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Pacific Islander Missionaries

Sione Latukefu!

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

mission activities. Later, enthusiastic, enterprising and intrepid missionaries such as William Henry, John Williams, A.W. Murray and Samuel McFarlane of the LMS and John Thomas, Peter Turner and George Brown of the Methodists, saw the advantages of using Pacific Islander converts to spread the gospel among neighbouring countries.

These Pacific Islander missionaries were referred to in early missionary literature as "native teachers" rather than missionaries, in order, among other reasons, to distinguish them from the 'real' missionaries who were Europeans. In the 1820s and 1830s, the LMS sent Tahitian missionaries to Tonga, the Cook Islands, Niue, Hawaii, Samoa and Fiji to help establish what was known locally as the Lotu Tahiti (Tahitian Church).

After the establishment of Takamoa College in Rarotonga in 1839 and Malua College in Samoa in 1845, trained teachers from the Cook Islands, Samoa and Niue were sent to Vanuatu and New Caledonia from the 1840s and 1850s, Tokelau and Tuvalu from the 1860s, and, with teachers from the newer mission fields such as New Caledonia and Tuvalu to Papua from the 1870s.

In a further development, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission sent Tongans from 1835 on to help establish missions in Fiji and Samoa where they were known as Lotu Tonga (Tongan Church). Some were later sent with Samoans, Rotumans and Fijians, to the New Guinea Islands from 1875, Papua from 1891, the Solomon Islands from 1902, and the highlands of New Guinea from the 1960s. Together with the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands they sent missionaries, mainly from Tonga, Fiji and Papua to work among Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory of Australia from the 1970s. Fijians and Tongans were also sent to the Caribbean, and to Australia to minister to Australian or Islander congregations. Some also went to USA and New Zealand, where recently a Tongan Minister was elected President of the New Zealand Methodist Church.

A smaller number of Islander missionaries from Niue, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and New Caledonia were sent by the LMS, mainly to Papua although quite a number appear to have gone as well from Tuvalu to Samoa, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. Hawaiian missionaries were sent to Micronesia by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). As well, the Roman Catholic church sent a number of ordained Islander priests to Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and other parts of the Pacific.³

In their endeavour to spread Christianity further afield, the LMS began its work in Samoa in 1830 when the enterprising John Williams and his fellow missionary, Charles Barff, visited the group and left eight Polynesian Christian teachers with Malietoa Vai'inupo (Davidson 1967:33). The acceptance of Christianity by the Samoans was relatively smooth and rapid (Moyle 1984). Only 15 years after Williams' first visit the majority of Samoans had become nominal Christians and been pre-disposed to European influence (Davidson 1967:34). There had even been some new religious activities before Williams' first visit, due to the influence of explorers, traders, whalers and beachcombers. The Samoans admired and coveted European wealth, knowledge, technology and power which they believed to have been bestowed on Europeans by their gods. The absence of a powerful traditional priestly class who would have provided strong resistance in order to protect their own positions and influence, the high regard in which the matai (chiefs) held their relationships with Europeans, and the influence they could exert on members of their 'aiga (extended family) to accept Christianity once they themselves had decided to do so helped to smooth and hasten the spread of Christianity among Samoans.

After only nine years from the establishment of the LMS mission in Samoa, John Williams had begun to use Samoan converts as missionaries on his fatal trip to Vanuatu in 1839. Others followed this up in the 1840s in their endeavours to spread further afield to New Caledonia, Tuvalu and, eventually to mainland Papua from the 1870s. The LMS work in Papua began in 1871 when McFarlane, formerly of Samoa, and Murray, of the Loyalty Islands' mission in New Caledonia, were commissioned by the Directors in London to explore the possibilities of establishing a mission in the Torres Strait Islands and mainland New Guinea. To a large extent this was prompted by the fact that for years since the mid 1850s McFarlane and the LMS mission in the Loyalty Islands had increasingly serious conflicts with French Roman Catholic priests and later French administrators in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands.

They decided to establish their headquarters in the Torres Strait Islands in 1871 for the purpose of evangelizing eastern New Guinea. Upon travelling to the mainland to visit some of the native teachers whom they had placed there they discovered that the appearance and languages of some of the people of the coastal area resembled those of Polynesians, and they concluded that the most appropriate

native teachers to evangelize the area, later to be known as Papua, would be Polynesian teachers. McFarlane and Murray were followed by two outstanding missionaries; Rev William Lawes of Niue in 1874⁴ and Rev James Chalmers of Karotonga in 1877. It was unfortunate that McFarlane could not see eye to eye with the newcomers. Chalmers saw no merit in McFarlane's strategy of the European missionaries remaining in the Torres Strait and leaving the native teachers on the mainland and further disliked McFarlane treating his native teachers as servants (Langmore 1974:32-34; Wetherell 1993:3-4). Lawes and Chalmers decided to settle in mainland Papua with their native teachers, "sharing as far as possible in trials and crises and gaining first-hand knowledge of Papuans in their home setting" (Garrett 1982:207).

The first Pacific Islander missionaries to work in Papua were Loyalty Islanders brought to the Torres Strait by McFarlane and Murray in 1871 and placed in Papua in 1872. They were followed by Karotongan teachers, including the much loved and highly respected Ruatoka (Crocombe 1982:55-78) later that year from Niue, two years later in 1874, from the Society Islands in 1878, and from Samoa in about 1884 (Latukefu 1974:50). From then the supply of teachers from other Pacific sources declined and Samoan native teachers dominated the work of the LMS in Papua, so their influence in culture change among the Papuans predominated.

The Wesleyan Methodist Mission was successfully established in Tonga in 1826, after the failure of an earlier attempt in 1822-1823 (Latukefu 1874:25-28). With the active support of a remarkable leader, Taufa'ahau, who with the help of the missionaries united Tonga into a kingdom and introduced the rule of law, the mission soon spread and consolidated its work throughout Tonga, in spite of strong opposition (Latukefu 1966).

Wesleyanism began in Samoa in 1828 through a Samoan chief, Saiva'aia, who had come under Wesleyan influence while on a prolonged visit to Tonga. Upon his return home to Savai'i he managed to persuade two villages to accept the new religion and thereby established the Lotu Tonga. Because Malietoa refused their request for one of the teachers Williams had left with him, the chiefs from these villages went to Tonga to request teachers. In 1835 Tongan 'native teachers' accompanied missionaries to establish Methodist missions in Fiji and Samoa (Garrett 1982:79-80, 105, 111, 281-84). The Fiji mission grew to become the biggest Methodist mission (later church) in the Pacific.

In Samoa however, there were bitter rivalries with the LMS. In a decision made in London, the LMS and the Methodist Boards of Mission decided that the Methodists should withdraw from Samoa in 1839 leaving Samoa to the LMS and Tonga to the Methodists (Garrett 1974). This was done without consulting either the missionaries in the field or their Samoan adherents. Consequently, and with significant political repercussions, many Samoan Methodists refused to join the LMS and appealed to Taufa'ahau and the missionaries in Tonga for help. In 1855 the responsibility for the Methodist Missions in the Pacific was transferred to the Wesleyan Methodist General Conference of Australasia. It was then decided by those with a better understanding of the problems in Samoa that the mission there would be re-established two years later, in 1857.

After founding missions in Fiji and Samoa in 1835, no new fields were opened in the Pacific Islands by the Methodist Overseas Mission for another 40 years, when the missions in New Britain and New Ireland were established in 1875. The new initiatives were due to the vision and tireless efforts of the most outstanding Methodist missionary in the Pacific at this time, Dr George Brown (1908:69-102). He was charged with the responsibility of this new endeavour and he took Samoans and Fijians (later to be joined by Tongans) with him to the New Guinea Islands to establish the mission.

Sixteen years later in 1891 another new mission was established in the Papuan Islands region which was then part of British New Guinea, at the invitation of its Governor, Sir William MacGregor. This new mission was under the able leadership of Dr William E. Bromilow, assisted by helpers from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa (Bromilow 1929). Others were recruited to help in another new mission in the western Solomon Islands under the leadership of Rev John Goldie in 1902 (Latukefu 1969; Forman 1996:11), and half a century later, in 1950, the latest mission was established amongst the Huli and Mendi peoples of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea.

Training of Islander missionaries

Education and health services were integral parts of the evangelizing activities of Christian missionaries in the Pacific. Reducing vernacular languages to writing was a major contribution to the conservation and development of cultures. Formal

elementary schools followed conversion everywhere and as needs for trained teachers and other church workers grew rapidly the demand for training institutions with improved syllabi and appropriate courses in which to train mission workers, teachers and assistant missionaries increased. The training of the native mission workers included not only biblical studies, moral precepts and character building, but more advanced literacy, numeracy, personal hygiene, sanitation and dispensation of simple remedies. During the 20th century technical, agricultural and theological institutions have developed and diversified throughout the Pacific, but from the beginning the missions were in the forefront of educational work.

The training of Pacific Islanders for mission work began early. The Takamoa Institute in Rarotonga was established in 1839 to train Cook Islanders, after Aaron Buzacott of the LMS had established a printing press in the early 1830s and had achieved widespread literacy among Rarotongans who could read sermons and literature translated into the local language (Gilson 1980:30). At Takamoa the divinity lectures of Dr David Bogue of the Mission Seminary at Gosport (Gunson 1978:65-70) were translated into Rarotongan and memorized by students (Garrett 1982:117). The four year course also provided instruction in practical skills such as house building, furniture making and included some training in domestic skills for the students' wives.

In Samoa the famous Malua Institute on Upolu was established by the LMS in 1844. Until its establishment Samoan teachers had undergone a three months course of rudimentary theological training.

Malua Institute not only became a seminary for Samoan teachers but for potential teachers from the various Melanesian islands to westward. There were two courses of four years each. The first was a course in general education, similar to that given in other mission schools. The second was for those who were accepted as teachers (Gunson 1978:324).

By 1869, Malua was training Samoan men for the ministry as faife'au (pastors) and their wives received special programmes in such practical skills as cooking, sewing, washing and ironing, housekeeping and childcare as well as some useful Samoan crafts. The College curriculum for male students included biblical studies, scripture history, pastoral theology, writing, arithmetic, geography,

astronomy, natural history, English and drawing (see generally Liua'ana 1995).

Feeder schools such as the Leulumoega High School established in 1890 to prepare promising youths for Malua, provided instruction in tropical agriculture, carpentry, concrete work, plumbing, blacksmithing, boat building and other crafts. Schools for young women trained them for future church responsibilities and to become suitable wives for Malua theological students. Character training was important as well as a knowledge of European ways of doing things (Sinclair 1982a:9).

Piula College, the Wesleyan theological institution in Samoa, was established much later at Lufilufi on Upolu in 1868 after the return of the Wesleyans to Samoa, which had been abandoned by Peter Turner in 1839, though he claimed there were then 13,000 Wesleyans, 197 schools and 487 teachers (Wood 1978:282). Piula College from the early 1900s has had some outstanding principals who did much to advance theological training there, but, as Gunson (1978:325) notes, the training of the Wesleyans was never as efficient, in the earlier years, as the training provided by the LMS.

This careful training of Samoan missionaries for work in Papua and other places was very satisfactory with regard to theological education, practical skills, enthusiasm and dedication, but it did nothing to help them appreciate the need to understand other cultures. In fact their training tended to enhance a conviction in their own superiority and heightened their intolerance towards the Melanesian cultures, such as in Papua. Some Samoan pastors, in order to erode the Papuans traditional religions, aroused the concern of certain European missionaries by their enthusiasm and thoroughness in destroying Papuan idols. But they were simply reflecting their training at Malua under other European missionaries (Sinclair 1982b:25).

The first training institution in Tonga was established at Neiafu, Vava'u, in 1841, where Taufa'ahau (who later became King George Tupou I) was ruler. He gave the institution his full support and provided land for students to grow their own food. However, the head of the institution died in 1846 and it was taken over in 1847 by a newly arrived missionary, Rev Richard Amos who had trained at the Normal Institution in Glasgow and who introduced the 'Glasgow system' after the training institution was moved to Nuku'alofa. The Glasgow system had been developed by David

Stow and

combined monitorial methods with the object teaching of Pestalozzi, while considerable emphasis was placed on the Bible and 'moral training'. Stow did not believe in prizes and corporal punishment but stimulated or rebuked pupils 'by sympathy of numbers' or the public opinion of the school (Gunson 1978:244-45).

The success of the system was attested by the fact that in 1853 no fewer than 8,000 could read the Scriptures and about 5,000 could write. Arithmetic, geography and other subjects such as natural history and singing were also taught. The Wesleyans used the 'Glasgow system' in Fiji as well, where a qualified teacher, William Collis who was stationed at Lakeba, and John Binner at Levuka in 1852 trained Fijian teachers in the same techniques (Wood 1978:143).

The promotion of the educational work of the Wesleyan mission in Tonga culminated in the establishment of Tupou College by Dr J.E. Moulton in 1866, which like its Samoan counterpart Malua, achieved excellent standards and aimed to create a new elite of educated men and women. The College produced not only outstanding ministers and teachers for the mission but also government officials and community leaders. The improvement in the training of teachers effected corresponding improvement in the number and standard of subjects taught in the schools as well as the efficiency of teaching. In addition to religious subjects, history, geography, arithmetic and English were taught in day schools and philosophy, astronomy, geometry, algebra and physics were added to the syllabus of the institutions. Tongan was used as the medium of instruction and books were translated and published in Tongan. Among those translated by Moulton were two volumes of world history, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Bridge 1918:252), and other scholarly works. Music was given special attention and a Tongan system of musical notation was devised by Moulton, which enabled hymns and classical masterpieces to be transcribed and then sung by Tongan choirs. This was one of the innovations introduced by Tongan teachers and missionaries later to Melanesia (Latukefu, 1974:75-78).

In Fiji the institution for theological education was moved from its earlier site at Mataisuvu, in the Rewa circuit where it had been established in 1857, to a new site at Navuloa at the mouth of the Rewa River about 20 miles from Suva. It remained there for 35 years, from 1873 to 1908, during which time it had some outstanding

principals.⁵ It provided Dr George Brown, in June 1875, with pioneer pastors for service in the mission he was about to establish in New Guinea. He addressed the 83 Navuloa students and described the hardships they might expect to face telling them that he "knew of the place [New Guinea], and of the character of the people who lived there; of the ferocity of the natives; of the unhealthy character of the climate; that they would be exposed to dangers on every hand; that in all probability many of them would never see their own Fijian homes again" (Brown 1908:75). He warned them that "they might be left there alone without any white missionary to look after them". Then he urged them to consider their decision carefully and give him an answer the following day. Next morning every one of the students volunteered to go. This is an indication of the complete dedication which these men had to their calling. In fact, nine of them were chosen, and the colonial authorities were worried in case they did not fully understand the risks they were to face. The administrator lectured them on the perils they were likely to face but their Fijian spokesman, Aminio Bale, after summarizing the administrator's address and thanking him for his concern, said:

We wish however, to inform your Honour that it is no new thing to us. Mr. Brown told us all that you told us about the character of the people, the unhealthiness of the climate and the dangers we will probably have to encounter ... we wish also to thank your Excellency for telling us that we are British subjects, and that you take such an interest in us, and that if we wish to remain you will take care that we are not taken from our homes in Fiji. But, sir, we have fully considered this matter in our hearts; no one has pressed us in any way; we have given ourselves up to do God's work, and our mind today, sir, is to go... If we die, we die; if we live, we live (quoted in Brown 1908:79-80).

Another example of the understanding these men had of their calling may be seen in a sermon delivered by Elimotama, one of the Fijian members of the group, on 8 August 1875 aboard the mission vessel *John Wesley* as it was passing the Solomon Islands. His text was from Romans 15:20-21. His sermon made three points. First, the path that Saint Paul had followed had been marked out for him by God and not by himself. Second, this path had been a new one - a missionary venture - for while others had remained at

home to preach the gospel Paul had gone to foreign lands. Third, Paul's path had been the path of the Book. God had promised through the Bible that the gentiles should share the blessings of the Lord and Paul had been called to fulfil that promise. Brown reports that Elimotama applied each point to the Fijian's own situation, drawing parallels between Saint Paul's endeavour and their own with great effectiveness (Brown 1908:85-86).

Many of the warnings given this pioneering group proved only too correct. Three years after the establishment of the mission on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, four Fijians were killed at the instigation of a headman, Talili, who pretended friendship toward the missionaries, but is said to have personally severed the head of the last surviving teacher, Peni Luvu, as Peni unsuspectingly drank from a coconut. Villagers then cut up and ate the bodies of the four Fijians. When the news of these murders reached Fiji, many more Fijians and their wives volunteered to go to New Guinea to continue the work left unfinished by their dead compatriots. One volunteer was a brother of one of the murdered teachers. When the wife of another volunteer was asked about the prospect of meeting the same fate, she replied quite simply, "I am the outrigger of the canoe; where the canoe goes I go" (Threlfall 1975:47).

Later, in 1891, Seluvaia, the wife of a Tongan missionary was murdered on the island of Panaeati in Papua by a man who had just learned that one of his wives had eloped with a policeman and he went berserk, vowing to attack the first foreigner he met. This happened to be Seluvaia (Bromilow 1914:555).⁶ Before she died, she urged the people around her to ask her husband, who was visiting another island at the time, to plead for her assassin's life on the grounds that he was not in possession of his faculties. The deep commitment and heroism shown by many of these Pacific Islander missionaries was one of the reasons for their success. They managed to gain the love and confidence of Melanesian villagers who were gradually influenced by them not only in religious conversion but also to adopt many other aspects of their cultures.

Problems Encountered

Undoubtedly the most serious problems affecting Islander missionaries were due to tropical illnesses which were unknown in Polynesia and Fiji. In New Guinea alone more than 150 men, women and children died of disease, most commonly, malaria. This



The memorial to Seluvaia. Standing second from left is Rev. Isikeli Hau'ofa. Photo provided by Dr. Ruth Latukefu.

was also true in Papua where the death rate among Samoan missionaries (from what they called *fiva Niugini*) was also very high, especially before the turn of the century, largely because they did not realize that mosquitos were the cause (Sinclair 1982b:17-18; Wetherell 1978:154).

The European missionaries expected the Pacific Islanders to live like the local people in houses made of bush materials, unprotected from mosquitos and it was not until the early 1900s when there was more knowledge of the role of mosquitos in the spread of malaria that mosquito nets became more commonly used. Moreover, the idea of preventive medicine was quite unfamiliar. Sorcerers in Fiji or medicine men and women in Tonga and Samoa did apply magic or medicine to cure sick parts of the body and prevent spirits from entering the body and aggravating the sickness, but the idea of taking medicine in advance of sickness was unknown. For this reason many South Sea Islander missionaries ignored their supervisors' instructions to take a prophylactic dose of quinine regularly. They usually waited until they fell ill and by then they were too sick to take their medicine and often succumbed.

Home sickness and despair often accompanied illness and strong faith was not always sufficient to overcome them. One former European missionary remarked that the South Sea Islands missionaries had "a fatalism which is characteristic of Pacific peoples ... a tendency when they become ill ... 'to throw in the sponge', to give up, and in some cases this resulted in death".⁷ Often too, these people had absolute trust in the will of God. They believed that if it was God's will for them to die, nothing and no one could prevent it.

Although social relationships between the Islander missionaries and the local people were on the whole, close and happy, there were minor sources of friction due partly to certain attitudes shared by South Sea Islander missionaries as a group and partly to individual idiosyncrasies. The Tongans and Samoans had no doubt whatsoever of their physical, mental, and cultural superiority to the Melanesians, an attitude that was reinforced by their role in "bringing light to the darkness of Melanesia". Even the legendary Chalmers, who had great empathy with pastors was forced to admit that Polynesian teachers generally "look down on the natives and bounce them too much" (quoted in Langmore 1974:30). Not surprisingly, the Fijians were closest to the local people. Since they were racially Melanesians themselves, there were fewer barriers between them and the people either racially or culturally. Marriage between Fijian missionaries and local women was common, especially among missionaries who became widowers during their term of service (Wetherell 1978:164-65), but marriages between Samoans, Cook Islanders, Niueans or Tongans and local people were rare and likely to be severely censured back home and by other Polynesian missionaries in the field (Wetherell 1977:98).

It has been alleged that the Samoans experienced the most difficulties in adjusting to their situation. This was unequivocally the view of many of the early European missionaries who found much to worry and upset them in the Samoans' behaviour towards Papuans. There is much truth in the allegation that Samoans were haughty and overbearing, although the same European missionaries were sublimely unaware that they often harboured similar feelings of superiority towards Samoans and Papuans alike (Sinclair 1982b:19). The Samoan attitudes can be attributed to their pride in the fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way), and to the special place which, the faife'au enjoys in Samoan society. Almost every

informant, both mine⁸ and Ruta Sinclair's,⁹ said the Samoans were hot-tempered and quick to resort to violence when the people failed to follow their instructions or administer their needs.

Pastors in Samoa have their material needs completely taken care of by the villagers, their house is usually the best in the village and practically all food and other necessities are provided by the community. Frequently the Samoan missionaries expected the same treatment from the Melanesians and were upset in the extreme when their demands were not met. In one place members of the local congregation were denounced from the pulpit on Sunday mornings for neglecting their duty to the mission and to God. The same Samoan pastor would visit people's gardens and take whatever he wanted without asking. Others refused to accept food unless it had been cooked by the local people in the Samoan manner, which meant preparation with lavish amounts of coconut cream.¹⁰

The Papuans resented such high-handedness and, significantly, the only missionary in more recent years to be seriously wounded by local people in the Papuan Islands was a Samoan stationed at Bwaruada on Normanby Island during World War II: a young man attacked the Samoan for having broken his older brother's arm with a spear during an argument.¹¹ The tendency to resort to such tactics was by no means confined to Samoans, although they resorted to it with greater frequency than other groups. A story is also told of a rather large Tongan missionary who used to shake the huts of those members of his congregation who failed to attend early morning church services.¹²

Another outstanding Tongan to Bougainville, who was there for some 30 years until the mid-1970s:

held very strong views on certain matters and made no apologies in enforcing them. Playing string instruments and singing secular songs was strongly discouraged being regarded as a means of eroding morality. He was also a strong disciplinarian. Rules were laid down and breaking of rules was met with severe punishment. Corporal punishment was liberally meted out by him. The people accepted this, regarding it as part of his strong leadership, and that it was after all, as they themselves put it, for their own good (Latukefu 1982:45).

Another cause of minor irritation, more often among the European missionaries than the local people, was the Tongans' insistence on wearing black suits to preach on Sunday despite the

intense heat. This was a tradition of the Tongan church where the same formal dress was maintained in an equally unsuitable climate. Some of Dr Moulton's former students took with them their academic gowns, received after graduating from Tupou College, and wore them at local school functions and important occasions; a practice which European missionaries again tended to ridicule, but which the local people admired. Samoans were just as fond of European clothing and went about on Sundays bedecked in waistcoats, ties and sometimes even frockcoats. What the European missionaries, however, took to be ridiculous showmanship was seen by Samoans as "showing reverence to God" (Sinclair 1982b:19-20).

Relations with European missionaries were a genuine source of concern to both parties. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent by 1893 that the question of sending the Samoans home was seriously contemplated. Rev John Marriott was sent from Samoa to investigate and he concluded that much of the trouble could have been avoided had there been a European missionary who was proficient in the Samoan language (Sinclair 1982b:18). In the event, Rev A.E. Hunt was despatched to Papua and with his departure eight years later the Papua mission lost its only European missionary with experience in Samoa and a knowledge of the Samoan language (Wetherell 1980:150).

The European missionaries condemned the superior attitudes of the South Seas Islanders toward the local people but, ironically, they looked upon these missionaries and Melanesians alike as 'natives' and therefore inferior to themselves. This attitude had unfortunate repercussions. A Maori missionary was rejected by the chairman of the Solomon Islands District in 1935 because the latter would only accept him under the same conditions of employment as other Polynesians, even though the New Zealand church had stipulated that a Maori missionary should be treated no differently from a European.¹³ Moreover, Fijian, Samoan, Cook Islander and Tongan missionaries, like local people, were excluded from meetings discussing mission finances, or else were excluded when the European missionaries had their morning and afternoon tea breaks.¹⁴ Even as late as the 1940s, some Samoan pastors were demanding that they be treated on the terms of equality to which they were entitled (Sinclair 1982b:23), but still the message was not always heeded. During the early 1950s, for example, a newly arrived Australian missionary invited a very senior South Sea Islands missionary (who had been in charge of the mission during

the war years when the Europeans had been evacuated) to attend one of the finance meetings, only to be reprimanded and told by the chairman that the Islander missionary must leave the meeting, for he was not entitled to attend and knew it.¹⁵ Even Islanders who were ordained ministers were not permitted to perform certain ministerial functions. As late as 1952, the Solomon Islands District Synod was able to pass a resolution saying that Tongan and Fijian ministers, fully ordained, should not be allowed to administer the sacraments except on the instruction, and under the guidance, of a European superintendent.¹⁶

Though it would be an exaggeration to maintain that racial discrimination was universally practised by European missionaries towards South Sea Islanders, those who disagreed with the racial codes were often under pressure to conform. At the same time, there were differences in cultural values which created conflicts and misunderstandings. On the question of food, for example, the Europeans were frugal and regarded the Samoan emphasis on food exchange as an attempt to buy prestige with the Papuans. In reality, sharing and reciprocity is valued in both Samoan and Papuan cultures and not inconsistent with the Christian ideal of caring for your neighbour (Sinclair 1982b:20).

In other instances it was a general attitude held by European missionaries who could not accept the fact that their South Sea Island colleagues might be more expert in some respects than themselves. An Australian missionary visiting the gardens at a training institution instructed students, supervised by a South Sea Islander, to build their sweet potato mounds closer together so that they could plant more in the area cleared. The South Sea Islander informed him that if this were done, the plants would yield a great many leaves but only a few small sweet potatoes. The Australian kicked the mounds, levelling them with his shoes, and then ordered the men to do as they were told. Apart from the humiliation in front of his students, it must have been galling for a man who had been growing sweet potatoes most of his life to be contradicted by someone so inexperienced in tropical agriculture.¹⁷

Impact of the Missionaries

In spite of these problems, the impact of these Pacific Island missionaries has been significant. As well as the gospel, they brought skills. It is not difficult to find reasons for their success. While European missionaries generally settled in headquarters

away from the local populations, the Pacific Islanders lived among the people. They were able to communicate almost on the same level, and indeed many became fluent in the local languages. The gap between their own cultures and those of the people was not nearly as great as the gap between Europeans and villagers, a fact which greatly facilitated mutual understanding. People on Matupit Island, for example, lamented the decision to discontinue sending Pacific Islander teachers and felt their school would never again attain the high standard reached during their time.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the Samoans and the Tongans tended to be impatient with the character, traditions, and customs of the local people whereas the Fijians showed more tolerance and understanding of them and their culture. In New Ireland a Fijian teacher named Ratu Emosi Verabasaga, instead of forbidding the traditional malanggan (ceremonial feast), joined in it and gradually extended his influence through it. He was later invited to offer prayers as part of the ceremony.¹⁹ Another Fijian:

Migieli, a man of Christ-like patience, occupied Waira, a place of murderers, liars and thieves. He was despoiled of his goods, his plantation was robbed, and he was treated with derision. When [Danks and his colleagues] sympathised with him he said: "Wait a while, sir, they will know better soon. At present they are ignorant, but light will come to them and then it will be different" (Danks 1914:515).

Some Pacific Islander missionaries, especially Samoans, had themselves been adopted by one of the local clans, thus becoming involved in its social activities and, in consequence, gradually extending influence over the community. The people of Taibe'u village on Fergusson Island in the Milne Bay District still speak with tremendous feeling of a Samoan missionary, Joel, who belonged to their clan, as do those of Nemumemu on Dobu Island where another Samoan, Philemon Faiteli, worked.²⁰ This accorded neatly with the special place of the Samoan faife'au in Samoan villages where the pastor is regarded as 'spiritual father' and his wife the 'spiritual mother', which many tried to transfer to their work in Papuan villages (Sinclair 1982a:12-13).

Feasting was also used to bring together people who had been hostile or traditionally enemies. Informants said that while the European missionaries only visited the village occasionally and in a rather formal manner, the Pacific Islanders would sit down with

them, share betel nut, and discuss their problems. Local people who happened to be in a Pacific Islands missionary's house at mealtime were always invited to share the meal with the family.

Gradually the Pacific Islands missionaries introduced their own cultural emphasis on feasting to mark important occasions and invited people to participate in them. In many traditional cultures, people had been afraid of eating in the presence of strangers, on account of fear of sorcery being performed on food remains, and it had been their custom to distribute uncooked food at feasts which people took home to cook and eat with their family. I recall a visit to Munda, Solomons, in 1968 where one of the speakers pointed to me and said that it was the Tongans who had introduced the modern form of feasting. He imitated the traditional way of eating, where people hid themselves and ate furtively, looking around nervously to ensure no one was waiting to attack them or pick up their food remnants. In the new way of feasting, introduced by the Tongans, everyone sat together and even traditional enemies could enjoy a meal together without fear of attack. At Tonu, in southern Bougainville, the people told of Taani Palavi, a Tongan missionary who had prepared a feast soon after his arrival and invited all the people to partake of it. According to their account it was the first time ever that Tonu men and women had eaten a meal together in public. The following Christmas the people of Tonu prepared a big feast under Taani Palavi's direction and he invited the leaders of the Roman Catholics in the area to join in the festivities, previously they and Methodists had not been on speaking terms. Polynesian-style feasting has now become 'traditional' throughout these areas of Melanesia.

Not only methods of cooking but the diet of the people was also influenced by the Samoans, Tongans and Fijians who introduced foodplants from their various homelands. The Pacific Islands missionaries also taught new ways of using materials familiar to local people, such as pandanus, coconut fibre, and timber. These too became absorbed into local cultures. They introduced a species of pandanus which was better suited to the weaving of fine mats and baskets than the indigenous variety and taught students how to cultivate and use it. They also improved the somewhat crude houses in some areas. In Misima, for example, the Tongan style of housing was adopted; but more commonly in Melanesia it was the Fijian style. On Teop Island, Bougainville, my wife and I were shown a traditional house built in 1972 to

celebrate 50 years of mission presence there. The contrast between that house and the Fijian type house adopted by people of the island was quite marked.

They informed me that the first Fijian missionary, stationed there in 1922, had taught them how to build this type of house. The missionaries' wives had shown village women how to weave mats for flooring and bedding as well as fans, baskets and other items. Mat making had been particularly well demonstrated by the Samoan women and in many parts of Papua they are still referred to as "Samoan mats".

Cultivation methods had also been improved and a greater variety of crops were planted. In the Solomons, the Tongans are regarded as particularly good gardeners. Informants told me that the Tongans had taught them to plant sweet potatoes, new varieties of yams and bananas, and one large variety of yam is still known as the "Tongan yam". The Islander missionaries also encouraged the planting of cash crops and breeding chickens. Sione Taufa of Tonga encouraged the mountain people near Kieta, Bougainville, to plant coffee and he gave students at the mission in Roreinang training in establishing and running a plantation by allocating a tract of land to each student to clear for his own garden to provide food as well as raise cash crops. Villagers were influenced to follow this example and planted coconut trees and cocoa as well as a variety of vegetables which could be sold when he came on pastoral visits, he would also encourage the breeding of chickens by presenting a pair of breeding chickens to each village church leader. Later he helped promising young farmers, using loans from their own local mission fund to purchase land and start farms (Latukefu 1982:43, 48).

Agricultural training institutions run by the missions had Pacific Islander instructors, for example two Fijians at Salamo, in the Papuan Islands.²¹ The local people were experienced fishermen, but they were able to learn new techniques of fishing which are still practised in many places today. They also adopted the Polynesian style outrigger canoes, which proved popular for fishing and travelling short distances, while in Dobu the people incorporated many Fijian features into their canoe design (Wetherell 1978:158).

The South Sea Island missionaries also taught their own musical styles including, in at least one case, the playing of band instruments. The Tongans were skilful in teaching music and taught

their own system of notation, the tu'ungafasi, which had been introduced at Tupou College by Dr Moulton (Latukefu 1974:79). Local choirs were taught to sing choruses from the Messiah and other classical works, some of which are still sung today. One Tongan minister, Paula Havea, much respected and regarded with warm affection by the people, taught English, geography, arithmetic, Scripture and music at the main school in the head station of Kokeqolo in the Solomons. In the 13 years prior to World War II, he was bandmaster at the school, and one of his pupils was Belshazzar Gina, the first Solomon Islander to become bandmaster of the Solomon Islands Police Band.

Sports of various kinds were introduced as well - rugby and cricket were especially popular. Teams were not limited to regulation size, but took on as many players as wished to join the game. In some ways, these sports were a peaceful substitute for tribal conflicts. Games and Polynesian dancing were taught to young men and women:

As singing and dancing is part of village life in Samoa, and because the Samoans considered Papuan songs less tuneless than their own, and Papuan dances "heathen", the Samoans introduced their own songs and dances which had been stripped of their own "heathen" elements. Some of these are still danced by Papuans complete with the songs in Samoan (Sinclair 1982b:34).

Similarly, Fijians and Tongans taught their dancing and hymns to people in areas where they worked. Improved standards in gardening and fishing (Wetherell 1978:65-66), together with more peaceful and entertaining village life, helped improve the health of the villagers.

Before government health services were established, the missionaries also gave simple health care, though most medical care was given at mission hospitals by trained nurses. These included some Samoans, and there were some trained medical practitioners, such as Dr George Niumeitoli, who was in charge of Salamo mission hospital during the war and until his retirement in 1953.

Everywhere they went, Pacific Islander missionaries encouraged construction of sturdy permanent churches and organized fund raising to buy materials needed for them. The Samoans were accustomed to having very large and beautiful churches back home and were keen to build on the same scale in

the new mission fields. The Matupit people told me how Taniela Finau, a Tongan minister, had encouraged them to buy fishing nets from another part of the Gazelle Peninsula, where people specialized in making strong nets of local material. Under his direction, they put the nets across a narrow passage of deep water near the village. They caught hundreds of fish and sold them for tambu (shell money) which was stored in a huge pile in his house. Later, as others needed tambu for ceremonies, it was sold for cash at a profit. This money enabled them to purchase building materials for the first permanent church on the island, and over the years such churches have become a focal point for the social and religious activities of various communities throughout Melanesia.

The full story of the contribution of Pacific Islander missionaries to Melanesia has not yet been told, and much historical work needs to be done, in collecting local oral traditions of some of these little known workers in the service of Christ, while there are still villagers alive who can remember them. That some of them, particularly during the early part of the 20th century, had limited education, and lacked insight into the cultures in which they were working cannot be denied, but in general these brave Fijian, Samoan, Cook Islander and Tongan men and women, who were prepared to sacrifice their lives in mission service and who were given relatively little recognition by the mission authorities, left their mark on the people among whom they worked. By encouraging local people to contribute to the work of the mission as a sign of their acceptance of Christ and the responsibilities accompanying true conversion, the Pacific Islander missionaries helped to improve the education and material well-being of the people. Almost every facet of traditional life was in some way affected by their presence, and this is acknowledged by Melanesian villagers among whom they lived and worked. Many of the changes introduced by them were easily comprehended, readily welcomed and easily adopted by Melanesians. In many places they are remembered with affection and gratitude, and their impact continues to the present.

Abbreviations

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
LMS	London Missionary Society

Notes

- 1 Sione Latukefu died suddenly on 2 June 1995 while working on this essay. It was completed by his wife, Dr Ruth A. Latukefu, to whom we are profoundly grateful - Eds.
- 2 As early as 1822 native missionaries from the church of Borabora were sent to Vava'u in Tonga (Gunsong 1978:15).
- 3 The very first Pacific Islander priest was a Tongan, Soakimi Gatafahafa, who was ordained in 1865 after studying in Rome. He returned to the Pacific in 1867 and was sent to Tonga but was unsuccessful and spent his final years as a Marist Lay brother in New Zealand after being sent there. However in 1874 a seminary was set up at Lano, on Wallis and the first ordinations, those of three Wallisians and one Futunan three of whom served in Tonga, took place in 1886 (Laracy 1977:151-152).
- 4 Lawes arrived in Torres Strait in 1873 and moved to Port Moresby in 1874 as the first white man to settle there.
- 5 These include Jesse Carey (1873-74), Joseph Waterhouse (1874-77), Lorimer Fison (1877-84), William Lindsay (1884-1900). See Wood 1978:146-47.
- 6 There is a memorial erected to the memory of Seluvaia on the island of Panaeati, where she was killed in October 1896.
- 7 Rev George Carter, former chairman of the Solomon Islands Mission. Interviewed, Buka, March 1968.
- 8 Sione Latukefu collected these recollections from informants in the Papuan Islands region in 1970. He carried out further research there later that decade. The informants referred to here were Rev Wilson Yareki, United Church Bunama, Normanby Island, and Rev Robert Duigu, United Church Salamo, Ferguson Island. Earlier results of this and related research were presented in Latukefu 1978: 91-108; 1981:175-87.
- 9 Ruta Sinclair, herself a Samoan, found her Papuan informants "very reluctant" to relate negative encounters with Samoan pastors for fear of offending her. She goes on to explain that David Wetherell, an Australian, encountered no such reticence (Sinclair 1982b:24; Wetherell 1980:146-49).
- 10 Informant: Rev Robert Duigu, United Church, Salamo, Ferguson Island.
- 11 Informant: Lebege Yarudile, Bwasitolobwa Village, Normanby Island but who as a young man had speared Noah, the Samoan.
- 12 Informant: Rev George Carter.
- 13 Informant: Rev George Carter.
- 14 Rev Taniela Fisi'ihoi, a former Tongan missionary who served in the Papuan islands region from 1962 and who in 1965 became Principal of the Bible School at Bwaruada experienced many problems of this kind when he first went into the field. It was only after a new superintendent was appointed that the discrimination was eliminated. Interviewed in Brisbane, December 1994.
- 15 The Tongan missionary in question was Rev Isikeli Hau'ofa, an outstanding missionary to the east Papuan region who has translated the books of Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah into the Misima language (Hau'ofa 1970). During the early war years, from 1941 when the

government had ordered the withdrawal of all European staff, the Tongans kept the mission going. Apart from Rev Hau'ofa and his wife, Mele, on Misima Island, Tevita Mone was in control of Salamo and a Fijian, Felimoni Faitele, was at Dobu during the early 1940s. The headquarters of the mission and its institutions were kept going so that when J.W. Dixon returned in 1943 "he found the organisation remarkably intact" (Williams 1972:212-13).

- ¹⁶ Informant: Rev George Carter.
¹⁷ Informant: a retired Tolai pastor who was a student at the time at the training institution.
¹⁸ These sentiments were expressed to me during fieldwork in 1973.
¹⁹ According to my informants, Timot Kaipeng and Mesulam Pasingus, Lauan Village, New Ireland who were interviewed in the early 1970s, when people brought pigs for the malanggan the Fijian missionaries used to contribute shell money toward the cost of the pigs. They were then allowed into the enclosure where the ceremony was held. There they helped to distribute the pork among the participants. The people greatly appreciated this, feeling that these missionaries identified themselves with the people.
²⁰ Informant: Vabati Gariauna, Dobu Island.
²¹ In the 1930s Isoli Kini and Alenai Salabiau served at Salamo as agricultural instructors (Williams 1972:199).

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Glossary

'aiga	extended family
faife'au	pastor
fiva Niugini	malaria
matai	Samoan chief
tambu	shell money

2

Errand of Mercy:

Samoan Missionaries to Southern Vanuatu, 1839-1860

Featuna'i Liua'ana

John Williams, of the London Missionary Society (LMS), introduced Christianity to Samoa in 1830. Central to the success of the Samoan enterprise were missionaries from the Cook Islands and Tahiti. The Samoans flocked to the mission for knowledge and material wealth. Samoan matai (chiefs), such as Malietoa, To'oa, Matetau, Lavasi'i, Pe'a and Taegogo (who later became an LMS missionary) and their families, were early prominent LMS adherents. It was from such chiefly families that most of the pioneer Samoan missionaries originated. John Williams believed Samoans could succeed in mission work just as the Tahitians and Cook Islanders had done.

This article examines the work of Samoan missionaries on Aneityum, Futu'na, Tanna, Aniwa, Erromanga and Efate during the first 20 years of evangelization. Although the emphasis is on the work of the Samoans, other island missionaries are mentioned in order to maintain a coherent story. The difficult task is trying to trace who the Samoan missionaries were, their home villages, mission stations, length of service, and outcomes of their labour.

The blood of the martyrs...

In 1839, Williams selected 12 Samoans for mission work from 30 candidates recommended by European missionaries.² Many other Samoans offered themselves personally; young and old, strong and weak, as well as the afflicted. William Mills recalled Sepetaia, an elderly matai, offering himself for mission:

Whilst sitting in our house talking over our plans, a blind chief who is intelligent and a good man came in. He said, "Teacher Mills and Williams you know I am a blind man but I have a good desire to go with you to the dark lands