

## **The First Oceanian Marist: Petelo Likumoakaaka**

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### **Introduction**

On 29<sup>th</sup> August 1938 a man died on the remote island of Nuiia Fo'ou in Tonga. He was nearly 80 years old and had lived there for many years. He was a priest and a Marist and he wasn't a European and he wasn't a Tongan. He was originally from the island of Wallis. Who was he? How did he get there?

In order to discover more we need to go back to the time of the first Marist missionaries. Pierre Bataillon had just become the Vicar Apostolic for Central Oceania and he had a dream. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church whenever missionaries have gone out to new lands it had not been long before the question of the formation of indigenous clergy had risen. It was no different for those early Marists.

On 27<sup>th</sup> June 1845 Bishop Bataillon announced to Colin in a letter that he had initiated the process of beginning a seminary on Wallis:

"I hasten to inform you of something that will please you. It is that during the last few days we visited a pretty little isolated bay in order to build a seminary there; I dream day and night about this establishment, and we definitely must begin. We will call it "The Seminary of the Immaculate Heart of Mary"<sup>1</sup>

"Please pray, reverend Father, that this establishment is a success. What a consolation for your fatherly heart it would be if, before [your] dying we could ordain a Polynesian priest and enlarge Mary's family by forming Marist Fathers and Brothers in the various islands of our mission."<sup>2</sup>

This paper has three parts: Where were the places of Marist formation for Oceanians? Who was the first Oceanian Marist? What effect did his presence have within the Society of Mary then and today?

### **Marist Priestly Formation for Oceanians in the Nineteenth Century**

By the end of 1847 a college at Lano on Wallis had begun under the care of Father Meriais. About a dozen young men had started their studies. Meanwhile on the island of Futuna a school had been

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. Girard (ed.), *Lettres Reçues d'Océanie* (LRO), doc. 376, Bataillon to Colin, 27 June 1845 (Translated by Brian Quin, March 2009).

<sup>2</sup> LRO, doc. 376, 4.

established at Kolopelu the previous year.<sup>3</sup> The Marists hoped that from these small beginnings future priests and brothers would be formed.

There was only one teacher at Lano, Meriais. He was not only responsible for the academic life of the college, but also supervised the physical work of the students. Classes were for only 2 hours each day and there were few books. The rest of the time was spent working in the plantation and the gardens. This work was necessary to produce enough food for the students and staff to survive.<sup>4</sup>

It was a similar situation at Kolopelu (Futuna). The long hours of work in the gardens and plantations, the lack of books, the few hours of classes, and the difficulties of providing a seminary education to people who had only just learnt to read and write took their toll on the students. After a few years the Marists began to question the wisdom of this approach. Father Dezest, who was at Kolopelu, wrote to Colin:<sup>5</sup>

“It seems necessary to us to send overseas those young Oceanians in whom can be found dispositions for becoming priests and to separate them from their island, their family and their customs. Whatever efforts I have made to change them, they will always stay natives. They do not lack intelligence; but it will not be developed enough because they will have not read enough, seen enough and heard enough.”

Bishop Bataillon was coming to the same view. In 1852 he arrived in Sydney accompanied by a number of people from his vicariate. He supposedly was there to raise money. He had some other plans in mind too. He wrote a long letter outlining his thoughts on how the Procure could be used more effectively to Colin on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1852. He

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<sup>3</sup> Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Islands Christianity*, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, and Pandanus Books Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 2005, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> “As for class-time, the students had only two hours of class a day and even those two hours were sometimes interrupted by an unforeseen event or work that needed a whole day out of their schedule”, in John Broadbent, *Attempts to Form an Indigenous Clergy in the Vicariates Apostolic of Central Oceania and the Navigators’ Islands in the Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven 1976, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> LRO, doc. 1098: Dezest to Colin, 6.12.1851; Quoted in Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 185.

imagined that it could operate as a seminary, novitiate and a training house for Brothers as well as being the Marist Procure.<sup>6</sup>

Not many other Marists shared this dream with Bishop Bataillon. In January 1855 he sent Father Junillon and four students to Sydney. “Father Junillon had been instructed to tell Father Rocher, (the superior in Sydney), that he had been sent to Sydney for health reasons, although Rocher knew it was to run a college.”<sup>7</sup> Rocher felt unable to call the bluff of Junillon as he had not yet heard from the new Superior General Father Favre. However the cost of feeding the young men was a concern and he soon sent Junillon and the students back to Wallis. It was not long before Bataillon with the four students and a number of priests arrived back in Sydney demanding some answers from Rocher.<sup>8</sup>

Matters had come to a head and the difficulties of the relationship between Bishop Bataillon and the Society of Mary needed to be resolved. The time it took to get a response from the Marist authorities in Europe meant that the standoff continued for over a year. Meanwhile classes for the young students continued at Villa Maria.

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<sup>6</sup> LRO, doc. 1176: Bishop Pierre Bataillon to Colin, 28 August 1852. Translated by Brian Quin, March 31, 2009: “[20] This general Procure in Sydney could very soon and even immediately become a seminary for our missions. It would be the Pulo-pinang of Oceania, because it is now recognised that we will not be able to create indigenous priests without taking them out of their homelands for some time. Now, we cannot send them to Europe. That would give our Procurators something to be responsible for, they would be teachers about missions and, as a result, missionaries. In that situation each vicariate would have to pay an agreed sum for all the pupils it had at the seminary – and for the teachers it would appoint there over and above the procurator. (2) Pulo-Pinang, an island on the coast of Malaysia; cf. Table of Contents of the *Annals* of the Propagation of the Faith from 1822 to 1863 (Lyon), p. 265.

[21] That same house could also be a novitiate. The young men in Europe who are destined for the missions could come there to do their theology. They would get an early idea of what the missions were like, would learn the languages and would be useful in forming their fellow-students from Oceania.

[22] A certain number of brothers could be placed there [at the Procure in Sydney] to make clothes, shoes etc for the missionaries, [and] Oceanian brothers to be formed there. This would be the place where [mission] workers, European and Oceanian, would come together, it would be the school where we would, little by little, teach our Oceanian brothers to stand on their own feet. Without a foundation of this sort, I can see the future of Oceania only with difficulty.”

<sup>7</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> John Hosie, *Challenge: The Marists in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987, p. 109.

Bataillon did not get the response from Europe he wanted. In May 1856 he was summoned to Rome to discuss the matter of the disputes with the Marists. He took the three remaining students with him. He made a triumphal return to France. Many people flocked to hear him preach and to see the three young men from the Pacific. One of whom was Soakimi Gata, who we will hear more about later. He arrived in Rome in December 1856 to a papal audience. The three young men were soon enrolled at the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome.

When Bataillon returned from Europe early in 1859 he was determined to establish a college to train priests in Sydney. It wasn't long before he bought a property called Clydesdale in western Sydney.<sup>9</sup> By Christmas 1859 Bataillon had returned to Sydney with twelve Polynesians. Father Junillon was named as the superior of the college.

There were many difficulties and challenges that proved too much. These difficulties included the many floods and droughts, the constant turnover of Marist staff, the lack of classes and the excess amount of manual labour that was needed to make the farm a going concern. Eventually the reputation of the college in some of the islands discouraged more candidates from coming to Sydney.<sup>10</sup> Clydesdale was eventually sold at the end of 1871 without producing one priest.<sup>11</sup>

Bishop Bataillon was still willing to persist with the formation of indigenous clergy and in 1874 the college at Lano reopened. Three young enthusiastic French Marists had recently arrived in Wallis and their presence and expertise helped greatly.<sup>12</sup>

Casimir Bouzigue was appointed as the superior of Lano, while Pierre Jouny and Alfred Ollivaux initially worked in parishes on Wallis. Gradually numbers at the college increased and in 1876 there were more than 100 students at Lano. Bishop Bataillon died at Lano in 1877.

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<sup>9</sup> Hosie, *Challenge*, p. 169-181: "Bataillon's next move was to establish his college, after failing to take over Villa Maria, was to approach every brother on the staff there, and ask him to join the Clydesdale staff. He did not consult Poupinel until all was over, and one of the brothers, no longer happy to be a tailor, had agreed to join the bishop. Poupinel had been angry at the recruiting campaign, but protest was useless." (p. 172).

<sup>10</sup> Hosie, *Challenge*, p. 181: "On 28 April 1869, Father Amand Lamaze wrote to Poupinel from Tonga, and described strong opposition there to the recruiting of any more candidates for Clydesdale."

<sup>11</sup> Hosie, *Challenge*, p. 177.

<sup>12</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 259-261.

The new vicar apostolic, Bishop Lamaze, made a formal visitation to Lano in 1879 and in 1881. He was impressed by the witness of Fathers Bouzigue, Jouny and Ollivaux and the students. The presence of a number of young indigenous women on Wallis taking the initial steps towards religious profession may have also influenced Lamaze.<sup>13</sup>

Lamaze was convinced so much by what he saw that he was willing to select sixteen young men to begin “a kind of novitiate or scholasticate.”<sup>14</sup> Jouny and Ollivaux were recruited as teachers for the seminary, in addition to their parish responsibilities. The students continued to improve and develop so much that on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1884 Bishop Lamaze gave minor orders to five of the students. Sadly one of them died the following year, but in December 1885 the four remaining students were ordained as sub deacons and then a week later they were ordained as deacons.

Petelo Likumoakaaka, Lolesio Kavauvea, Kasiano Malivao and Sosefo Mougateau were ordained as priests on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1886. This was the first ordination to the priesthood in Central Oceania.<sup>15</sup> Petelo, Lelesio and Kasiano were from Wallis while Sosefo was from Futuna. These four men “were the first indigenous Pacific Islanders to enter and continue in the priesthood.”<sup>16</sup>

### Who was the first Oceanian Marist?

There are three candidates to consider: Soakimi Gata, Louis Godinet and Petelo Likumoakaaka. Who were these men? What became of them? Who was the first Oceanian Marist?

**Soakimi Gata** came from a Tongan family. He was born in Fiji in 1838 and left for Futuna in 1845. He entered the school at Kolopelu which served as a minor seminary. It wasn't long before he was sent to Lano by Bataillon and then accompanied him to Sydney in 1855.

Soakimi was one of the three young Polynesians who travelled with Bishop Bataillon to Europe in 1856.<sup>17</sup> Soakimi was ordained a priest on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1865 in the Basilica of St John Lateran by Cardinal Patrizzi. He was the first priest from Central Oceania. Bishop Bataillon's hope and dream that he had expressed nearly twenty years

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<sup>13</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 121: “The first four professions were in 1884.”

<sup>14</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 269

<sup>15</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 272-273

<sup>16</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 121

<sup>17</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p.209-217. Rafaele Tauliloa returned to Rotuma in 1857. Motesito Ila died in 1858.

earlier had come true. He and Father Colin were still alive to hear the news of the first ordination of a Polynesian priest.

Father Soakimi Gata arrived in Tonga in July 1868. Despite the initial positive reactions it was not a happy experience. Soakimi had to live with the expectations and cultural pressures of the European missionaries, his own people and the followers of the Wesleyan religion. After only a short time Bishop Elloy transferred Soakimi back to Futuna. More problems emerged in relation to celibacy and in 1869 he was transferred once again, this time to Wallis.

Living a celibate life and dealing with the different cultural expectations of the European missionaries and the people of the Pacific was difficult for Soakimi. He became more withdrawn and unco-operative with the Marists and ceased to say Mass on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1872. In January 1873 Bishop Elloy noted:<sup>18</sup>

“It is very regrettable that Fr Soakimi was left in a position where he was on his own, and, as it were, independent and far from any supervision. That is what brought about his loss and his becoming hardened against advice.”

In 1875 Bishop Bataillon sent a report to Cardinal Franchi Prefect of Propaganda about the Central Oceania vicariate. In speaking of Soakimi and his experience of formation and priesthood he said:<sup>19</sup>

“I have had only one indigenous priest and he was trained and ordained at the Urban College of Propaganda in Rome. This was the first attempt made in Oceania, but the man unfortunately turned out bad. He compromised himself in such a way that we were obliged to put him under interdict and even to separate him from the Church.”

After a brief stay in New Caledonia Soakimi eventually became a member of the Marist community at Meeanee in New Zealand in 1876. In time this would become the major Seminary in New Zealand, and he was known there as Brother Joe.

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<sup>18</sup> Frederic Angleviel, *The First Oceanian Priest, Soakimi Gata*, in *Marist Messenger* (April and May 2007) <http://www.maristmessenger.co.nz/?p=39> Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Melanesia and Micronesia, 1850 – 1875*, Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2008, p. 483, with reference to PF: SC Oceania vol. 10 (1873-76), f. 984r-985r, Bataillon to Franchi, 24 August 1875.

“Brother ‘Joe’, the first Polynesian priest carried out his tasks in the vineyard and nursed the sick. The students knew him merely as a kindly, saintly old brother.”<sup>20</sup> In 1896 he got influenza and died. It was only after his death, when he was dressed in his priestly vestments, that it became clear who ‘Br Joe’ truly was.<sup>21</sup>

Historian John Hosie speaks of a confusion of identity and a clash of cultures when he says about Soakimi:<sup>22</sup>

“He was not Futunian, because born in Fiji of Tongan parents; not Tongan – and harshly rejected by Tongans – because he had never been there; alien even to the Pacific, because he represented that strange status, the Catholic priesthood, not properly a priest like all the others, because his skin was of a different colour, and he was not French like them, and not even a Marist like them.”

While Soakimi was in fact the first local diocesan priest from Oceania, and the first Polynesian priest, and while he lived for much of his life in Marist communities, he was never professed as a Marist. So he cannot be considered the first Oceanian Marist.

The second candidate is **Louis Godinet** was born in Samoa in 1859 of a French father and a Samoan. His parents were generous friends to the Marist missionaries.<sup>23</sup> He was sent to France for his secondary education and later joined the Society of Mary in France. He was professed in 1885 at Paignton England and did some of his theology in Barcelona before completing his studies in Montbel France. He was ordained in 1888 and was the first Samoan priest.<sup>24</sup>

Ten days after his ordination he set sail for Oceania in 1888 and was posted to Apia. By the end of that year problems of scandal emerged but the young priest seemed to pay little or no attention to the concerns of his family or the Marists, rejecting any offers of help. The scandals were not only sexual problems. Louis became involved in Samoan politics and this caused many difficulties. Problems also arose when he spoke out against the European missionaries. A few years later he even tried to turn a newly ordained Samoan priest, Father Soane, against the missionaries.<sup>25</sup> He was later transferred to Pago Pago in American

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<sup>20</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 253.

<sup>21</sup> Hosie, *Challenge*, p. 183

<sup>22</sup> Hosie, *Challenge*, p. 183

<sup>23</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 89-90

<sup>24</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 283.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284-285.

Samoa but nothing seemed to change and he was sent to Sydney in 1895. He asked for a dispensation from his Marist vows and this was granted in 1897.<sup>26</sup> He worked as a diocesan priest in Australia for a short time. He did not return to Samoa. The last information that we have is that he moved to Canada.<sup>27</sup>

You could argue that Louis Godinet was the first Oceanian Marist. He was in fact the first man born in the Pacific who took vows in the Society of Mary in September 1885. However his father was French and almost all of his education was in done in France. Finally he was dispensed from his vows in 1897 and apparently never returned to Oceania. In that sense Louis is not the first Oceanian Marist.

Our third candidate is **Petelo Likumoakaaka** who was one of that group of four young men (three from Wallis and one from Futuna), who had studied at Lano and been part of that first group to be ordained to the priesthood in Central Oceania on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1886. Virtually the whole population of Wallis, including the Queen and many Chiefs were present for the grand occasion. Bishop Lamaze wrote:<sup>28</sup>

“See how o most happy Oceania in order to hasten your salvation, the Lord blesses your own children, honours them with the priesthood and joins them with his apostles from afar: and so you will extend the voice of God to your most distant islands.”

Bishop Lamaze also wrote to Cardinal Simeoni, prefect of the Propagation of the Faith on February 26 1886 after the ordination:<sup>29</sup>

“Your Eminence will learn with satisfaction that I have just ordained four indigenous priests, first fruits of our seminary. They are continuing with studies and at the same time helping our priests in the exercise of their ministry, to the great satisfaction of all.”

Petelo Likumoakaaka remained at Lano teaching philosophy while also helping in the parish work of Wallis. Sosefo Mougateau went with Pierre Jouny, to begin a new mission in the northern islands of Tonga at Nuia Taputapu and Niua Foou.<sup>30</sup> Kasiano Malivao and Lolesio Kavauvea were appointed to different parishes on Wallis under the supervision of Fathers Ollivaux and Bouzigue.

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<sup>26</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 285.

<sup>27</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 273.

<sup>30</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 273.



The Marists were careful to ensure that the newly ordained priests were nurtured, even protected, from some of the rigours of priestly ministry. They continued to encourage them in their formal studies but it is doubtful that they considered them to be their equals. Raeburn Lange notes:<sup>31</sup>

“This was no doubt an attempt to protect the new priests from the isolation and individualism that was at that time usual for a Catholic missionary in the Pacific but was alien to the lifestyle of a Polynesian.”

Petelo continued to teach at the seminary but despite the confidence that Bishop Lamaze had in him Father Bouzigue was beginning to have misgivings about him. There was an incident which Bouzigue referred to as “an affair of cupidity.”<sup>32</sup> It involved Petelo’s family and village. Bouzigue felt that some time in a Marist community might help and Petelo had expressed a wish to become a Marist and do more study.<sup>33</sup>

So Bishop Lamaze took Petelo to Rome with him when he travelled to Europe for the beatification of Peter Chanel. Petelo entered the Marist novitiate at Paignton in England and was professed as a Marist on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1889.

From the Marist Archives in Rome we have a copy of the document that he signed on his day of profession. From it we learn his date of birth, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1859, the names of his parents – “Joannis Liku” and “Modestia Siakoli”, and we sight his signature. He is number 959 in the book of Marist professions.

Petelo attended the beatification of Peter Chanel in Rome in November that year and he had an audience with Pope Leo XIII. He then studied theology for 2 more years at the Marist scholasticate in Barcelona Spain and returned to Wallis at the end of 1891.

Thanks to the archives in Rome we believe we have found a photo of Petelo. This photo was taken in front of the Marist Scholasticate in Barcelona, apparently in 1892. According to the SM Index for 1891 Petelo was at Barcelona. He was the only student from Oceania in Barcelona in the 1890’s and he was back in Lano at the beginning of 1892.

It would seem that Petelo definitely had some academic ability; otherwise he would not have been asked to stay at Lano immediately

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<sup>31</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p.122.

<sup>32</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 278.

<sup>33</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 123.

after his ordination to teach. He also would not have been sent to do more study. However Father Ollivaux had written to the Procurator in Father Petelo's last year in Barcelona warning him to not let Petelo make any purchases while in Europe, "As a native I am convinced he would want to buy many useless things."<sup>34</sup> This comment would suggest that the previous issue of cupidity was in the nature of property and possessions. The French Marists and the people of Wallis would have had different understandings about the nature of the ownership and use of goods. There appears to be much potential for misunderstanding and cultural clashes.<sup>35</sup>

Petelo returned to Wallis and Lano in 1892 and all seemed well. In 1895 he asked for a further seven or eight years in Rome or France for more study<sup>36</sup> but was already making the missionaries uneasy by seeming to claim that his travels and meeting with the Pope made him superior to his fellow French Marists.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile Father Henquel had taken over at Lano and in one of his letters mentions Father Petelo's sexual misdemeanours. Then in a letter to the Superior General Father Martin in 1898 Father Ollivaux spoke of Father Petelo's violent reaction to Father Henquel's admonitions. He then mentions Petelo's gradual alienation from his Marist confreres and life at the seminary.<sup>38</sup>

During this time Petelo was apparently working secretly among the chiefs to overthrow the King and the European missionaries. In 1902 one of the Wallisian Chiefs showed one of Petelo's letters to the missionaries. Petelo wrote:<sup>39</sup>

"Have pity on me, and believe me. It is only out of a concern for the future of our country and my desire for its peace [*that I am writing – Transl. note*]. Indeed, we are always/still being harassed, oppressed and dragged along the ground without being able to do anything.

Believe me, you understand this perfectly well. We already are familiar with the religion, and we are capable of practising it, so let us be left to

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<sup>34</sup> APM/OW 208 Ollivaux to Procurator, 19.8.1891/ in Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 279.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 279.

<sup>36</sup> Petelo's personal file in Marist Archives in Rome 1895; and Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> Lange, *Island Ministers*, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 280.

<sup>39</sup> Father Petelo Luka-mo-Akaaka to each individual chief on Wallis asking his support against the European missionaries, written in 1902. Broadbent, *Clergy*, Appendix I Letter II p. vii-x. (Translated from the French by Fr Brian Quin March 31 2009). Lavelua was the King of Wallis. This letter was included in a letter from Fr Henquel to Fr Raffin, July 19 1902 (APM/OW 208).

carry it out by ourselves. Really, really, let us be allowed to organise it ourselves, because we are intelligent. Meanwhile, if we stay in this condition, we will always be led by foreigners like dumb animals [“bêtes de somme”] or know-nothings.

Enough! It is time to find another way than that. Have no fear, because it is not difficult, the only thing that matters is that we are united. You must be aware that if education in Uvea (Wallis) is making no progress, it is because of them. If there are complaints, discontent and disorder in the colleges, it is always because of them.

When they are angry with some chiefs or old men, they scold them as if they were insane. They never fail, in their sermons in church, to mention their names and to overwhelm them with shame. That’s awful! It’s the way you treat animals - talk about it to N..... I have already warned him. Let us wait until we have come together, then we will see, and there, I will tell you everything else. Don’t say anything about this beforehand to Lavelua, but speak about it before, and only to those whom you know, lest they be hypocrites and flatterers of the missionaries.

It is I, Father Petelo”

After the Marists discovered this they decided to send him to Sydney to take part in the first Second Novitiate to be held in the Pacific was about to begin. In February 1903, Father Olier, the Provincial of Oceania, wrote to Father Martin, the Superior General:<sup>40</sup>

“The matter of Father Petelo is on the way to being settled. When Mons. Lamaze arrived in Wallis on the *Meurthe*, he sent him to me via Fiji and Noumea on the same warship. I begged Mons. Fraysse to keep him at St Louis, and to make use of him there until the time of his Novitiate. Meanwhile, I can make arrangements with the Government, who are demanding a security of £100 to allow him to enter Sydney. The law does not want a coloured man in the country... I do not think it would be prudent to send him back to Wallis, even after his Novitiate. Meanwhile, we have time to reflect, and I will send him wherever I think he can do well.”

A few months later Father Olier wrote to Gaston Regis who was the Procurator for the Society of Mary to the Holy See,<sup>41</sup>

“Until the month of November we have time to reflect; we mustn’t despair of our good confrere, who has good qualities and could be used

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<sup>40</sup> B135 Olier to Superior General Villa Maria 1 February 1903.

<sup>41</sup> B135 Olier to Gaston Regis Villa Maria 13 April 1903.

very well in some other area than Wallis, where, as we have often said to Mons. Lamaze, he should never have been sent.”

It is interesting that Olier says that Petelo should never have been sent to Wallis. Why? Perhaps being the local priest and remaining on the same island as his family and village caused cultural problems? The experience of the Second novitiate seems to have helped Petelo and the Marists seem to have regained confidence in him. Father Olier wrote,<sup>42</sup>

“[Fr Petelo] can stay in Sydney only until December; on 15<sup>th</sup> December there would be a fine of £1500 to pay to the Governor if Father was still in Sydney...I am persuaded that the Novitiate has done him a great deal of good; and he could be very useful and do much good wherever he was sent.”

Petelo was then sent to Tonga from Sydney, in late 1903. “Father Petelo has left for Tonga. He met Mons Lamaze in Fiji, and they could find a place for him in that island”.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1910 SM Index he is listed as the assistant to the priest at Niua Fouo Island. No trouble seemed to have occurred there and a certain trust must have been established because in the 1933 Index he was left in sole charge until his death in 1938 at almost 80 years of age.<sup>44</sup>

### **What effect did his presence have within the Society of Mary then and today?**

When Petelo Likumoakaaka died in 1938 there were only six other men who had been born in Oceania who were professed Marists. Where were they from? Who were they? Why so few?

Three of them were from New Caledonia and had received their Marist formation in Europe. They were not Kanaks, but ethnically French.

**Paul Bichon** was born in 1894 and went to France for formation. He was professed on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1924 (No. 1912).<sup>45</sup> He was ordained and then returned to New Caledonia where he worked for many years. He died in 1976.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> B135 Olier to Superior General Villa Maria 22 October 1903.

<sup>43</sup> B135 Olier to Superior General Villa Maria 5 January 1904.

<sup>44</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 282.

<sup>45</sup> His number in the Marist profession book for priests. Petelo had number 959.

<sup>46</sup> Th. Koster (ed.), *In Memoriam*, Oceania Marist Province, Suva, 2001, p. 175.

**Jean Soury-Lavergne** was born in New Caledonia in 1904. He did his formation in France where he was professed on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1925 (No. 1956).<sup>47</sup> After ordination in Rome he returned to New Caledonia where he ministered until his death in 1980.<sup>48</sup>

Another man from New Caledonia called **Schmidt**, unfortunately we don't know his first name, was professed in 1930 (No. 2215),<sup>49</sup> but left the Society in 1942.

There were three other men from Oceania who were professed members of the Society of Mary at the time of Petelo's death.

**Julian Waqa** and **Paul Yavala** were both born in Fiji. They spent 10 years at St Theresa's Minor Seminary in Cawaci before coming to New Zealand in 1934. They had one year at St Patrick's College Silverstream before beginning postulancy at Greenmeadows on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1935. After novitiate at Highden they were professed on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1937. We don't know their number in the Marist profession book. They were ordained to the priesthood in New Zealand on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1941 and both ministered for many years in Fiji.<sup>50</sup> They are the first Fijian Marists, but not the first Fijian priests.<sup>51</sup>

**Dominique Galuola** was ordained at Lano in Wallis in 1922. After novitiate in Wallis he was professed on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1937 (No. 2710). He spent most of his life at Lano working at the seminary before dying in 1956 aged 62.<sup>52</sup>

**There was no Marist from Oceania professed from the time of Petelo's profession in 1889 until 1924. If we exclude the three men from New Caledonia, then the time expands until 1937. Nearly 50 years before the Marists were willing to profess another man from Central Oceania. Why?**

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<sup>47</sup> His profession number.

<sup>48</sup> *In Memoriam*, p. 264.

<sup>49</sup> His profession number.

<sup>50</sup> Greenmeadows Seminary Register: "Entrant no 324 (Paul Yavala)" and "No 330 (Julian Waqa)".

<sup>51</sup> Margaret Knox, *Voyage of Faith: The Story of the First 100 Years of Catholic Missionary Endeavour in Fiji and Rotuma*, Archdiocese of Suva, Suva, Fiji, 1997, p. 144-145. Tito Daurewa was professed as a Marist on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1939 after novitiate at Highden New Zealand. He was ordained in Suva on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1939. He did all his studies for the priesthood in Cawaci, Fiji. He is not listed in the Greenmeadows Seminary Register.

<sup>52</sup> *In Memorium*, p. 215.

Soakimi, Louis and Petelo were products of that first effort of the formation of indigenous clergy in Oceania. They each had difficulties, not always of their own making. Did those difficulties inhibit the Marists in their ongoing encouragement of indigenous clergy? Did they, as it were, “get their fingers burnt” and were very wary of repeating the experience? Or was it that any prospective students and their families had heard about what had happened to these men and were reluctant to come forward?

The trio of Fathers Bouzigue, Jouny and Ollivaux provided a stable wise influence for formation at Lano Seminary for at least ten years. Through their personal example, wisdom, patience, and encouragement, the vocations of that first group of priests: Petelo, Lolesio, Sosefo, and Kasiano, and those who followed them, were brought to fruition.

A stark contrast was the experience at Clydesdale from 1859 to 1869. According to John Broadbent, in that time at least thirteen Marists were appointed to work in formation.<sup>53</sup> So many men to a place where there were only normally two. No wonder no one from Clydesdale was ordained!

This still holds true for formation today. Too frequent changing of formation personnel does not help the formation process. Stability is important.

A Marist recently said in relation to the difficulties of Soakimi, Louis and Petelo: “the European missionaries viewed it in moral terms, we view it today in cultural terms.” Given the newness of the Catholic faith to Central Oceania it was hardly surprising that the different cultural expectations of the European missionaries and the Polynesians and the lifestyle a priest was expected to lead in those days would have exacerbated any personal issues and questions of identity that these young priests may have been struggling with. We have reflected on the difficulties that these young Polynesian priests experienced. It doesn’t mean that the early French missionaries had no problems though. Some of them struggled too with celibacy and cultural issues.

There was a similar story of struggle and failure and limited success in the formation of indigenous clergy in other parts of the world. The Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in 1845 had released an

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<sup>53</sup> Broadbent, *Clergy*, p. 233, footnote 52.

instruction, *Neminem Profecto*.<sup>54</sup> This encouraged, even demanded, that more efforts should be made to facilitate the development of local indigenous clergy. The instruction pointed out that the missionary expansion of the Church had always rested on two basic facts: the creation of Bishops and the institution of an indigenous clergy.<sup>55</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1919 Pope Benedict XV wrote an encyclical, *Maximum Illud*, “On the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World.”<sup>56</sup> Despite the encouragement of previous instructions and encyclicals, and the ongoing presence of missionaries in many countries the numbers of indigenous clergy in mission areas were few and there were no indigenous bishops, except for four in India.<sup>57</sup> *Maximum Illud* also stressed the importance and the necessity for indigenous candidates for the priesthood to receive a proper and adequate formation just as a European would receive.<sup>58</sup> Pope Benedict XV wrote:<sup>59</sup>

“It is a deplorable fact that, even after the Popes have insisted upon it, there still remain sections of the world that have heard the Faith preached for several centuries, and still have a local clergy that is of inferior quality. It is also true that there are countries that have been deeply penetrated by the light of the Faith, and have, besides, reached such a level of civilization that they produce eminent men in all the fields of secular life - and yet, though they have lived under the strengthening influence of the Church and the gospel for hundreds of years, they still cannot produce Bishops for their spiritual government or priests for their spiritual guidance.”

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Comby, *How to Understand the History of Christian Mission*, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1996 (Translated by John Bowden from the French *Deux Mille ans d'évangélisation*, Paris, Desclee, 1992), p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania 1825 to 1850*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1979, p. 488.

<sup>56</sup> Benedict XV *Maximum Illud* <http://svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm> Accessed 14th May 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, London, Penguin Books, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1986 (revised and edited by Owen Chadwick), p. 220: “In 1914, the Roman Catholic Church had no bishop of non-European origin, except the four belonging to the Indian hierarchy created by Pope Leo XIII in 1887 and 1896 for the ancient church of the Thomas Christians.”

<sup>58</sup> *Maximum Illud*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Maximum Illud*, 17. <http://svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm> Accessed 14th May 2009.

A few years later, in 1926, Pope Pius XI in *Rerum Ecclesiae* “On Catholic Missions”<sup>60</sup> encouraged the bishops of the world to continue their efforts at promoting the formation of indigenous clergy. But it wasn’t easy. In the next few years Pius XI took concrete steps to ensure that indigenous bishops were consecrated.<sup>61</sup>

The institution and formation of an indigenous clergy was a struggle not just in Oceania during the nineteenth century. There were problems in India<sup>62</sup> and Africa too:<sup>63</sup>

“In reality, the creation of an indigenous African clergy was greatly retarded by the celibacy requirement. Only two reached the priesthood between 1852 and 1864; then twenty-two between 1869 and 1910, all but four from Natal and Madagascar, educated by Holy Ghost Fathers. In 1933, however, there were 150 indigenous priests; in 1939 there were 257, including two bishops; and by 1957 the number had risen to 1,380. Nowadays expatriate priests are exceptions rather than the rule, and African priests serve as missionaries in many foreign countries.”

In New Zealand the first Maori priest Bill Te Awhitu, was only ordained in 1944.<sup>64</sup> In Australia the first and only indigenous priest, Pat Dodson, was ordained in 1975.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_28021926\\_rerum-ecclesiae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_28021926_rerum-ecclesiae_en.html) Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2009: “Before everything else, We call your attention to the importance of building up a native clergy. If you do not work with all your might to attain this purpose, We assert that not only will your apostolate be crippled, but it will become an obstacle and an impediment to the establishment and organization of the Church in those countries.”

<sup>61</sup> Neill, *Christian Missions*, p. 388-389.

<sup>62</sup> Neil, *Christian Missions*, p. 338-344, p. 340: “From 1845 onwards Rome had been impressing on its representatives in India the importance of the indigenous clergy, and the need to move rapidly forward in the training of Indian priests. These injunctions met with singularly little response. Bishops and others had had painful experiences with unworthy and irresponsible Goanese priests, and felt it necessary to be cautious. The Jesuit tradition, which once again was very strong in India was, as we have seen, inclined to a similar caution. And perhaps the Roman Catholic missionaries, like others, had come to share the general feeling of superiority of western men, and to believe that the future of the Church would be safer if it was kept in their own hands.”

<sup>63</sup> Henry Koren, *The legacy of Francois Libermann*, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, 4 (October 2004), p. 176.



Bishop Bataillon's dream came true. Young men from Polynesia did step forward and were ordained to the priesthood as Marists. And they are still coming forward today. In the Society of Mary today most of our candidates for formation come from Oceania.

Marist College Suva and Marist College Bomana (PNG) are both full. Marist Seminary Auckland would not have continued in recent years without the presence of some of these young men from Oceania. According to the latest index for the Oceania Province of the Society of Mary there are currently thirty postulants, six novices, one brother in formation and thirty two scholastics.<sup>66</sup> That is, a total of sixty nine young men in formation in Oceania.

This project has helped us to learn more about an important Marist. Issues of culture, celibacy and identity will always be significant in formation, especially when formators and seminarians are from different cultures. The story of Petelo Likumoaka, his peers, and their struggles, can help us today as we seek to understand more clearly our ancestors in the Society of Mary.

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<sup>64</sup> P. Ewart (ed.), *The Society of Mary in New Zealand 1838 1889 - 1989*, p. 92; [http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/DNZB/alt\\_essayBody.asp?essayID=5T6](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/DNZB/alt_essayBody.asp?essayID=5T6) Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/unisec/calendar/honcausa/citation/dodson.html> Accessed 14th May 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Society of Mary 2009 Index Oceania Marist Province.