Editorial Introduction

Retrieving the Pastors:

Questions of Representation and Voice

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We need to be clear at the outset as to the office we are examining, because it has gone under many different names in the different islands and churches. At the centre of the operation of each local church, there has been one person variously called the minister, the pastor, the priest, the catechist, the evangelist, the missionary, or the teacher. But though the different titles have carried different emphases, they have all referred to that one central person in the life of the local church: the man with some specialized training in church work, the man who has normally come from outside the village to serve the village congregation. Those few churches which have allowed a local person to assume this role, have insisted that he be chosen by the territorial church organization and be responsible to that wider body. Usually, however, the churches have required that this person be an outsider because local folk are too easily caught up in family feuds and factionalism, and are too easily subject to social pressures. This is the person whose place and function we are examining. We will call him the pastor, since the other titles often imply ordination, pioneer evangelism or school work, none of which has been as universal as the shepherding role implied by the title of pastor (Forman 1974:422).

But few marvels in Christian history can equal the faithfulness of these men and women left behind among people of unknown speech and often in danger of their lives to plant and build churches out of their own limited stock of faith and knowledge... (Neill 1964:253).

In almost every island group, mission and church growth are intertwined with the voluntary migrations of several thousand

Pacific Islanders under the guidance of small groups of white missionaries. Diffusion of Christianity has been largely by contacts of Islanders with Islanders in everyday life. From the time of the first baptisms the churches struggled to be free, to embody their Oceanic ensigns and customs. Names of Islander pioneers ... resemble ensigns at mastheads. They indicate the presence of long passenger lists in the ships. Historians have already begun to make members of this company more widely known (Garrett 1982:xi).

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, Edward Thompson declared that his aim was "to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' handloom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan ... from the enormous condescension of history" (1963:12). Thompson's concern was that the workers' contribution to the 'making' of their own history had been smothered by other people's (mis)representations of it. A similar sentiment has been expressed in the Pacific context about Islander pastors. When editing the writings of Ta'unga, a 19th century Cook Islander pastor of the London Missionary Society (LMS), Ron and Marjorie Crocombe observed that the introduction of Christianity throughout most of the Pacific was not accomplished by European missionaries alone, but by a veritable army of newly converted Polynesian teachers and pastors, themselves often recently converted (1968:xv).[1] This reality, however, like that of the poor stockinger, had been obscured for posterity by the European missionaries who wrote almost all of the records upon which later historians depend.

Pacific Islanders need no such reminding of the key role of the homegrown pastors. This is evident to visitors who stop to look at monuments scattered around the Islands, which are generally not in honour of fallen soldiers, statesmen or elders, as an antipodean might expect, but to Islander missionaries. These small memorials are a reminder that Christian culture contacts in the Pacific were largely between Island cultures. Islander pastors taught in their home islands, but there was a strong overseas mission impulse in the early Pacific churches. For example, Tahitians went to Hawai'i and Samoa, Tongans to Fiji, Hawai'ians and Tuvaluans to Kiribati, Samoans and Cook Islanders to Vanuatu, Fijians to Papua, and Solomon Islanders to New Guinea. This by no means exhausts the extent of their travels and enterprise. There was, moreover, a greater number of pastors in the Pacific on a per capita basis than in any

other part of the world, except for Japan (Forman 1974:432). European missionaries, by contrast, were often a less dominating influence than their histories and records make out.

This is not to suggest that the Islander pastor has been completely ignored and marginalized in Pacific historiography. A much older generation of scholarship quite explicitly recognized his importance but only in a paragraph or two within the text of a lengthy monograph (Kuykendall 1938:103; Koskinen 1953:30-31). It was left to the Crocombes to shift the pastors from sideshow to centre stage with their seminal work on Ta'unga's writings. The Crocombe's continued with a collection of essays on Polynesian missionaries in Melanesia (Crocombe and Crocombe 1982), and with Marjorie Crocombe's edition of writings of yet another Cook Islands pastor, Maretu (1983). These commencement and terminal dates - 1967 and 1983 - can be taken as convenient markers; in the 16 years between Ta'unga and Maretu, the importance of the Islander missionary was confirmed in the monograph literature[2] and in general histories of missionary activity (Forman 1982; Garrett 1982) where they emerge as more than shadowy, unimportant figures. What really made the difference was a number of detailed articles in mainstream journals and anthologies - some written by contributors to the present volume - that dealt specifically with pastors, either as individuals or as a group.[3] The contrast between this upsurge of interest and the diminished recognition that preceded it is marked and instructive. Academic perception had finally caught up with what Pacific Islanders had known all along.

Part of the answer for this change in perception was the prevailing intellectual climate. The institutional expression of the new winds of change was the establishment of a Department of Pacific History at the Australian National University where J.W. Davidson and H.E. Maude called for island-oriented history and the study of Pacific Islanders in their own right. No longer was Pacific history seen as an aspect of imperial history but rather in terms of culture contacts (or "multi-cultural situations") with the Islander closer to centre stage and more in control of events and their outcomes (Davidson 1966; Maude 1968a:xv-xxii, 1971). As part of this new wave of Pacific historians, the Crocombes (with the publication of Ta'unga) created an awareness of the importance and the ubiquity of the Island pastor[4] in what might be termed an exercise in "redress history".

Since 1983 there has been a discernible lull in writing on

Islander missionaries, which in part reflects the diffuse redirectioning of Pacific historiography into such paradigms as postmodernism, cultural history, and feminist theory. There has been also, largely under the impetus of the Fiji coups of 1987, a shift of attention away from the 19th century into contemporary political history.[5] Sporadic research on pastors continued but the output had discernibly diminished.[6] More recently, however, there has been a seeming revival with the appearance of articles on pastors in church publications, notably in the 1995 special issue of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* to mark the bicentenary of the founding of the LMS,[7] and in the published proceedings of the Fiji Methodist History Conference at Davuilevu, in late 1995, which contained several chapters on individual pastors and the Fijian ministry generally.[8]

This points to something else: that church history in the Pacific is tending to become restricted within theological colleges, which carries the risk that mission history might become detached from the mainstream of inquiry.[9] The present volume departs from this pattern. The contributors are by no means confined to clerics and committed Christians; secular backgrounds and standpoints are also represented. The book, moreover, is pitched at a general readership and not just to the faithful. In short, we wish to redirect Pacific Islander missionaries back into the forefront of public and academic inquiry.

To put it another way, this collection falls into what might become the third wave of studies of Pacific Islander missionaries. In fact, some resemblance can be noted with the three phases of missionary activity identified by Peter Miria (1985). First, was the initial announcement of the gospel and its "translation" from a Western concept to an Island one; second, the "transition", refers to years of continuing development (or what is more commonly referred to as consolidation); and third, the "transformation" from dependent mission to independent church. The Crocombes initiated the "translation" with *The Works of Ta'unga*; the "transition" was accomplished as increasingly the pastors entered the literature in their own right, mainly through Western academic eyes; the "transformation" has arguably just commenced - more by accident than design - with the LMS commemorative issue of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* and the proceedings of the Davuilevu Methodist history conference; and there is a greater representation of Pacific Islander historians than before. This volume continues the

momentum but it remains to be seen whether the impetus will continue.

WHATEVER its exact historiographic location, *The Covenant Makers* falls into a well-defined tradition of attempting to give proper recognition and 'voice' to the pastors. The prevailing contemporary view was that pastors were an appendage of European missionary endeavour. They were seen as carrying out a secondary role in a master/servant relationship reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. In the 19th century the European missionaries called them "teachers" or "helpers" or "Native Assistant Teachers" to indicate that they were less than fully fledged missionaries. Even the Anglicans in Melanesia, who were notably enlightened towards indigenous cultures, saw their "native agency" in terms of a "black net" buoyed with "white corks". This fishing analogy neatly reflected the racial and the hierarchical dimensions of the missionary-pastor relationship (Hilliard 1978:81, 153). Their subordination to white missionaries was the more unjust given the element of personal risk.

> It was generally accepted by the missions ... that the role of the 'native brethren' was to make initial contacts, establish peace, learn the language and obtain at least nominal acceptance of Christianity and thus to *venture their lives* in order to ... 'prepare the way for more efficient labourers from privileged Britain' (Crocombe and Crocombe 1968:118, our emphasis).

They were, as historian Kerry Howe bluntly points out, considered "far more expendable than a European missionary" (1984:293; see also Maude 1968b:xi). Given the essential nature of the work they accomplished and the potential sacrifice involved, why have pastors had such a low profile and been given so little 'voice'?

The fundamental reason is because their activities, role and achievements find little echo in the archival record. As Michael Goldsmith points out, the European missionaries not only *created* much of the documentary material but *interpreted* it to suit themselves (Goldsmith 1989:125, 285, his emphases). Anyone who has tried knows how difficult it is to piece together continuous information on a given pastor.[10] That is why studies of individual pastors are rare and group portraits prevalent by comparison. It all boils down to the art of the possible. It also underlines the point

that history is not what happened but more a matter of what happened to get recorded and what of this happened to survive. We doubt, for example, whether David Wetherell's brief account of the pioneering Loyalty Islander pastors in Papua will be materially added to or substantively altered unless fresh evidence comes to light (Wetherell 1977:9-12). To put it another way, the Crocombes made a revealing, if unintended, statement by calling their own book *The Works of Ta'unga.* By equating Ta'unga's "work" with what he wrote as distinct from what he did, the message comes across that action is for naught unless it is recorded for posterity. The observation is doubly interesting given the frequent perception in the Islands that writing does not constitute "work".

The customary lament is that only the occasional pastor, such as a Ta'unga or a Maretu, left written records; and had this been the norm the record would have been less one-sided. Harry Maude has also said that Pacific archival sources, not just mission documentation, are "to a large extent tainted, being written by Europeans possessing the almost inescapable bias of their racial background (Maude 1968b:ix-x). Such is the scarcity value of documentation 'from the other side' that we sometimes forget that it too is "tainted" by an "inescapable bias", and more besides. In an oft quoted passage, Ta'unga told his mentor, Rev Charles Pitman, that he was writing about "what I saw with my eyes, heard with my ears, and felt with my hands". But he also said that:

> The customs of these Islands [the Loyalties] are innumerable. I have not written about all of them, lest you should not approve of these matters, and perhaps you may not be interested.... What is the point of my writing this report to you? It is just to let you know about these things. Then cast it aside (Crocombe and Crocombe 1968:111).

To which a reviewer responded:

> To all questions of value Ta'unga responded simply: Christ was the answer. This is not surprising. It is perhaps less remarkable that Ta'unga wrote like a missionary than he learned to write in the first place. Christianity is the price that he paid (willingly enough, to be sure) for literacy. And the price we pay for being able to read Ta'unga's writings at all is that we will never know what he thought of the rest of the innumerable customs of the islands, those he did not describe for Pitman, lest the missionary be uninterested or disapproving (Daws 1969:228).

One may feel this statement a trifle overblown or insufficiently appreciative. But Daws has a point in that an exaggerated worth attaches to anything of scarcity value; and we could certainly wish that pastors wrote more about their experiences. Some missions, such as the Methodists in Fiji, relied for information on letters from Fijian pastors but others, such as the LMS in Samoa, went on voyages of inspection to the outstations and generated their own reports (although some letters and reports from Samoan pastors on foreign service were published in the LMS magazine *Ole Sulu*). To compound the problem, the relatively few letters and reports written by pastors were often lost or destroyed (e.g. Crocombe and Crocombe 1968:31, 153), and pastors tended not to leave autobiographical accounts (but see Bulu 1871). On the other hand, some material never known to exist has been unexpectedly located, such as the manuscript of Semisi Nau, a Tongan missionary (Nau, forthcoming), and a wealth of documentation 'from the other side' probably remains to be found.[11] But it will never begin to rival in bulk or diversity the European archival and published material, with all its faults.

As a result, pastors tend not so much to get shut out as shouted down in the records, and their wives even more so. The one essay in this volume on a missionary wife, by Jeanette Little, was only possible because her subject published a lengthy biographical account. As individuals and as a group, the pastor and his wife are at risk of becoming what one historian, in a very different context, has termed an "unperson" (Stern 1977:xix-xxi), someone whom other people neglect to mention and who is thus erased from future consciousness. Such has been the fate, until relatively recently, of the Islander pastors in Pacific historiography. Not only in the archival records but the photographic record. If photographed at all, it was in an unambiguously subordinate and anonymous role. As Max Quanchi (in this volume) demonstrates, pastors were very visible on the ground - in their white shirts and trousers, guiding European explorers, helping administration officials, and in their everyday work of teaching and preaching. They were an integral part of the European world in Papua but they were also marginalized in text *and* image when those Europeans recorded, re-presented and represented Papua (see also Quanchi 1996). In short, the visual imaging in photographs and illustrations served to deny pastors, despite their pioneering role, the contribution they were making to Papua's political and

economic development.[12] Perhaps, in a later anti-colonial era, such a 'contribution' might be deemed less than desirable. But credit was not given at the time to where credit was due. That belonged, or rather was accorded, to the white population, to the near exclusion of the isolated and vulnerable pastor.[13]

THE Islander pastor has now been restored to something like his rightful place but how is he to be represented? More to the point, why does he continue to be represented in different ways? Pastors were often controversial figures, especially the Samoans, and the contemporary record carries numerous allegations of worldly pretensions, political opportunism and other brazen human imperfections. This, in turn, has been offset by a hagiographic literature that idealized and ennobled the pastors, traces of which are sometimes found in more recent scholarly writing (e.g. Sinclair 1982b; Wood 1978a, 1978b).

Indeed, the memories of pastors who engaged in overseas service are revered, not least in Samoa. One reason for this celebratory attitude toward pastors of bygone days is the degree of suffering that they endured, especially in Melanesia. Ta'unga, for example, was one of the few pioneering pastors in New Caledonia to survive cannibalism and disease (Crocombe and Crocombe 1968:118). Latukefu, Quanchi, Mullins and Wetherell (in this volume), indicate that Papua was a veritable graveyard for pastors and their families. According to LMS figures, almost exactly one half of the pastors and their wives either died or were killed between 1871 and 1885. Of the 188 teachers/spouses concerned, 8 were killed and another 79 died (of whom 4 were suspected of being poisoned). By any standards this is a shocking mortality rate. It far exceeded that experienced by indentured plantation workers, whose recruitment and employment missionaries as a group so roundly condemned (see Shlomowitz 1996). Casualties decreased over time; none of the 55 pastors/spouses in Papua between 1882-1885 were killed and only 12 died. Even so, in excess of 20 per cent of teachers/spouses died over this four year period.[14] Little wonder that pastors are often represented as heroic figures.

Representation has many dimensions, not simply steering a course between the simplistic extremes of adulation and condemnation. This volume over-represents Protestant pastors but perhaps not proportionately because Protestant missions relied far more heavily on pastors than Catholic missions did on the native

catechist (see Forman 1974:425). However, the widespread use of pastors in the Pacific was not a feature of missionization in other parts of the world. Protestant missionaries in the Pacific placed enormous 'trust' in unordained native preachers. The only parallel that comes to mind is Alexander de Rhodes, a Jesuit in 17th century Vietnam who made extensive use of lay catechists. The use of unordained personnel, which Pacific historians take as the norm, is a significant departure in the overall context of church growth. The irony is that while the European missionaries lamented the underqualified character of the native pastorate, they used this pretext to keep them subordinate - until the pressures for change became overwhelming.

There is also a risk of over-representing the numerous and wide-ranging Samoan pastors to the extent of imposing a Samoan model on the overall Pacific situation. The LMS Samoan pastorate was the first to be ordained en masse as of right, in 1875, after pressure from London and from the rank-conscious pastors themselves (Gilson 1970:135). Elsewhere in the Pacific, ordination came much more slowly, especially with Catholic missions who could usually rely on an adequate supply of European priests. Samoan pastors and catechists, moreover, followed Samoan forms and expectations regarding recognition, ranks and material well-being that is not so evident among pastors of different origin; and when local pastors attempted to arrogate these Samoan forms, as happened on the south coast of Papua, the congregations showed a certain resistance to such attempts at domination (Forman 1974:425-26).

Friction between European missionaries and Islanders was common enough, especially when Samoans were involved; and because Samoan pastors are so well represented in this book, the impression may be given that missionary/pastor tension was the norm. This might be to impart a false overall impression. Tensions were less evident, but not absent, in the case of Fijian pastors (Thornley 1982). The chapter on Dominiko Alebua (by Tarcisius Kabutaulaka) is instructive because there was seemingly no overt friction between him and the Marist fathers. This could be an indication that competition and rivalry between European missionaries and Islander pastors was less prevalent than the literature to date would indicate.

A BOOK of this nature cannot be exhaustive and we do not pretend that it is. Nevertheless, we have tried to strike some balance and to cover an appreciable terrain. The contributors are a mix of

established scholars and younger colleagues; academics and non-academics; Protestants and Catholics; committed Christians and persons of more secular outlook; Islanders and non-Islanders. The content of the book is also diverse, covering a wide area of the Pacific, dealing with pastors from a variety of origins, representing women (although not as much as we would have liked), recognizing both Protestant and Catholic missions, and ranging over time from pioneers in the 1820s to individuals still living. The intention of this collection is not to suggest that European missionaries and their wives cease to be studied and written about - only that the more numerous Islander missionaries, who did much of the work at the coalface, cease to be crowded out and shouted down. Nor do we wish to perpetuate the lingering and simplistic polarization of views that starkly depicts pastors as either saints or sinners. There is, moreover, a pressing need to study more closely the results of the pastors' work, namely the perspective of the converts and church members and the development of their Christian lives.[15] In attempting to present a nuanced depiction of pastors, we recall how John Clive summed up the defining features of the Victorian age. He described them as "contradiction and complexity - conflicts between religiosity and worldliness, belief and action, idealism and practice, self-love and self-sacrifice" (Clive 1989:250). These words capture the spirit of this book.

Notes

1 Over 1,200 names are cited in the Pacific Theological College's register of Pacific Islander missionaries, which was compiled by John Garrett. Based on information supplied by the various churches, the figure is a conservative one. See also Gunson 1978:357-64.

2 The monograph literature can be divided in several overlapping categories: histories of island groups (e.g. Howe 1978; Newbury 1980; Macdonald 1982; Wood 1978a); histories of a particular mission, which are often confined to a single island group (e.g. Laracy 1974; Wetherell 1977) but sometimes not (e.g. Hilliard 1978; Wood 1978a); denominational histories (e.g. Williams 1972; Threlfall 1975); histories of missionaries as a group or of individual missionaries (e.g. Gunson 1978; Langmore 1974, 1989); and histories with a strong missiology focus (e.g. Tippett 1977).

3 Maude 1973; Latukefu 1978; Munro 1978; Wetherell 1978, 1980; Thornley 1982. To these can be added the discussion of the Melanesian Mission's "native agency" in Hilliard (1970), and the account of a walkout by students at the Takamoa Theological College in Rarotonga, in 1954 (Crocombe 1970).

4 It should be mentioned that earlier works from the Canberra-school recognized the importance of Islander pastors (Davidson 1967; Gilson 1970). The latter book was mostly written in the 1950s; its publication was delayed by the author's death in 1962.

5 The expansive diversity of approaches is evident in the proceedings of recent Pacific History Association Conferences (Rubenstein 1992; Talu and Quanchi 1995).

6 E.g. Wetherell 1989; Mullins 1990; Goldsmith and Munro 1992. The monograph literature also continued to give pastors their due (Whiteman 1987; Garrett 1992), but the published outcome of Association of Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) sessions, in the mid 1980s, on Christianity in the Pacific, barely mentioned pastors (Barker 1990).

7 Gallagher 1995; Lange 1995; Thornley 1995.

8 Baleiwaqa 1996; Jakes 1996; Thornley 1996.

9 Indicative of this tendency was the abandonment of the session on mission history at the 1996 Pacific History Association at Hilo. This contrasts with the 1975 meeting of the ASAO in Florida where a hugely successful session on missionization was held, resulting in an impressive anthology which included papers on pastors and the development of indigenous churches (Boutilier, Hughes and Tiffany 1978).

10 An exception is Marjorie Crocombe's work on Ruatoku, a Cook Islander in Papua (Crocombe 1982). The problems of writing biographies of marginal characters and those who get little mention in contemporary sources are usefully outlined by Goldsmith 1995. See also Hempenstall 1994:727-28.

11 For example, the considerable vernacular material in the missionary newspapers of the Tonga Free Wesleyan Church and the Fiji Methodist Church.

12 For a comparable critique of the visual imaging of Pacific Islanders, see Stephen 1994.

13 The photographic record raised other misconceptions, as in the case of Melanesian sugar workers in Queensland during the 1890s who decided to become pastors in Papua; they assumed that the well-dressed European missionaries they saw in photographs "had rank and status in their [own] society, [and that] they too would be accorded rank and status if they became missionaries" (Wetherell 1978:102).

14 Crocombe and Crocombe 1982:131-34; Jakes 1996:117; Wetherell 1977:340-41. In fairness, some European missionaries in Papua had misgivings about sending pastors to dangerous and unhealthy places where they themselves were reluctant to venture (Crocombe 1982:68; Joyce 1971:169; Langmore 1974:16).

15 We are indebted to Paula Onoafe Latu for this observation.

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1 Pacific Islander Missionaries

Sione Latukefu[1]

Some of the first Christian Pacific Islander converts began to be involved in missionary work as early as the 1820s,[2] a mere decade or so after the London Missionary Society (LMS) had begun to win converts among the Tahitians (Gunson 1978:357-64). They wanted to follow Christ's command (in Matthew 28:19-20) to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you", which has fired the imagination and enthusiasm of Christian missionaries of various denominations throughout the years, including those who went out to the Pacific since the 19th century. They, in turn, passed on that enthusiasm to their Pacific Islands converts.

This chapter focuses on the work of the Fijian, Samoan and Tongan missionaries sent by the LMS and Methodist missions to Papua, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. It briefly considers the history of their mission involvement, critically examines their preparation and selection, the problems they had to face in the field, and last, and most important, the effects of their work on the cultures of the communities among whom they lived and worked and, in many instances, died.

The conclusions of this study apply, in general, to the work of other Pacific Islander missionaries in other areas of the Pacific, despite minor differences due to the particular cultural attributes of the missionaries and the missionized.

Pacific Islander involvement in the mission field

The decision to engage the early converts in mission work appears to have been due to the shortage of personnel and finances to cover the widespread Pacific. Initially the missionaries were forced to turn to their new converts to assist them with their internal