore’s preparatory school at Marau. All eventually became men dedicated to spreading the faith, battlers as became descendants of warriors.

We read of Langalanga in 1949:

Langalanga is still very pagan and it is only in recent years that Catholics could gain the right to have their churches on the Island of their village. But in that tight little group of villages, Alite, Koalia, Busu, Foudoru and Lauasli, the heathen priests are fighting a losing, if stubborn battle against the firm persistence and steady pressure of Abaramo Osifera’s clear teaching in word and example. (169)

During the war years, Alfonso Ganea, as altar boy, mechanic and ship’s engineer, became the Bishop’s assistant. Moving from Tulagi to Guadalcanal, from Avuavu to Marau to Rohinari, avoiding mines and battleships, Alfonso saw Bishop Aubin encouraging his missionaries by his low-key presence.
Alfonso shared Aubin’s distress at the deaths of four missionaries near Ruavatu and again at seeing the mission headquarters at Visale destroyed by bombing.

By the mid fifties, Lilisiana had become a catholic community thanks to the lifelong efforts of Ioane Walelle, once cured of malaria, it is claimed, by his baptism. Filipo Kakasi had started a school and a family at Buloabu that would reverberate into the future. Abaramo Osifera went to Rome to represent Solomon Islands at the Beatification of Oceania’s first martyr, Peter Chanel.

A decade or so later, Osifera would ask a Marist newly arrived from England to baptise his dying mother - this mama who fifty years previously had taken her two year old son to be baptised in the strange new lotu at Buma. (1)

Toma Dolalasi, blind catechist of Takwa, after a great apostolate and a fantastic existence, died at Malu’u hospital, his wife holding his hand.

It is to these Malaita men of faith, and to such as these throughout the Solomons that all missionaries pay homage. These battlers, transformed warriors of a new order, have from the beginning and up till now, continued to ‘fight the good fight’ as St Paul, apostle of the gentiles, applauds.

END NOTES

1 Mendana wrote, ‘All the Indians of this island (San Cristobal) fear the island of Ramos (i.e Malaita) which is at war with all the others’. Amherst who translates this in 1900 writes a footnote to this: It is still so, nor is it
safe for Europeans to explore, except in strong parties...Amherst page 181.

2 The catechists with Peter Supara assisting Fr Coicaud were: Sotere Borau of Visale; Iakobo of Avuavu, father of Sr Domitila DMJ; Berenado of Savo; Ioane Batisto Saunimara, grandfather of Saniela, wife of Clement Raukeniana; Saniele of Marau; Iuliano Kauhoa of Pipisu.

3 TURUPATU 1915.

4 Teytard died in 1916 at Visale; Allet in 1915 at Marau.


6 From notes of Fr Chris Kamphuis SM, parish priest of Dala 1970-1992. Other priests at Dala had been Frs Devlin, Louis Morosini, Jan Snyders, Liam O'Reilly, Siebo Leppen.

7 Raucaz. In the Savage South Solomons, p 259.

8 Fr Chris Kamphuis. Homily on occasion of Dala's Jubilee.

9 Oral history and notes from Fr Kamphuis.


11 Osifera's mother baptised by Fr Norman Arkwright, 1967.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN  MAKIRA AND GUADALCANAL

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.
ECCLESIASTES 9:11

It may be asked whether Mendana's suspicion that the headman at Makira Bay was invoking the devil was a valid one? Do devil sor spirits allow themselves to be invoked? What credence can we give to fairly common
stories in places untouched, or newly touched by Christianity? Missionaries are often faced by puzzled neophytes and even committed Christians who seek explanation for what appear to be preternatural events, showing the power of good or evil spirits. Accounts of such events, which gain credibility when verified by several reliable witnesses, are common enough in Mala and Makira. Some of these are frightening; others encouraging. No mature missionary will dismiss them lightly.

Fr JOHN ESPAGNE SM

DISAPPOINTMENT

When Bishop Raucaz writes of San Cristoval in Vingt-cinq Annees d’Apostolat aux Iles Salomon Meridionales 1898-1923, he sighs regretfully through his chapter. He sees the island as ‘the most favoured by providence’, yet in terms of Christian response, the most disappointing.

Even Mendana’s first encounter with its people had been unpromising. On the day after his landing, hoping to barter for provisions, he was surprised that the friendly atmosphere of the previous day had changed.

One of the Indians made a kind of incantation; drawing a circle, he stood within it, and shouted aloud. Those around him looked disturbed at this, and he began to tremble till he was on the point of falling and he went and held on to the posts of a house. We understood that he had invoked the devil. Then he and all the others took up arms, and came towards us, making signs to begone.

Mendana’s attempt to negotiate failed. The Spaniards, badly in need of food, resorted to the firing of several arquebuses. This put the villagers to flight and the starving crew took from the abundance of the food gardens what was necessary for survival.

Mendana stayed 6 weeks in San Cristobal, cleaning and repairing the two ships, while the brigantine explored the coastline. The Franciscans celebrated Mass as usual, but in San Cristobal there were no friendly conversations with the islanders.
as there had been in Ysabel. Instead there were clashes in which both Spaniards and Makirans were wounded. We hear of no deaths but it seems that no qualm prevented the Spaniards from the kidnapping of a family, taken onboard to be landed in Peru. That these were treated with respect and kindliness, we may surmise, for they did survive the epic journey back to Peru, while many of the sailors died.

That the Spaniards regarded this ‘kidnapping’ as a kindly act, is apparent. But we may ask: Of what significance, historic or other, is this handful of islanders taken in exile to Peru? At face value, a non-sequitur, was this drab tableau but a stone pitched into the sea? Who knows? For Mendana, at least, it may well have been the one consolation in his otherwise tragic life, that six persons from his isles of discovery had uttered the name of Christ with understanding and desire. Certain pious missionaries were later to see in this little band, the first Solomon saints, interceding for their ‘onetalks’ still in the dark of unknowing.

RETREAT

It was from the same port of Our Lady’s Visitation, renamed Port Sainte-Marle, (and later to be called Makira Bay), that Bishop Collomb had departed in 1847, with his depleted band of Marists. He had written of that departure: However we do hope that this retreat will only be momentary, and that our unfortunately large number of victims who have been sacrificed in the Solomons will draw down upon that archipelago, after a short while, the grace of salvation. (1)

That momentary retreat lasted longer than 51 years. Fr Pierre Rouillac, visiting Makira Bay in October 1898 was aware of the half century that had elapsed since the Marists had left the same bay regretfully, hoping to make a fresh start in Woodlark.
From his first days in Rua Sura, Rouillac was fascinated by the thought of those pioneers in San Cristobal. The victims whose bones strewed some inland patch, appealed to his curiosity. Did any vestige of that ill-fated mission remain? What memories, if any, lingered of those brave, but foolhardy strangers in the inhabitants who had hosted them? Where word had failed, did witness prevail across the stream of time?

In 1899, Rouillac with skipper Jacques Beugnin and three Fijian catechists stopped at Makira Bay. 'We were surrounded by canoes bringing all sorts of food.' One of them spoke Fijian so communication was established at once. Fr Rouillac explained his desire to see the site where the old time Marists had been.

It was soon apparent that they didn't want any religion. At some distance behind them, some women made a gesture of offering fresh eggs. They were stark naked, so that I constantly had to turn my eyes from them. Finally one of the men took two eggs from a woman and handed them to me. I responded by placing a stick of tobacco in that same hand. The eggs were indeed fresh and I ate them on the spot. Back at our boat, three men offered to take us to the site of the old Marist mission. Within the hour we were there.

Rouillac, aided by his interpreter spoke with an old man. He asked him if he remembered the missionaries and indeed he did though he was but a small boy at the time. He spoke of them as of old friends of his elders. In the afternoon, led by their Fijian-speaking guide, Rouillac and his party were taken to see the site of the Marist house and grounds. The house had been levelled but coconuts they had planted still stood. 'He showed me pieces of brick, relics no doubt of an oven they had built. I knelt down, recited a De Profundis for our departed confreres, and a Memorare for the conversion of the island.'The chief, whom Rouillac met before leaving, proposed 'that we come to live within his tribe, promising to give me all the land I needed. Remember that I was dealing with people from Oni, the tribe of which the former missionaries always used to speak highly.
'They still are', adds Rouillac, 'what they were then: good, friendly, pleasant.'

We may wonder how much the Melanesian ethic of politeness to foreigners prevailed. One suspects that the blithe answers given Rouillac on this occasion told him little, or that Rouillac, still himself a naive newcomer, took too much for granted. However Rouillac did link past to present. He took time to write to Fr Leopold VERGUET, now parish priest of Carcassone (and nearly eighty years of age). Verguet is the last survivor of Epalle’s group, since Brother Gennade Rolland died in Villa Marla, Sydney in 1898.

After his first trip to Pte Ste Marie, Rouillac, with Bouillon, Guilloux and Guilet, made several visits there. He was well known to the Oni villagers now, and his letter to Verguet in April 1900 describes one such visit:

You would not believe how your memory still lives among the people of Makira Harbour, and what a lasting impression you made upon them... I get the impression that you were all well liked by the people. They would not wish anything untoward happen to you. I have met two men who seem to have known you quite well. One named Marau was a regular visitor to the mission. He used to take you in his canoe whenever you were going to villages along the coast. The other called Oamea, though then very young, still remembers the missionaries. I was not too surprised when he mentioned the names of Peremo (Fremont), Peregue (Verguet) etc. I asked these two old men about the names of several chiefs you mention in your book. They knew them but they are now all dead.

Rouillac goes on to comment on the state of the Oni villages;

There does not seem to be much harmony. The fever makes inroads on the population; people die off and nearly all the young men have gone elsewhere. There are not many children. Soon the place will be left desolate....
To complete this pessimistic view, Rouillac concludes with the news that, 'Today we have been digging the spot where Fr Crey was reputedly buried and we did indeed find some bones.' Rouillac's initial questions have sprouted new ones. Memories remain, good memories, it is true, but can mere memory generate life? We did indeed find some bones... Will these dry bones rise up?

This implicit query seems to sear the paper, as he concludes his letter to the old pioneer, begging prayers, 'for your unworthy and respectful successor.'

**THE THIRD COMING**

Mendana and his six Christians of San Cristobal; the first Marist band, Epalle and Collomb. Christianity had touched the Solomons twice in 400 years, leaving no apparent trace. San Cristobal's third contact with Christian influence came not from outsiders but from its own people. We may read about these in the Diary of Wainoni Bay, Makira in its early days.

It was to be a woman then, who was to be the first apostle of her island. In 1908, Selina was one of a dozen who returned from Fiji's plantations to the Kahua district. In Fiji, Selina and Stanislaus had been instructed and baptised. The diary tells us that having come home, 'Stanislaus lost no time in dying quickly, while Selina, aged about twenty, became the soul of the place.' In no way discouraged, Selina gathered the children of Kahua around her and taught them prayers and hymns in Fijian. Morning and evening, about twenty young people listened and sang hymns and learned prayers under the leadership of Selina, whose exuberance infected those who surrounded her.
A year of such catechising had passed, when one day, Fr Bertreux arrived. Veteran of Fiji, now at home in Sura, he was delighted at what Selina had done. As he offered Mass in Kahua, the leaf roof shook with the singing of hymns in Fijian and the responses in Latin. During his stay he baptised Mikaele, the brother of Selina, and blessed the marriage of Selina to Mikaele Tallga. He promised a resident priest who sailed into the nearby harbour soon afterwards.

Father Emile BABONNEAU (1872-1931) with four catechists from Avuavu, arrived in December 1909, to build and settle at Wainoni Bay. Food gardens were planted, an enclosure built for chickens and coconuts sown; all normal procedure for a station. A note to the Sydney Procure asks for a poison strong enough to kill the dogs that kill my hens and the hogs that devastate our gardens. (4) The coconuts fared better, an investment for years to come. Apostles must never be lacking in hope.

Fr Babonneau was joined next year by Fr Samuel MOREAU (1882-1936). More headway was made in the local language, one of the five spoken on the island. Selina and her father, Tedeo Vasira, whose knowledge of Fijian was shared by the missionaries were key teachers in the fathers' tenuous grasp of Kahua. Babonneau was not an avid linguist and his lack of this gift was to have damaging effects. In school the Gari language was at first the medium of instruction and Aloisio Alukwao the first teacher.

The first days were hopeful. TURUPATU tells us that on Christmas Day 1910, three boys were baptised and that some adult catechumens were making progress. In 1912, two Sisters, Brigitte and Edmee, came and began a class for girls. A visitor to Wainoni, J E Philp, connected with Burns Philp Co., in 1913, records his impressions of the mission in his log-book:
Later I joined the Fathers for a meal. They are most genial and hospitable and do, I am sure, good work. Their flock seems happy and seems to have quite an affection for their mentors. The plantations and gardens here are in excellent order. The boys are encouraged to grow tobacco for their own use.

It was at this visit that Philp discussed the population question with the fathers. 'The natives are a dying race,' Resident Commissioner Woodford had often said, echoing the opinion of other old-timers. It appeared to be true in San Cristobal. Babonneau gave as his opinion based on observation that the rate of decrease was 60%. In the villages, infanticide and abortion were commonly practised. Furthermore, in 1921 a flu epidemic decimated the village populations. In 1927, a measles epidemic caused further loss. The 1928 census recorded the San Cristobal population as being 8,000, that is, 200 fewer than in 1924.

Nowhere in Solomon Islands, perhaps, had the seed fallen on such rocky ground as in the isle of San Cristobal. With reason the first mission, established at Wainoni Bay was dedicated to Our Lady, Queen of Martyrs. But did the newcomers of the 20th century realise in their first bright eagerness to begin again, that they too might be called on to continue being the sons of that Queen in another kind of martyrdom?

Failure is an expected ingredient of the human condition and particularly so of the missionary life. But failure unceasing, start after start and season after season, can strain the stoutest heart and the deepest faith. Where did it all start? Ecumenism had not yet been heard of in San Cristobal. It was, though, practised in a paradoxical way. The Anglicans were on friendly terms with the Marists and Dr Charles Fox often dropped in at the Catholic mission for a chat. 'I shall always pray for your work and rejoice sincerely in your success,' he once wrote to them.
The same good relationship did not exist between Fr Babonneau and the pastors of the South Sea Evangelicals (SSEM). Letters in the archives record a kind of vendetta by correspondence that took place between the two in 1915-16. Today one may read with amusement the stream of letters of mutual accusations of the missions' stealing prospective christians from the other. One such note to Fr Babonneau ends as follows: Now Sir, I as a man, would like to express feelings of friendship with you as a man, but I am afraid that our religious beliefs and ideas of right and wrong are as far apart as the poles. I am quite ready to believe that you are sincere in your beliefs, but I believe that you have been grossly misled by your teachers. I pray for your enlightenment...and remain yours truly, Norman C. Deck.

One suspects that Fr Babonneau rather enjoyed the contest as he thanks his would-be friend for the prayers for his enlightenment. He then adds: No, dear M Norman, I cannot admit that our religious beliefs and ideas of right and wrong are as far apart as the poles. He then suggests to Mr Deck that he 'may be fighting a devil which, thank God, did not come to Makila'. (5)

The Marists were to have worse devils to confront than 'heretics'. The demons of apathy, ignorance and indifference among the villagers would hinder the work of the missionaries for the rest of their days. The battle would never be done. Fr Aloys BRUGMANNS arrived in Solomons in 1928, the first Dutch Marist among his confreres, mainly French and French-German. Brugmanns (1899-1985), young and gifted, brimming with zeal, was placed at Wainoni Bay. Perhaps the Bishop had intimated that the place needed an injection of new thinking. Fr Babonneau, pioneer of Makira, was bent under the weight of twenty years of its contradictions. Fr Moreau, more agile, had seen 18 years of life in Makira. He too looked
exhausted. Was the young newcomer daunted by such records of endurance?

Reality touched him in the first weeks after his arrival. A small scratch on his leg became infected, turned ulcerous and soon led to blood poisoning. Fr Babonneau panicked at seeing Fr Brugmanns dying, before he had, so to speak, begun. Against all principles he called a passing ship to take the dying man to Tulagi. The ship was the Evangel, mission ship of his dreadful opponents, the S.S.E. Mission.

Providentially, one of the dreadful heretics was a medical man, Dr Waite. Coming ashore he performed surgery, gave medication and with kind care saved the life of the young priest. Thus reports the chronicler of the Wainoni Diary. If during his convalescence Fr Brugmanns had reflected on the jottings in that diary, as he most likely did, he must have been dismayed. The second decade of that 20 years reads like a chapter of calamities.

Its bantering humour hardly conceals its grim desperation. The school in every mission might well be termed the source of evangelisation catechesis. Here in Wainoni, school attendance fluctuated. Small but efficient, it had begun with a handful of boys, barely a dozen. At its greatest recorded enrolment in the twenty years, there were 42 girls and 35 boys. But hunger and learning are not compatible and when the gardens fail, so does attendance. 'The children have all run away home,' was a common entry. Not on the word alone can humans survive.

The school gardens were part of schooling and a great worry to Sr Brigitte. In 1924, she succumbed to sickness and was sent for a rest. Fr Babonneau too suffered from yaws and eventually also went south for treatment. He returned rested but not cured.
Fr Moreau himself, during his pastor's absence, had fallen on a stake on one of his safaris and was disabled for several weeks. In mid decade, all the banana trees died and again the school children were hungry. The big earthquake is recorded in the following year. The splendid church that Brs Jean-Claude and Roberto MOISO had been building these two years was split and partly toppled. There were landslides that destroyed gardens and houses. Though no one died, there was much distress among the villagers that all the efforts of the missionaries could do little to assuage. In 1927 an epidemic of measles killed many babies and affected small children. When this was over, Sr Christopher was sent to Avuavu, where a year later, after a 4-day sickness, she died.

1930 FATHER PODEVIGNE ARRIVES

Fr Babonneau was feeling his age:

My sight is dim. I am shaky and my hand wobbles as I write these lines. Come quickly, you young ones! There are souls we want to save but we are unable to do what we could in earlier days. If only I were twenty years younger. It is thirty years since I saw my mother who is eighty five. To return to France? It is a beautiful thought but who would care for our San Cristobal people in my absence? Au Ciel!

The old priest should not have worried. In his two young helpers, Frs Brugmanns and Fr Podevigne in 1930, he had two concerned Marists, whose eagerness to start work in earnest was restricted by the good old man. Fr Podevigne, writing to a superior in France, hints at the difficulties. He had heard somewhere that Fr Babonneau had been sent from Fiji early in the century to counterbalance the influence of Fr Rouillac. That Podevigne should mention this rumour, thirty years after the event, attests to his surprise that Babonneau, this feeble old man beside him, had once been a man of influence.
For, like Fr Brugmann and perhaps many a keen young missionary elsewhere, Fr Podevigne was dismayed by the state of the church in San Cristobal. He has at least completed a round of the sixty or more villages; he has found that many have reverted to paganism and a few to the heretics. 'The one thing that astonishes me is that more ground has not been lost when you consider that some villages have not been visited for seven years.' This (he hastens to explain) is not that our two predecessors were negligent but that the task exceeded their strength...It is heart-rending and all because reinforcements have not come long before this.

Perhaps there were other factors too. Two epidemics in the twenties had killed a large village population. The Government system of pacification too had led to a loss of morale. Sickness and ignorance went hand in hand causing a vacuum into which Christianity might or might not seep.

When the newcomers set to work to put order into the school, 'which is run by the pupils', they lost them all. 'There are almost insurmountable difficulties. In the villages the baptised are in the minority. Surrounded by paganism, they are swamped and their pretence at prayer is pitiful...the so-called catechists, trained in this school, are profoundly ignorant, without zeal and very demanding.'

Fr Babonneau died in 1931, two years after Fr Moreau had been appointed to Tangarare. Little could be seen for the twenty odd years of effort each had given. For the two young priests, the task of recovery appeared as difficult as that of starting a new mission. But they did not hesitate. The bad catechists were sent away, the good ones sent for training to Gausava. The early catechisms were rewritten, for once they had mastered the language, the newcomers had found 'serious theological errors' in the text. No wonder neophytes had been
confused. The faithful were encouraged to send their children to school once more and a refreshing discipline enlivened the station.

'Only the grace of God can rescue us,' Podevigne had written in distress previously, 'we need prayers and prayers and prayers.' His concerns of that time were now being addressed. A small boat was bought and this enabled regular visits to be made down the coast as far as Mami. In 1933 a canoe from Ulawa brought men re-questing a visit to their isle. A new station was founded in south Makira at Faumera. Some catechists returning from Gausava expressed the desire to become religious brothers like Br Jean-Claude who had built the church at Wainoni. To the fathers these events were hopeful signs.

The faithful Alukwao and his wife Veronika, who had spent many years aiding Fr Babonneau, continued to be a support, wise and knowledgeable, upon whom the fathers could always rely. Their adopted son, Emilio, who had grown up in Wainoni, was now a teacher. When Fr Podevigne went to live at Faumera, Emilio went with him to begin a school. He later married a Mami woman and remained teaching at Mami till his death. (6)

Alukwao's adopted daughter, Veronika, star-pupil of Sr Brigitte one day asked her teacher if she too might become a sister. Her initiative as founder of the religious congregation today known as Dalena Ko Maria Imakulata is part of Guadalcanal church history. It may have been her example that inspired the demands of the catechists, (7) who likewise became the first aspirants to a Solomon Islands brotherhood. Fr van Mechelen was put in charge of their postulant training at Wainoni in 1935.
Regular week-long visits made to Ulawa with a couple of resident catechists had resulted in a little group of neophytes, who, under the leadership of Damasuke, built their own church. This was blessed in 1935 and became the Catholic centre of the Ulawa flock from which one day would emerge their own Uluawan priest. In 1941 the Sisters opened a nursery at Wainoni to care for six orphans. Like these rescued infants, the church in San Cristobal was struggling into motion once more.

WARTIME... A PAUSE

In time came the Pacific war to Guadalcanal where the action took place. Fr Podevigne farewelled San Cristobal when he went as chaplain to the Free French Forces in New Caledonia. From afar, the missionaries Frs van Mechelen and PARSONAGE, Srs FERNANDE and STEPHANIE would see a passing destroyer, a crashing Zero. Work went on as usual; couples were married, babies were born, gardens produced food, a few children came to school to learn a little, people received the Sacraments and, in a hidden, silent way, grace continued its action among the poor in spirit.

During this time of isolation from the rest of the world, a sad missionary gives a dry eyed picture of the church as he sees it:

This island of Makira, nearly a hundred miles long and twenty miles across, with its thick bush and mountains - truly an unruly piece of earth - is cared for by two fathers. The Catholic population is one in seven and though I consider the present time very opportune for good work, it is with a heavy heart that I tell you that the Catholic increase for the last twelve months was only three ... the total result of one year's work!

Our efforts to build up a school have met with little or no success. Truly things seem to be at a standstill. And yet I feel that the people are only standing on the edge waiting to come to us. WHAT IS WRONG? Well
we can have our various opinions, but no doubt the real reason is God's secret.

'Despite appearances to the contrary, there is now more advance than regress,' jotted the diary of Wainoni Bay some several years previously. In moments of depression, this had to be stated from time to time. So too after 1945, with an influx of young Marists, morale in San Cristobal lifted. With Frs John Espagne and Anthony Loft from New Zealand and Karel Leemans from Netherlands, the changes that imperceptibly took place were mainly constructive. Makira had suffered in previous years from a lack of mastery of the languages. As a result there had been misunderstanding and ignorance of Catholic doctrine. Having a strong interest in language, Fr Espagne in his nine years among Makira people, four years in Mami and Wainoni, with week long visits to Ulawa, studied the vernaculars of Arosi, Kahua and Ulawa. He managed to produce new and better translations of gospels and prayers as well as a booklet on Marian devotions. 'It will be many years after the actual practice of paganism disappears, before the heritage of paganism does,' he wrote.

Fr Leemans in 1947 was sent to Manivovo where he was noted for his skill in seacraft, his narrow escapes with tides and currents and his humorous wisdom, sharpened by the San Cristobal environment. He was recalled to Honiara in the early 50s to take charge of the aspiring seminarians.

Though the Little Brothers had been disbanded by Bishop Aubin, the death of Br Romano in his fall from a ngali nut tree seemed to have awakened rather than weakened an attraction to the religious life. Among the lads sent by Aubin to Fiji for further schooling were three from Wainoni. One of these would become Br Jerome Hura SM, spending many dedicated years as mission printer in Honiara and Bomana PNG. The ranks of the Marist Teaching Brothers too would be
enriched by the vocations of others from San Cristobal. (11) Numerous Makira girls too would become Dalena Ko Maria Imakulata, following the footsteps of Sr Aloisia.
CELEBRATION
FATHER MICHAEL AIKE

GIANT FOOD BOWL, SAN CRISTOVAL, B.S.I.P.
FR JOHN ESPAGNE and JASINTO at grave of FR. CREY S.M.

REMEMBERING THE PAST

AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
WITH THE GILBERTSE

AND THE SISTERS D.M.I.
RAUCAZ INTRODUCES CHANGE

When the gospel comes to a place, charity comes with it, bearing witness to the human validity of Christ's message, and taking the form of schools, hospitals, social assistance and technical training.

GAUDIUM ET SPES

I will start by pulling down the old house to make room for the new one.

Fr RAUCAZ

In 1918 Rua Sura had been 20 years the headquarters of Catholic Mission. In that year Fr Raucaz was appointed to Visale. Practical and systematic as usual, Raucaz proceeded to build up the station. With cement and fibrolite he replaced the sand floors and bamboo walls. He bridged the creek running through the property, and by 1921 had even installed a telephone connecting presbytery with printery, classrooms, Sisters' and Teachers' houses. Food gardens to occupy and to feed the school children flourished on the slopes. Most importantly and with vision, Raucaz built a small dam by a hillside spring from which he piped water sufficient for the whole station. This permanent water supply has lasted to this day.

When in 1921 Raucaz was appointed successor to Bishop Bertreux, Marists and islanders alike had reason to hope for better things. Raucaz had spent all his missionary life, seventeen years in the Solomons. He knew from experience the difficulties and possibilities of Langalanga lagoon, and those of far western Rubiana. He had toiled and built and laboured in Avuavu, Tangarare and Visale. He had taught, trained teachers, installed a printing press, built bridges, houses and classrooms. He was the mission ship mechanic, even as bishop. Handy man as well as leader, man of common sense and concern...yes, there were high hopes for this bishop.
One of his first decisions, approved by all, was to relocate the Catholic mission centre from Rua Sura to Visale. The place had several advantages, over the small off shore Sura. With its fine harbour sheltered by Cape Esperance, it was a stopping place for trading ships and the odd steamer. The climate was healthy, the soils fertile. Best of all, it was close to people, and accessible by canoe to visitors from Savo and Russell islands.

Villagers from Kakabona to Lambi Bay were already familiar with Katel, his patient mare, bringing Raucaz to visit and to minister. Now that headhunting was a thing of the past, several of the bush villages had shifted back to the coast. The Turupatu of June 1922 reports how the leaders in these had already built their own 'vale lotu' in each new settlement.

As for Rua Vatu, that shore facing Sura, its people had long resisted friendship with the missionaries. But now the old resentments had melted and people were asking for the lotu. It was to Tavugi village, Petero Manilunga tells us, that Father Aubin and his catechist Alfred Lovi went in 1924 to build a first mission. Lovi, born in 1908 at Rua Sura, trained as catechist by Fr Bouillon, was a lifelong example of generous Christian dedication, both to his large family and to all who knew him in Rua Vatu parish.

CONCERN FOR TRAINING

Raucaz was ever wary of the superficial: Our mission has had a certain exterior appearance of vitality, but within, a lot of things were wrong and lifeless. His ambition was to remedy this situation. Sound catechist training was regarded as essential to the building up of a healthy Catholic society, where practical skills and joy in work were the outcome of a Christian approach. Raucaz was equally keen to see that catechists had understanding wives and that
the Sisters training them were well cared for. At Tangarare and later at Visale he had built the sisters' houses. Girls were sent to school with them at about age 12, often remaining till they were of marriageable age. Thus girls aiding the sisters in clinic and house learned a little first aid, and health care as well as reading, writing, numeracy and how to prepare for marriage.

Knowing that Christian families should be the strength of village life, Raucaz was concerned at the high rate of infant mortality. Though the custom of infanticide (in Avuavu) had been wiped out, many (about 50%) children under two, weakened by malaria, died of hookworm, T.B. and general lack of proper hygiene. To encourage families to better care for their families, the new Bishop, aided by the Society of Propagation of the Faith, started a child endowment scheme. This assistance, begun in 1925, ceased in 1934 at the death of Raucaz.

All the churches recognised the value of literacy as key to learning. The bi-monthly Turupatu, issued first from Sura and now from Visale, was popular. Besides providing content and motivation for literacy, it gave the small groups of Catholics scattered in Mala, Makira and Guadalcanal a kind of solidarity. Br George continued to train printers at Visale, and the faithful continued to learn a little about the wider world: the Pope who lived in Rome, the martyrs of Uganda, the warfare in Europe. In 1921 the Bishop bought new printing equipment to supplement and continue the work at Visale printery. In 1924, the gospels for Sundays and feasts were printed in Gari, and were on sale.

A more specific course was designed for church helpers, and in June 1928, the Catechist Training Centre of Sts Peter and Paul was founded at Gausava, Tangarare. The group of 21 included young unmarried men from Mala, Makira and Avuavu. The Director was Fr Rinaldo Pavese (1886-1955). Arriving in
Solomon Islands in 1910, Pavese had spent all of his 18 missionary years in the Tangarare-Visale district. He was well liked by the people, pagans and Christians alike, and this promised well for the Catechist ministry.

A third project, more than educational, was the commencement of a pious sodality of girls that eventually became a religious congregation. NA DALENA KO MARIA originated at the request of a couple of bold girls in Wanoni Bay. VERONIKA MALEFO, adopted daughter of Aloisio Alukwao, and MARIA KEVASI of Makira ventured to ask Sr Brigitte one day if they too might become sisters. Why not? The startled Sr Brigitte had asked, and kept on asking till the question was repeated to Bishop Raucaz. A house was built at Visale for the training of this pair and others who would follow. Sr Evangeline was appointed as their instructress in the knowledge of prayer, the religious life and how to wear clothing. This group of dedicated girls was a novel option for females, opening an alternative to arranged marriages. The first two made their promises and were received two years later as 'DALENA KO MARIA IMAKULATA' at Visale. (12)

In 1930 Fr Lebel (1903-75) arrived, the first Marist from USA. His novel methods of teaching, his promotion of the Boy Scout movement made him, in the eyes of Pavese, a dangerous man, spreading modernist attitudes. It was the antagonism against such notions that helped to fuel the quarrel that was to become a scandal in Tangarare district.

Certain feelings of resentment about low wages stirred some of the catechists taught by Pavese, who sympathised with their demands. The situation was compounded by Pavese's condemnation of several Marist confreres for letting 'modernistic ideas undermine their Christian ideals.' He accused the Bishop for allowing such laxity, and for injustice
towards mission workers. Encouraged by support from his students, Pavese in a dramatic gesture before them, greeted the visiting bishop with a demand for his resignation. One can imagine the confrontation between Raucaz, the wrinkled veteran who had in 30 years, learnt to know his people, and Pavese the teacher renowned by his students for his sanctity. It was a quarrel with no victor. But the disunity caused at that moment was to split the church of Tangarare and to cause a distress that would be long remembered. Pavese, at the end of 1933 was recalled to Europe, never to return. The ex-student catechists especially were angered at their Director's removal. The event triggered off the almost 3 year alienation of the Tangarare people from their church authorities.

In what seemed a retaliation against church authority, Toma Boko, nephew of the Ravu headman, organised a boycott of the station. Refusing to accept Fr Samuel Moreau as their parish priest, Boko incited rebellion in a group who chased Moreau with knives and sticks to Visale. Fr Denis Moore was escorted, more kindly, through the bush to Kakabona.

The school children were taken back home and classes ceased. When a few girls opted to remain with the Sisters, they were forcibly abducted by their uncles. In this period, though neither schism nor heresy occurred, the state of estrangement from the mission station persisted.

VIOLENCE AND PITY

Bishop Raucaz grieved deeply. These were his own people, in many cases, those he had baptised and converted. Falling victim to a series of malaria attacks, Raucaz went to Sydney for treatment in June 1934. He died within a fortnight, of a broken heart, the Tangarare people of today are still saying.
In 1936, Fr Aubin was caretaker at Tangarare, and one day ventured to land on the beach at Ravu. Thin and rather puny, Aubin was well known round the missions from the days when he skippered the JOAN OF ARC. This Sunday, he came hoping to find friends. No one greeted the priest as he stepped out of his canoe. Indeed most people had withdrawn inside their houses and all watched in fascination as big man, Toma Boko, knocked the priest over, dragged him along the sand and stamped on him (so narrators recount). Father Aubin, breathless, lay passive, and some of the women and children watching, felt sorry and even wept. (13)

Boko knew that a man who refuses to fight insults the challenger. For him, now to strike such a victim would be like ‘killing a corpse’. Boko was angry therefore, since he had provoked no response, and feeling foolish, strode off along the beach. Fr Raucaz picked himself up, dusted his ribs, and limped to the church, there to pray. By sunset, say the narrators, the church was filled with the villagers, not only women and children, but also the warrior braves as well. Thus compassion overcame, where violence had failed. That was the beginning of the return of the Tangarare Catholics to the lotu at Tangarare, as related by the sons of the rebel advocates of Pavese. Thereafter it was Vitoriano and Teotimo, faithful catechists, who were to become the forerunners of a new era in Tangarare. In later years Tangarare would become a centre first for a Senior Primary School, later a Pastoral Training Centre. Moreover, despite Pavese’s abhorrence of long ago, a bright troop of Boy Scouts, trained and animated by Br Len Sydenham, would become the pride of the district.

AUBIN BECOMES BISHOP

To nobody's surprise, it was Aubin who was consecrated Bishop to succeed Raucaz. But it was the small dynamic
Dutchman, Fr Emery de Klerk, who was to continue the work of reconciliation that Aubin had begun. De Klerk by the end of 1936 saw the last of the leaders Abaramo come back to the church. With his expertise in the Gari language, de Klerk gained an understanding and sympathy of the Tangarare people equal to that which Bouillon had with Visale and Savo catechumens. In September 1936 De Klerk had not only become friends of the chief rebels, but was respected for his facility with the language. New Gari editions of Bible Stories and Lives of the Saints and gospels for Sundays were printed. Once again, the church at Tangarare resounded with song as masses were resumed and families took up their interrupted liturgies.

THE MARIST BROTHERS (F.M.S.) 1939

When Fr Aubin became successor to Bishop Raucaz, nobody was surprised. One of Aubin's dearest concerns was to promote education. Conscious of Raucaz's attempts to begin this, he ensured that the work was carried on at every level. Aubin's first step was to instal Fr Denis Moore in 1936 at Marau to teach bright boys of Mala, Makira and Guadalcanal. There, classes in basic subjects prepared young men for future training, for Aubin had already invited the Marist Brothers to open a school in the Solomons.

In 1939, three Brothers, John, James and Ephrem arrived in Solomons where they were greeted by Fr Emery de Klerk. The Annals of the Marist Brothers give us glimpses into those days of the first years. 'Very kindly man,' it says of Mgr Aubin; with him they ate their first lunch served by native boys, rain served by Providence! After a brief visit to Visale and Tangarare to hear the language, the Brothers arrived in Marau on 23 August to be welcomed by the pupils with
song, dance and speeches. The Brothers adapted quickly to a different scene. Their diary is brief but vivid. Fr Moore takes them to see the food garden which they reach after squelching through a swamp. They find the agricultural system 'interesting but woefully prehistoric!' They are soon launched into the full programme. In class the boys are 'attentive and intelligent'. In the kitchen, Br James has problems with wet wood. In the tidal creek a wily crocodile is caught in a trap designed by Br James and John. It is killed, cooked and eaten with gusto. The brothers learn with the boys how to fish, cook turtle, how to plant yam and make 'tavugi' for the kumara.

During the three years before the Japanese and American conflict the Brothers great achievement was to combine academic studies with appreciative practice of traditional skills. Thus the hobby sessions urged boys to explore further into their own tribal expertise, especially in fish-net making, dug-out and other canoe construction. They learnt to combine their abilities with the practical use of maths and simple science. They learned to use language with accuracy and understanding, and above all to question in order to widen their grasp of the truths of the faith.

The busy days hummed with activity and growth till one day the war interrupted. The Japs and Americans did not harm the Solomon Islanders, but the Brothers were taken away to Vanuatu on a U.S troopship. During their 4 year absence they kept in touch with the mission.

Br Ephrem wrote in 1943:

'To understand the work these boys can do for the spread of the faith, let me give you some examples. I have just heard of the death of Toma Anisimae, who spent three years at our school and was there when we left. Later, he returned to his village and at the time of his death was conducting a school of forty pupils. Pilipo Kakasi wrote and told me he was going to carry on at Marau. Klodio Haumola wrote to tell me he was
building a church in his village... Others have gone to strange districts where teachers are needed, e.g. Damosi went from Mala to Ulawa and Fr Tiggeler writes to say he is doing a wonderful work." (15)

THE FORTIES...ONLOOKERS

The school children at Visale ran shouting to Sr Evangeline in the clinic. A light plane, apparently a Zero, losing height all the way from Savo had just dropped on the reef, some hundred yards offshore. The solo Jap pilot was injured and had to be carried to the clinic unconscious. A few days under Sr Evangeline’s care put him on his feet again, and he departed gratefully to his troop up the coast.

The incident was a prelude to the coming of Commander Ishimoto to Bishop Aubin, a few days later. The Bishop knew the commander by sight for he had long since worked in Tulagi as a carpenter. Now, before the Bishop, he courteously offered protection for the Visale station, in return for the use of it as a camp for his soldiers.

As bombs had already failed on Tulagi, the Bishop foreseeing strife, decided for the welfare of the school and station, that a temporary evacuation was called for. Having sent the children back to their nearby families, he then, accompanied by some Visale guides, joined a small procession of Brother, Sisters, catechist and pastoral workers going by bush track to Tangarare. Later the sisters would be taken to Noumea, as Aubin resumed his itinerant missionary role. Elsewhere Sr Evangeline has told her story of that hilarious retreat with its accidents and small catastrophes. One casualty saddened the laughter of the journey: the memory of Peter Kego, a village lad who gave his life to protect the missionaries. (16)
As in the days of headhunting, most people left their coastal villages and withdrew inland. Here on the foothills and slopes, some built makeshift dwellings for the duration. Others took their families across the mountains to Avuavu and the security of the weather coast.

Many of the young lads of the Visale - Kakabona to Mataniko district, left their villages to join the excitement of working to aid the Japanese build an airfield. About 800 young men joined in this operation, which at its completion in August, was wrested from the builders to serve the U.S. campaign. At the arrival of the Americans, another phase began. The British commander called for volunteers from Solomon Islands youth to join in helping the allies. Men from Malaita as well as Tulagi and nearby, responded; some as coast watchers, others as scouts or bag carries. Though the bombings over the sea at first aroused terror and confusion among the people, the helpers soon became accustomed to the good life they shared with the intruding army.

'Despite the fear, we islanders really had a good time with the free supply of beer from the Americans,' cites Laracy. Though praise has been given for the loyalty of the islanders to one or other of the combatants (Boges to the Japanese, Vouza to the Americans) it is not hard to imagine the confusion that must have entered the minds of native people. Surely some must have found it strange that the fifth commandment demanding respect for life could be put aside so easily if the prisoner was an enemy, since they were told to shoot rather than take prisoners to avoid inconvenience.

Meanwhile, Visale had become a Japanese hospital camp, thanks to the water supply that Raucaz had installed. Sadly, because of that, it also became the target of U.S. bombs, and the once fine station of Visale, headquarters of the South
Solomons Apostolic Vicariate, was razed to the ground. Only the concrete foundations and some statues remained intact. The mortal remains of Bishop Epalle that had been recovered from San Jorge and reburied in Visale were scattered and lost. (17)

It was at the end of the hostilities, that Aubin sent twenty one boys to the Marist Brothers in Fiji, that they might have further education. These stayed from 4 to 6 years gaining a secondary education that geared them to become leaders on their return to their country that was slowly evolving towards nationhood. The first two aspiring seminarians also came from this group (18) and though they did not reach priesthood, they too used their learning to become leaven in their communities, now awake to new political responsibilities.

MINOR SEMINARY - TENARU

A further dream of Bishop Aubin was realised in 1951, when a minor seminary was started for young men interested in studying for the priesthood. Fr Karolo Leemans, recalled from the wilds of Makira, was appointed its first Director. The ‘Seminary’ was a large all purpose quonset hut, left by the American army on the land beyond St. Joseph's School. Surrounded by some acres of gardening land and situated along the Tenaru River it provided a quiet atmosphere for the students who shared food, studies and views with their Dutch director.

They used the quonset hut for classroom, dormitory, chapel and certain recreations. They built a more convenient kitchen and eating place nearby. Dominic Otuana of Fauro in the West was the joker of the group and self appointed right hand man to Fr Karolo. Tim Bobongi, Philip Solodia and Frank Mauli came from north and central Mala, while Michael Aike, Emilio
Li'i and Donasiano Hite'e were men of Are'are (South Mala). This group sharing hardship and achievement studied under Fr Leemans' guidance and that of Fr van Mechelen till they were ready to go to Ulapia Minor Seminary in New Guinea. (19) They would later proceed to Bomana, PNG.

We have seen already how Aubin had fostered a desire for learning in the twenty one boys sent to the Marist Brothers and onward in Fiji. Though none of these became priests, all were to lay the foundation of a solid informed Catholic laity in their own islands. Many became outstanding leaders. (20)

The Marist Brothers taught their boys to ask questions. When people begin to ask questions about their own country and where it is going, a political awareness is born. The Ma'asina Rule in Mala was one result of the political awareness. Though Guadalcanal people were less affected by the Ma'asina movement, it did have adherents. But it was a Tangarare man, ex-catechist and old disciple of Fr Pavese, who started another form of dissidence. He was Mateo Belamatanga, and his Freedom Movement of 1948-49 attracted many young men of West Guadalcanal. Belamatanga had learned much from the U.S. army and his ideology owed something to the United Nations Human Rights Declaration. The aim of his Freedom Movement was similar to that of Ma'asina Rule: to better the living standard of villagers, and to return to the ways of ancestors.

The Government, tired of being patient with the Ma'asina Rule, decided to nip the idealism in the bud. They felt threatened, Laracy suggests, by the large gatherings attracted by Belamatanga’s eloquence. They sentenced him, with his four counsellors to prison. Belamatanga had time in prison to consider alternatives. He later became a politician.
A decade later, the aims of Belamatanga were re-echoed in the bush villages of the depressed 'weather coast' by an illiterate dreamer called Moro.

One day in 1958, while fishing, Moro fell sick and was carried home paralysed. Thereafter he became unconscious. Friends and relatives began to dig his grave and to look for pigs for his funeral feast. When to everyone's surprise, Moro emerged from his three day coma, he told of an extraordinary experience he had. The Holy Spirit, appearing as a large bird, had appointed Moro as keeper of Guadalcanal. At first people thought Moro a little mad, and ignored his ravings. But soon his uncle began to tell people that Moro vision made sense. He had risen from the dead, he claimed, and now was to start a new order where the people of Mauri Tasi were to be respected as owners of their own land. Moro soon became a charismatic leader. His message went around by word of mouth, for he himself was no orator. (Later, he would disclaim much that he was supposed to have said). Yet the Moro movement that started in his district of Makaruka was to lead many away from their villages, their work and their worship.

At Avuavu mission, the advice of Moro to return to tradition, was regarded as harmless by Frs John Geisselink and Noel Fox, but when its adherents began to break tradition, introducing incest and other practices forbidden by custom, the catechists of Avuavu, led by Petero Tseni, Leone Laka and Dominic Alebua began an active campaign of resistance against the Moro teaching.

However, Moro's exploiters used his charisma to better purposes when they founded the Moro Custom Company, to promote economic development in depressed areas long neglected by Government. Its initial undertones of cargo cult gave way to more practical effort. The movement which
spread across bush Guadalcanal to Kakabona in early sixties, fluctuated between periods of loss of interest to sudden outbursts of popularity. In its varying forms and intensities, its existence has challenged thoughtful Solomon Islanders. It had made church ask, how deep is the faith of the bush people of Guadalcanal? What education is needed to help them become Christians of conviction? It was such questioning that led to one Marist priest living in Moro's village Makaruka for two years. When later appointed to Malaita, he would begin a continuing programme for families, headmen and grass roots people for the dialogue and understanding of what Christ's teaching implies.

TETERE LEPROSARIUM

In 1948 the Government asked the sisters to take charge of a new leprosarium at Tetere. With funds from concerned New Zealanders organised by Mr Twomey, a small establishment began. A group of local lepers under the direction of Srs Joseph Beck and John Lyons was taken into care. A letter from a patient at Tetere appeared in TURUPATU.

Now there is a place for lepers to stay at Tetere in Guadalcanal. Two Sisters of the Society of Mary take care of us lepers. Leprosy is a dangerous sickness, that is why some of the healthy people don't want to come near us. These two sisters (10) are always patient with us. They never stay away from us. They accept us in their whole hearts because they love God in their whole hearts.

About seven in the morning, one of the sisters brings us breakfast and some medicine. In the afternoons the sisters dress the sores of the lepers and give injection also.

During June a lot of people with leprosy came, and some more in July. Many came from Gorogana and near it. Nineteen came altogether. We work together with co-operation every day, making our gardens of pana and kumara.

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Around our houses where we stay, we have constructed a new road, and we plant varieties of flowers. As a result our grounds and house look so beautiful. Sometimes our parish priests when they come to Guadalcanal, come to visit us. Fr Peter Geerts, and Fr van der Riet from Malaita. Also Fr Palmer and Fr Courtais come and say Mass for us and the Sisters.

Our Bishop came to celebrate the feast of Immaculate Heart of Mary, our patron of Tetere. All of us sick people got ready and prepared to blow the panpipes and to sing. The people of Gorogana and Suta prepared dances. After we had the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, we entertained the Bishop and the sisters with the dances and singing. All these made the Bishop very happy. He joined in our singing and told us some stories of the past. This is our story of the sick people at Tetere. Please pray for us. (22)

The Tetere Leprosarium continued its treatment into the seventies. By that time new medication and advances in village treatment made the isolation of patients with Hansen's Disease unnecessary. A few advanced cases were transferred to a special block in Honiara's central hospital, while the rest were sent back to their villages. Sr Joseph was appointed to the clinic at Takwa, while other helpers Sisters Oliver Plunkett, Lorna Tinkler and Imaculata moved on to other station clinics. Fr Joseph Halbwachs, chaplain to the lepers for many years, now went to Ruavatu, where as doyen of the mission, he would end his days. (23) Other medical needs had also to be met. Brother Colman recalled the polio epidemic:

As the local hospital was very overcrowded, Br Ephrem fitted out a small cottage as a mini hospital. Old American deep-freezers became hot and cold immersion baths. He also had a system for immersion baths using sand-packs. There were daily runs to the sea with other students to exercise the limbs in salt water. Brothers were ably assisted by Sister Clare, one of a group of 13 Anglican nuns who all became catholics.

Not everyone was as fortunate as the boys with the Marist Brothers. The polio epidemic hit the Solomons badly. Throughout many coastal villages of Guadalcanal, Makira and Mala two or three people were left victims. Of those many
became expert at moving about in a wonderfully adaptable manner. Most lived normal lives. It would be about 16 years later that a Polio Rehabilitation Scheme changed the lives for many of these. The 3 mission ships (24) donated by New Zealand through Mr Twomey to the Catholic, Anglican and United Church for purposes of health - were busily engaged when Dr Huckstep's campaign began. Assisted by Sr Jane Burleigh and Dr Tony Cross, the polio victims of 1951-2 were brought in by these ships from villages throughout the Protectorate. Dr Huckstep, the visiting specialist, examined each patient with a view to improving ability to move about. Some were operable, some were not. Some were so habituated to their way of locomotion that they preferred to remain as they were.

Sr Jane ran the Physiotherapy Department at Honiara Hospital, and assisted the surgeon Dr Cross in the second phase of the campaign. Week by week the operable patients were again brought to town for operations. Between the surgery and the physiotherapy many cripples were literally put back on their feet. Some were given new hands, feet or legs. Others were taught how to walk with callipers or other aids. It was an event that transformed the lives of many villagers.

HONIARA

Bishop Aubin in 1946 settled in a small house on the seashore near Kakabona. With him were itinerant Fr Jim Wall, and procurator Fr Claude Palmer. It was Fr Palmer working with the captain, Damiano, who organised the comings and goings of LINA MARIA, the newest mission ship. Fr Wall had a leaf chapel at Point Cruz, used as an office by day and a chapel each morning for the Langalanga wharfies, and other Catholic seamen.
The Bishop was noting the signs of the times. Tulagi, the former capital, had been bombed, and most of its buildings of administration destroyed. He could see now that this new settlement at Point Cruz, growing from the remains of the American depot was about to mushroom into a settlement larger than Tulagi had ever been. Already the government had claimed several of the convenient quonset huts as their new administrative block. Others had been occupied by the growing numbers of seamen, mechanics, wharfies and carriers. Along the Mataniko river several Chinese families had built general stores to supply the growing needs of a new population. Burns Philp also had its Trading Company. It seemed inevitable that the settlement had come to stay.

Among the stores in Chinatown was that of Quan Hong (1904 - 1982). Quan Hong was a nephew of the first Chinese to start a business in Solomon Islands. He came in 1924 to join his uncle Quan Yin who had opened a store in Tulagi, 10 years previously. Quan Hong soon moved to Gizo where he began his own business. Learning the Rovian language he was soon like by the people who often came to him for advice, knowing him to be a peace-maker. The war brought destruction to the west. Quan Hong, like other Chinese, lost everything, his entire assets, his 3 ships, his 4 branch stores. All was destroyed.

When peace was declared, Quan Hong took his growing family to see his parents in China. They remained in Hong Kong till 1949, when at his wife’s request, he returned south. First he put his 2 eldest sons in school in Sydney. On his return to Solomon Islands, he became one of Honiara’s first citizens and pioneer storekeeper of Chinatown. Here Quan Hong once more started from scratch. Always generous to his neighbours, he taught his children, 'we should always help people in need'. By this rule the Quan family lived.
In the late 40s after Mao's takeover in China, Hong Kong was flooded with refugees, many of whom dispersed to New Guinea and other Pacific Islands. The new capital of Honiara had its share of these, Quan Hong helping the most needy to get on their feet. Frs Dinny Moore and Jim Wall were friendly with the Chinese and it was about this time that Quan Hong was baptised Augustine. He continued to be a strong support to the church in need and to society in general. He was appointed to Honiara Town Council and set up the first school, Chung Wah. Initially for Chinese children, Chung Wah in later years was opened to pupils of all races and continues to maintain a high standard of education. Honiara owes much to the quiet Chinese presence of such families. If one in particular has been selected, it is because its long residence and friendly service have made it an exemplar of the best in the Chinese component of the Honiara population.

Another minute but significant minority group in town was formed by that number of transient wrongdoers called prisoners, of whom a considerable percentage were Catholics. When Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Carboni visited the Solomons in the mid fifties, he was somewhat surprised to see at Visale a welcome group consisting almost entirely of women. They were not abashed to tell his excellency that most of the husbands and sons were currently in prison, because of a 'battle with some Mala men' fought a few weeks previously. The battle of sticks and stones had landed not a few in hospital, and the rest in prison. The Archbishop kept his promise to visit the disappointed Visale men in prison. The prison ministry was to become part of urban pastoral care, in which Frs Espagne, Hoymeyers and Srs Ana DMI Jane Burleigh, John Patrick smsm would have ongoing involvement.
The Bishop, in consultation with Fr Wall and those nearby, bought a hill near the river Mataniko. Here a quonset hut became the Procure. Beside it a building for church workers was put up. It was a transit place for captain and seamen of the mission ships, the visiting plantation workers of Sura or for those who would perhaps have a sick family member in hospital, called Number Nine by the Americans, a name which it still bears.

The remains of the Catholic Printing Press were brought from Visale to the new Mission at Kakabona where the Bishop made his headquarters, calling it Tanagal. Some new parts enabled Br George Dwyer to initiate the ex-G.I., Brother Joseph Howard, into the intricacies of printing.

Doubtless the Bishop already envisaged the implications of this new town on the churches. The population was young. Schools would be needed. The Church of Melanesia (Anglican) was building their primary school, the Catholics must do the same. St. John's was built at Rove. The Sisters SMSM Maurisla and Kostka were its first teachers. They cycled along into Rove daily to meet their students, Chinese, Indian, English and Fijian as well as Solomon Islanders.

The Bishop's vision went further; the sisters Dalena Ko Maria must be trained as teachers as soon as possible. In 1959 Villa Maria was built by Fr Wall on the foundations of the old church buildings at Visale. Here the novices and young professed would upgrade themselves to reach the standard to begin teacher training. The first Teacher Training course began in 1959 with 12 keen trainees. These would eventually share in the same graduation ceremony as the B.S.I.P. Teacher Graduates at the Panatina Campus 2 years later. (25)

PRO-CATHEDRAL AT HONIARA 1957

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About the same time as Moro was translating his vision into patriotic desires, another event of significance took place on the north side of Guadacanal. On the hill of Holy Cross, assumed to be the one where Mendana's Franciscans planted their Cross, a new Catholic Cathedral was blessed and officially opened. A large quonset hut, ventilated with louvres and furnished with a finely crafted wooden altar (the work of Br Clement Turnbull), was filled to overflowing on that day.

Though but a temporary building, for it would be sold to become a nail factory in twenty years time, the Pro Cathedral stood as a sign of something bigger than itself. The solidarity that marked a growing unity among Catholics of various islands from east to west, was displayed on that day of celebratory dances, music and solemn High Mass. For the small man who was Bishop, it was also a farewell gesture. Since his coming in 1908, he had variously captained JOAN OF ARC, founded Ruavatu mission and during 25 years of episcopacy, had effectively promoted education and the training of catechists. Bishop Jean-Baptiste Aubin was now feeling the pain of age and was ready to resign.

In his next six years at Visale, he could regard dispassionately the news of Pope John's four years of dynamic leadership, his convocation Vatican Council II for renewal. Nearer home, Aubin might quail at the trials and errors of his successor, Bishop Dan Stuyvenberg. The new Bishop of fifteen years experience in Mala, had stepped into a world on the threshold of another era.

TOWARDS UNITY.

A certain group of Solomon Islanders sat together in Honiara one day to discuss a matter of concern. The group of nine (26)
were representatives of four churches: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and South Sea Evangelical. These thoughtful men, looking beyond the frontiers of the capital, beyond the squatters on the ridges, the noisy labour lines, the small camps of Gilbertese, Bellonese and Fijians could see a land marching towards independence. To those who were politically aware, that final step was much closer than the public anticipated. It seemed therefore to the concerned group that the churches could be a most potent factor in the preparation for a united nation. In a region of scattered islands, where each tribal network unit was its own world and tribal identity was a primary value, the idea of partnership with other tribes and isles was a somewhat alarming thought.

The meeting concluded with a resolution to form an association of Christian churches to encourage the Christian understanding of fellowship and collaboration. The resulting Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) was set up with three member churches: Anglican, Catholic and Methodist in 1967. A church service at St Barnabas (Anglican) Cathedral marked the inauguration. The large congregation came from each of the five Christian churches of Honiara and Gizo.

The first aim of SICA was to consult together to 'find ways of Christian service to the community and people of Solomon Islands and in so doing to further a sense of unity and fellowship between participating members'. The Constitution was signed by Bishop John Chisholm of the Diocese of Melanesia, Pastor E.C. Leadley, Chairman of the Methodists, Bishop Crawford of Gizo and Bishop Dan Stuyvenberg of Honiara Diocese. (27)

Indigenous initiative had sparked off the first meeting. It was strongly supported by expatriate church leaders and the idea
soon spread to Malaita where it was promoted by Manasseh Faifu, Arnon Wadili and Adrian Smith.

SICA'S first concern was to draw up a religious education syllabus for schools. It also set up sub-committees for Christian communication through the media, bible translation into the vernacular, disaster relief and a Ministers Fraternal regular meeting to discuss problems associated with 'urbanisation' a new phenomenon in Solomon Islands.

Large bursts of enthusiasm followed by bouts of apathy, sliding into indifference, have characterised the process of many a worthy project in Honiara society. SICA has been an exception. Though it has fluctuated in energy and had an occasional disagreement, the association would be seen alive and active as ever after its 25th anniversary.

HIGHER EDUCATION A DEEPER UNITY.

In the 60s the Government began to assume responsibility for education, a matter it had left up till now, to the churches. Now each of the different denominations was asked to consider setting up its own secondary school, assisted by modest funding from the government. Frs Jim Wall and Dinny Moore in Honiara, Fr Cyril O'Grady in Gizo and Bishops Crawford and Stuyvenberg began a search for a suitable site. In 1965 Quan Hong sold 150 acres of land at Tetepe for a nominal price to Bishop Dan for the intended building. Why this land was not used as the donor intended is not known. Instead a hillside on Aruligo Plantation, already owned by the church, was chosen for its panoramic view. St Paul's Secondary Catholic school was built there.
The first students at St Paul's were boys from the Marist Brothers' Senior Primary at Tenaru and girls from Tangarare Senior Primary Girls' School. The Headmaster, Fr Michael BELLENOIT SM began with a staff of four: Fr David GALVIN, Br John VAN DER LAAR and Srs Pauline RAE and Mary KEEGAN of the Marist family. The school, hit by a cyclone in its first months, pushed ahead despite setbacks. Dry soils, lack of nearby water, wild pigs ravaging the food gardens, shortage of firewood - were but a few of its problems. But 'Press Onwards,' according to St Paul's directive, was the school motto and therein problems were made to be solved.

One Sunday in the sixties the students of St Paul's had an outing to Honiara. They sang the solemn Mass celebrating the 400th year since Mendana's Franciscan chaplains raised a cross on a hill near Point Cruz. Let us leave them returning joyfully and noisily singing hymns of praise, boys and girls, signs of a lively church, whose future is held in the hands of a One whose wisdom is greater than that of Solomon.
ENDNOTES

1 Collomb to Annales de la Propagation de la Foi, 21 Dec. 1847.
2 Rouillac, letter 12. Oct 1898. Also April 1900.
3 Br Gennade Roland had been visited by Vidal on his way to Solomons in 1898.
5 Deck/Babonneau 28 April 1916. APM OSM 208.
6 Emilio was still there in Mami when Fr Espagne arrived in 1946.
7 Among the Little Brothers were Romano (brother of Jerome Hura), Dominiko Alebua, Donasiano of Nahukihuki.
8 Fr John Tahieu, ordained at Mouta, Ulawa, 1994.
10 Recorded in Wainoni Diary 3 Feb 1936.
11 Jerome Hura, Paolo Tasla, Elia Koke.
12 The first group of aspirants included Maria Kevasi, Susana Ngenge and Veronika Malefo of Wainoni Bay; Stepania and Pilomena of Tangarare, and Paula Palebiti of Savo.
After 2 years of study and preparation, Maria Kevasi and Veronika Malefo were ready for novitiate.
13 Romano Vaolu and William Barile have given this story from oral tradition, handed down from an older generation.
14 Annals of Marist Brothers. St Peter Chanel School, Marau, 1939.
15 Br Valens Boyle FMS, Sacrifice not Romance. p 91.
17 Epalle’s bones, recovered from San Jorge, were taken to Sura and later to Visale where they were lost during the war.
18 Steven and Lorensio from north Malaita.
19 Michael Aike, Donasiano Hite'e, Tim Bobongi, Francis Mauli, Dominic Otuana and Emilio Li’i were among the first group at Bomana Seminary PNG.

20 Mariano Kelesi, Steven Pita, Lorensio.

21 Sisters Joseph Beck, John Lyons, Anna Koelsh SMSM began Tetere Leprosarium.

22 Martin Alaveti in Turupatu 1950.

23 Fr Josef Halbwachs was chaplain at Tetere.

24 Three hospital ships given by N.Z. Leper Trust to Solomon Islands: Ozama Twomey, Fauabu Twomey, Mala Twomey.

25 This group of DMI sisters was the first of many women teachers who graduated from Villa Maria in the 60s, to continue up to 30 years in the teaching force.

26 The idea of SICA was initiated by Dominic Otuana, Isaac Qoloni, Goldie Vengo, Leslie Piva, Leslie Fugui, Filipo Solodia, Baddely Devesi, Peter Kenilorea and Bobi Kwana'irara. Ples Blong Iumi, p 74.

27 From Constitution of Solomon Islands Christian Association, copy in Fr Wall's notes, AA.
Let us now leap over the last 30 years into the here and now of Solomon Islands of today, 1995.

Here and Now at Visale, we visit Sr Aloisia, a venerable character, perhaps one of the oldest linking the 20s to the 90s. She greets you from a wheel chair, the smile dancing from ear to ear. She is delighted to see you, is interested in all you are doing. Having spent her 80 years committed to the good of her people in Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal, she has transcended the barriers of tribalism and sexism. All men are her sisters, all women her brothers, all part of the one family of our Father in Heaven. She radiates something of Mary’s joy in gratitude for her own faith.

Here and Now comes another personage hobbling towards us. It is Lazaro, ex-leper and con-man of long practice. Unhappy man, or rather being a plausible actor, he can put on a sorry face and hold out a beggar’s hand. (Who has caused him to become like that? your guilty soul may ask.) He is adept at this act in front of visitors in order to shame you into giving him $5 for his bus fare, (so he says). Everyone knows fiction. ‘Yes, Lazaro?’ Own up to it, you cannot avoid him. You harden your heart. True to expectation, he takes his hand from his pocket. Against expectation, in that hand is a small carved cross. ‘For you,’ he says triumphantly (yes he is going to win again, the old trickster!) ‘for your kindness.’ (is he being ironical? who can tell?) Who now can refuse him a bus fare?

Here and Now come Saniela and Clement Raukeniana, an Are'are couple currently working in Honiara. Saniela, gracious
always, does secretarial work for the Bishop, while jovial Clement, having given his tyre business, devotes himself to the building up of Epalle School (founded by the Catholic parents of Honiara). A problem solving task, but then, one who is an Are'are and who has grappled with worn out tyres of Honiara, is accustomed to complex problems. Perhaps that is what Saniela and Clement are doing, bringing up 5 children, adopted by them at the death of a brother. They still find time to visit the sick and do you a good deed at the drop of a hat.

But the time is jogging on. It is evening. A tired missionary sits on his door step at day's end. How wonderful to put up one's feet after the tangles and wrangles of a parish meeting, a broken water pipe, a young couple asking marriage instruction. Ah yes, it is good to rest... A women approaches down the road. 'Father, one moment please. I have a problem.' A dozen problems spring to mind. He says, 'Well Salome?' She says, 'Father, my best pig, my beautiful pig that I have fed so well, my own pig is LOST! Can you say a Mass that the robber will be shown up and that I'll get it back?' 'Ah!' thinks the priest, 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.' A discussion takes place. There are many aspects to this incident. There are things like attachment, acceptance of loss, forgiving, and the possibility of a lesson to be learnt. The woman nods in agreement. She is learning something anew. There is also a saint who is famous for finding things. Perhaps a prayer to St Anthony with the proviso that you will accept your loss.' The woman goes away uplifted and even smiling. God is asking something of her, she is special.

Yes, of such trivia is the kingdom of heaven built. It is in the nitty-gritty of the human condition (the gospel affirms) that people find God. While his splendour surrounds their islands it is Emmanuel, living among them, that assures each heart of a One 'greater than Solomon' in the here and now of everyone of the people of God.


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APPENDIX

MARISTS - SOLOMON ISLANDS 1845 - 1855

1845 1847 1855 including WOODLARK and UMBOI

Mgr Jean-Baptiste Epalle 1808 - 1845
Jean-Pierre Fremont 1810 - 1864
Joseph Thomassin 1818 - 1891
Leopold Verguet 1820
Jean-Marie Paget 1816 - 1847
Claude Jacquet 1812 - 1847
Etienne Chaurain 1819 - 1887
Xavier Monrouzier 1820 - 1897
Mgr George Collomb 1816 - 1848
Cyprien Crey 1823 - 1847
Gregoire Villien 1812 - 1848
Pierre Trappenard 1813 - 1848
Eugene Ducretet 1819 - 1902
Br Hyacinthe Chatelet 1817 - 1847
Br Gennade Rolland 1817 - 1898
Br Aristide Brun 1821 - 1901
Br Charles Vincen
Br Prosper Rousesne
Br Berguillon

P.I.M.E. - (Priests and Brothers of the Milan Institute for Foreign Missions were in Woodlark Island from 1852 to 1855)

Fr Paoloreina - Vicar Apostolic
Fr Carlo Salerio
Fr Giovanni Mazzuconi
Fr Angelo Ambrosioli
Fr Timoleon Raimondi
Br Giuseppe Cord
Br Louis Sacchini

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Bouillon Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rouillac Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guitet Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bonifasio B</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pieux Felix Br</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Menard Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Venasio Br</td>
<td>Malaita</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Guilloux Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Babonneau Fr</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>Pellion Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Colcaud J-M Fr</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Bertreux Fr</td>
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<td>Raucaz Fr</td>
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<td>Chatelet Fr</td>
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<td>Vigne Fr</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>Berdin Fr</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>Boudard Fr</td>
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<td>Jean-Claude Br</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>Graton Fr</td>
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<td>Aubin Fr</td>
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<td>Pavese Fr</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>Bertheux Fr</td>
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<td>1912</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Colcaud D Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Paul (Thomme) Br</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Foltzer Fr</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Robert Br (Moiso)</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Ernoult Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>Vallery Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Simler Fr</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Brugmans Fr</td>
<td>Holland</td>
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<tr>
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Hautona Melkore Solomon
Raqe, Fr Maurice
Tahieu, Fr John

1994

Reksosusilo, Fr Stanislaus
Balcasar, Fr Pedro
Tanaka, Br Yukihiro

1995

LIST OF DAUGHTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE (D.M.I.) - 1934-1995

Sr Mary Aloisia
Sr Mary Ioana
Sr Mary Odilia
Sr Mary Silvia
Sr Mary Angete
Sr Mary Ulalia
Sr Mary Benedita
Sr Mary Madalena
Sr Mary Saniela
Sr Mary Dorothea
Sr Mary Clotilda
Sr Mary Bernadina
Sr Mary Donasiana K
Sr Mary Victoria
Sr Mary Anastasia
Sr Mary Elizabeth
Sr Mary Katarina
Sr Mary Noela
Sr Veronica
Sr Mikaela Sotala
Sr Mary Alberta
Sr Goretti
Sr Emanuela Patauvera
Sr Mary Domitilla
Sr Mary Anna Ta'alia
Sr Mary Batistina
Sr Pauline Gobua
Sr Josepha
Sr Mary Antonia Tarina
Sr Agatha

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Sr Nellie Kotete
Sr Concilia
Sr Juliana Olokwao
Sr Miriam
Sr Mary Mauricia
Sr Margaret Uranai
Sr Selina Kame
Sr Eraina Sasa
Sr Lawrencia Kage
Sr Lawrencai Rimanu
Sr Luisa Koudi
Sr Antonia Bibi
Sr Luisa Kishia
Sr Nellie Arepuru
Sr Hilda Koni
Sr Anna Ngosana
Sr Michaela Rarokeni
Sr Madalena Oiria
Sr Maria Teku
Sr Donasiana Maetaefilia
Sr Maria Ngelea
Sr Emma
Sr Bernadeta Likisla
Sr Vincentia
Sr Odilla Luhukolo
Sr Daniela
Sr Veronica Alari
Sr Emiliana Onahe
Sr Bernadetta Maropo
Sr Tarasisia

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MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY 1904 - 1995

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<td>Sr M Oliver Plunkett (Hyland)</td>
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<td>Sr Margaret Tisch</td>
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**MISSIONARY SISTERS FROM 1992**

**OBLATES DE NOTRE DAME**

Sr Georgina O.N.D
Sr Betsy O.N.D

**SISTERS OF ASSUMPTION**

Sr Cleophe
Sr Lita

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MARIST TEACHING BROTHERS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS - 1938 -1995

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<th>Year</th>
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DOMINICAN PRIESTS AND BROTHERS 1956 - 1995

Bishop Eusebius Crawford
Bishop Bernard O'Grady
Fr Peter Durning
Fr David Halstead
Fr Edmund Hill
Fr Patrick Hynes
Fr Stephen Kamoa
Fr Maurice Keating
Br Michael Kisu
Fr Peter Kobakina
Fr Ambrose Loughnan
Br Dominic Mahony
Fr Roman Carter
Fr Aquinas McComb
Fr John McKenna

Br Francis McKinnon
Fr Brendan McPhillips
Fr Dominic Meese
Fr Robert Mutlow
Fr Henry Paroi
Fr Jordan Perry
Fr Paul Purcell
Fr Terence Quinn
Fr Luke Rawlings
Fr Simon Suvenava
Fr Stephan Tarrant
Fr Callistus Tavisibatu
Fr John Tirollo
Fr Alexander Vickers
DOMINICAN SISTERS 1955 - 1995

Sr Bonaventura
Sr M Amata
Sr Phllomena
Sr Dolores
Sr Elizabeth Connolly
Sr Antonina Mary
Sr Damien
Sr Mark
Sr Francesca Hogan
Sr Michael Fennell
Sr Gregory O'Loughlin
Sr Frances
Sr Patrick
Sr Elizabeth Landon
Sr Pepetua Gibson
Sr Christopha Slattery
Sr Maria Tom
Sr Joanna Tebitara
Sr Martina Qilaivuna
Sr Margaret Fields

Sr Mary Rickards
Sr Rita Pitavurene
Sr Anne Ryan
Sr Veronica Benedito
Sr Mary Campion
Sr Rose Sisikleke
Sr Lawrence Tabiria
Sr Phllomena Barivudi
Sr Joyce Adams
Sr Maureen Casey
Sr Dora Qilavuvunu
Sr Maria Taravivini
Sr Rosemary Kinne
Sr Anastasia Arae
Sr Paul Frances
Sr Catherine Peter
Sr Leone Megogole
Sr Maria Rebecca
Sr Margaret Scharfe
Sr Christopha Konafa
Sr Frances Gaynor

DIOCESE OF GIZO, WESTERN PROVINCE SOLOMONS

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Michael Lomiri     John Allik
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