

Chapter five : *Worlds Apart*

Problem solved

In October 1836, when Peter Chanel passed through Paris, he happened to meet with Mgr. Ferdinand Donnet, a former classmate of Colin and Champagnat in Saint-Irénée, now coadjutor bishop of Nancy.¹ 'Write to your superior general, he had said to Peter Chanel, I am at his disposal'.² After his appointment to Bordeaux the new archbishop had first offered the pilgrim shrine of Verdélais, on the *Garonne*, upstream from Bordeaux, to the Marianists and when they turned it down, he approached the Marists. The bishop saw it as a parish ministry. Colin did not really want to accept parishes but it was a place of pilgrimage, a suitable base for home missionaries and a good place for Champagnat's teaching Brothers.

So far this had nothing to do with Oceania. However, from Le Havre Pompallier had already told Colin that Bordeaux was the port from which most French ships left for South America. The rector of the major seminary there, Mr. Cambis, looked after mail to the Pacific for the Picpus Fathers and Bordeaux had been mentioned as a possible site for a procure. In the perspective of travelling to Oceania via Valparaiso, Verdélais would be useful for missionaries, mail and mission goods.³ It did not take long before the connection was made. The fact that Caret had left from Bordeaux would have helped.

On 3 June Father Colin wrote to the archbishop and presented the Fathers Jean-Baptiste Chanut and Jean Balmet for an appointment to Verdélais.⁴ At the same time, Colin wrote to Fr. Pierre Convers, the former principal of the *Capucinière* in Belley, who was preaching missions in the nearby diocese of Angoulême, to go to Bordeaux and, apart from contacting the Archbishop in connection with Verdélais, look for a ship going to Valparaiso. Convers immediately found one: the *Basque*, and the booking was arranged.⁵ It really was not all that difficult! On 12 July Chanut presented himself in a letter to the archbishop and alluded to the importance of a Marist house in Verdélais for the foreign missions.⁶

On 20 July, Colin could write to Cardinal Frasoni to tell him that the missionaries were now booked to leave from Bordeaux between 20 and 30 August. He introduced and recommended the three priests and supported their own request for more precise faculties.⁷

Colin already had informed Mr. Meynis, the secretary of the Propagation of the Faith, and explained why he was still sending the men to Valparaiso: 'It is a route we have experience with and it keeps us in contact with the Picpus missionaries. For the time being it appears to be the safer thing to do, in spite of Mgr. Pompallier's preference for Sydney'.⁸

Taking leave

Only of Fr. Jean-Baptiste Épalle do we know something of the pain of saying goodbye. Mother had died earlier. His older brother, Barthélémy, was a priest in the diocese of Lyon. Jean-Baptiste joined the Society of Mary, volunteered and was appointed to Oceania. Before leaving he went to stay a week with his old father but he put off the painful moment

¹ OM III, doc. 888

² EC, docs. 27 [7] & 53 [7]. *Ecrivez à votre supérieur général que je suis tout à lui.*

³ LRO, docs. 7 [11] & 8 [17].

⁴ CS, doc. 36.

⁵ CS 1, p. 65f, n. 2.

⁶ CS, doc. 40.

⁷ CS, doc. 42

⁸ CS, doc. 37.

of telling his dad. The last evening Jean-Baptiste told him, but in such a gentle and cautious way that dad did not immediately get the message. Still, he knew there was something wrong and in the early hours of the morning he at once understood and rushed half-clothed into his son's bedroom. Jean-Baptiste stopped the emotional outburst by asking to be left alone a moment to dress. He then slipped down the stairs and jumped out of the window to avoid the creaking door. He went to the church to say Mass, where he was caught by his sister, warned by her own premonitions. While she went to call dad, he slipped out of the church and marched off, direction St.-Étienne. Witnesses later described him as a priest rushing off, on the way to anoint a dying person.⁹

Preparations

Later in June Claude Baty and Maxime Petit travelled to Paris and walked unexpectedly in on Marcellin Champagnat in his room at the *Missions Étrangères*.¹⁰ Champagnat took Baty to the ministry where they asked for letters of recommendation and applied for a grant to help them on their way. The ministry enquired about them with Archbishop de Pins and on 30 June de Pins wrote a letter to vouch for the two priests and to support their request for a mission that, as he said, was of great importance for the religion and for France. He recalled the support that Bishop Pompallier had received two years earlier from the king and the royal family who were very conscious of the value that a French mission in those areas could have for the mother country.¹¹

As soon as Champagnat had returned to the Hermitage after his second voyage to Paris, Colin asked him to make sure clothes and shoes were readied for the three brothers as departure could be imminent.¹² All the time, nobody thought of doing one of the things Pompallier had insisted on so much from his very first letters: learning English!¹³

Receiving and writing letters

As the last letter Colin had received was the one written in October from Tahiti, he still had no idea of what had happened to the first group of missionaries after their departure on the *Raiatea*.¹⁴ It looked as if the missionaries would have to leave with the gloomy prospect of searching all over the Pacific for their superior and their confreres. Still, wherever they were, Colin set to writing to them. The only letter that has survived is one written on 31 July to Pierre Bataillon.¹⁵ It was a dose of typical Colinian spirituality:

How beautiful to work only for the glory of God, to live only for the salvation of souls. You must feel very humble at the thought of being in Gods hands the instrument of his mercies. Be so in his hands that they can work through you in all your ministry. Never consider the deprivations you suffer, as long as Jesus and Mary keep you in their hands. With them you lack nothing, with them there are no dangers. My dear brother, do not live, let Jesus and Mary live in you. Be with them at all times and nothing will be beyond you.

⁹ Monfat, *Mélanésie*, p. 51f.

¹⁰ Cf. above, p. 76.

¹¹ LM1, doc. 196, ll. 18ff. CS, doc. 39

¹² CS, doc. 41.

¹³ Cf. LRO, 33 [8].

¹⁴ LRO, doc. 21.

¹⁵ CS, doc. 44. He wrote to Catherin Servant on 1 August (cf. LRO, doc. 39 [1]).

Use the opportunities you get to write to me from time to time. Do not fear to write to me of your problems, of your joys.... Whatever interests you, interests me. I want each and everyone of you to write to me of whatever goes wrong, of the dangers he may be in for body or soul. Are the spirit of the Society, the unity, the courage, the spirit of faith and of prayer maintained among you? Remain united and obedient to Mgr. Pompallier.

I leave it to others to give you news of the country and to tell you of the blessings that God grants to the little Society of Mary. We are readying helpers to come to your aid and we do what we can to send you what you need.

The last paragraph is remarkable. Colin is anxious to be told everything, but in spite of the urgent requests of the Bishop and his missionaries (from Valparaiso and Tahiti) to be given news of the Society and of everything going on, he leaves that pointedly to others. Himself, he will not indulge in small talk. He sticks to what he sees as his own role: the spiritual guidance of his religious.

In his letter to Pompallier Colin mentioned the 8.700 francs he had sent in May the previous year and that Colin now knew Pompallier had not received either in Valparaiso or in Tahiti.¹⁶

Colin made sure the word went around that everyone was welcome to contribute mail. We happen to know there was a letter for Brother Joseph-Xavier Luzy from his family¹⁷, a letter from Bishop Devie to Chanel¹⁸, from Terraillon to Servant, from Convers to Chanel¹⁹, and letters from Bataillon's friends and former parishioners.²⁰ There must have been many others. None of them have been preserved.

The spiritual director

To the parting missionaries Fr. Colin wrote a lengthy letter, similar to the one he had addressed to the first group.²¹

May the grace and the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the powerful protection of Mary, our good and tender mother, be with you and accompany you everywhere.

These are the good wishes that my heart makes for each of you and that it will renew every time at the foot of the sacred altars, as it does every day for your brothers who have opened up the way to Oceania for you and who call you to come and share with them the labours and the merits of the apostolate. With the help of the grace and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the support that this divine Saviour never refuses to whoever dedicates himself without reserve to his service, with the powerful protection of Mary, you will be happy and safe of all danger, you will find everywhere a hundredfold of what you have left behind, your parents, your friends, your country, and, anyway, is not the whole world home to the apostle who is consumed by the zeal for the salvation of souls, and who burns only from the desire to make his God known and to extend his reign?

¹⁶ Cf. LRO, doc. 33 [5]. The letter itself has not been preserved.

¹⁷ LRO, doc. 23 [21].

¹⁸ EC, doc. 56.

¹⁹ EC, doc. 38 [6], LRO, doc. 40 [1].

²⁰ LRO, doc. 38 [1].

²¹ CS, doc. 48. Additions and changes to the letter of 13.10.1836 are printed in italics, cf. above, p. 32.

I said it to those who went ahead of you on the road you are going, and I cannot help repeating it, yes, it is not without a secret jealousy, I admit it, my well-beloved brothers, that I see you breaking with a holy courage all the bonds of flesh and blood in order to follow the voice that calls you, and carry the torch of the faith to the non-believing peoples of Oceania. Wish I could share your happiness, your pains and your labours. But I am not worthy of the grace of the apostolate and of martyrdom. Allow me at least to repeat some of the points of advice that, at their departure, I gave to your confreres whom you are about to rejoin. These points may be useful to you. At least they are a last proof of my concern and of my heart-felt love.

1° Never rely on self - neither in adversity nor prosperity – but solely on Jesus and Mary. The more you distrust self and trust in God, the more you will attract the light and graces of heaven. The man of faith who places his confidence in God alone is unshakable in the midst of great dangers; he is neither rash nor fainthearted. His device is: ‘*When I am weak, I can do all things in him who strengthens me*’. Remember always that the measure of your faith and of your trust in God alone will be the measure of success of your mission.

2° Live in the presence of the Saviour. It is on his behalf that you are leaving. It is He who sends you. “As the Father sends me, so I send you”. He will be with you everywhere as in the past he was with his apostles. *Yes, my brothers, let this insight of faith get into the depth of your mind*: he will be with you in your travels, on land, on sea, in the calm as in the tempest, in health as in sickness; if you are hungry or thirsty, he will be hungry or thirsty with you. It is he who shall be received where you are, persecuted when you are and rebuffed when you are. See him everywhere, *I adjure you for your own happiness and security. See him* at all times, in all events good or bad, see him intimately united to you, sharing your work, your sufferings, your joys, your consolations. Give him the glory of your actions, disregard yourselves as useless instruments. Constantly thinking of him will be the source of your strength, of your peace and of all the enlightenment that you will need *sorely at every moment*.

3° In persecution and in danger, in privations, in temptations and in illness, do not argue with yourself, do not look inward. If you do, desolations, regret and sadness will get the better of you and you will feel your courage and your virtue wither away. Without reasoning or inner reflection, turn your eyes and your thoughts immediately towards Jesus and Mary, towards heaven and the sufferings of Our Lord. I urgently recommend you this practice. You will soon feel how important it is.

4° Be men of prayer. Converting souls is more than raising the dead. Such things are not done without prayer. Pray continually for the conversion of the heathens. Offer your actions each day for that intention, and one day a week of your own choice, you can offer all the good actions in each of the branches of the Society for the same intention and for your own needs. This will attract *very precious* graces upon you.

5° *I do not want to speak of the confidence you must have in Mary, or of your zeal to make her known and honoured. You are her children; can you forget it? It is under her banner that you depart. See her always walking in front and in your midst. However busy you are, let no day pass without saying at least a few decades of the rosary. Place every island you may set foot on under the protection of Mary and if*

you can, leave there a medal or a picture of this Queen of Heaven as a sign that the island belongs to her and that you consecrate it to her.

6° “Woe the solitary”, says the Holy Spirit, *and I will not hide it from you, my dear confreres*, especially in Polynesia loneliness will be dangerous. *I would surely fail in my duties, and leave out an essential point of my tender concern for all that touches upon your spiritual security, if I did not explicitly recommend you to avoid loneliness. Remember that only urgent need will allow you to go out or to be alone, especially in the beginning of your work.* In all other situations be conscientious to the point of scrupulosity to be always at least two together, even if you visit a sick person or only go for a walk. This precaution will shelter you from many a danger.

7° As much as you can and as circumstances permit, be unassuming, modest, poor, but clean in your clothing and you external attire. *Nothing is more conform the spirit of our Society than modest simplicity and being unpretentious in outward appearance and behaviour.*

8° *Be united, my dear confreres, and let there be no contention among you. You are members of one body and Jesus Christ is its Head. The joys, the troubles, the misery of your brothers are those of all of you.*²² *It is this union that will show that you are humble of heart, apostles of a God who is all love, Deus caritas est, and truly children of Mary. Do not forget there is merit in following the advice of others, even against your own judgment, whenever Gods glory is not at stake.*

9° *What shall I say of obedience, the virtue that, in the words of our Constitutions, leads by a straight road to heaven, quae recta via ducit ad coelum? If you are men of obedience, you will surely gain victories, it is the Holy Spirit that says so, and I do not hesitate to add that you will preserve your soul from all danger and that you will make sure of your salvation. When you reach Mgr. Pompallier, place yourselves under his paternal hands, so that he can give you your assignment according to Gods will. You will look upon him, not only as your Bishop but also as your superior. Until that moment, obey each other as brothers, do nothing without listening to each other, and ask each other permission so as not to deprive yourselves of the merits of obedience.*

10° *Do not seek your own interests, but only those of Jesus Christ, be of a pure and right intention. Be always full of respect for other religious and other priests, look upon the good they do as if it was your own, be considerate to them in everything by your honesty, your modesty and your humility.*

11° *Offer frequently the merits of the actions and virtues of Mary to Jesus Christ, and offer to God the Father the infinite merits of his divine Son. This practice will obtain you and your pagans manifold graces.*

12° *Use every opportunity to give us news about you and interesting things for publication in the Annales de la Propagation de la Foi. Letters with this material will go unsealed directly to the superior general of the Society in Lyon. Personal letters for your parents or friends can also be enclosed in the parcel for the superior.*

²² According to a text correction of Mayet.

The Propagation of the Faith asks for the number of adult baptisms, children's baptisms, catechumens, Easter communions, and the number of establishments. They like to get details on the way of life, the customs and the productive activities of the people to whom you are sent.

I finish how I began. I wish you peace, unity, the love of Jesus and Mary. Be courageous, do not let fear and unrest enter your hearts.

I have the honour to be, with the most tender love, my dear Fathers and Brothers, your very humble and obedient servant,

Colin.

The superior appears to qualify here his former rule that all correspondence should pass through him.²³ He does not qualify what he had decided on Bishop Pompallier being the religious superior of the missionaries. The sending of the second group was a chance to review the situation, but whatever had been his original motives, nothing indicates that he even considered a change.

Compared to the letter of October 1836, the most striking difference lies in paragraph six,²⁴ raising the question, what caused Colin to become even more anxious about missionaries being alone? The only thinkable reason is his contact with Fr. Caret, earlier that year. It cannot be a coincidence that in the only direct mention we have of this meeting (by Colin himself in 1846) he recalled: 'Father Caret, the Picpus priest, said that for the priests the dangers come after the conversion of those people rather than before...'.²⁵ In other words, the topic had come up between them.

Departure

When the missionaries were on the point of departure, somebody in Lyon suggested to follow the example of the Foreign Missionaries of Paris. Recalling the words of the Prophet: *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings*, those who stayed behind would kiss the feet of those leaving.²⁶ Most Marists considered that too dramatic. Not our style! Colin heard about it later and agreed: keep it simple and fraternal!²⁷

On 8 August 1838 Fr. Jean-Baptiste Chanut took the coach to Bordeaux to take up his appointment in Verdélais, Maxime Petit and Jean-Baptiste Épalle travelled with him. They arrived on Saturday the 11th and were received by Father Cambis at the major seminary. On Monday Cambis accompanied them on the steamer to *Garonelle*, a landing place on the *Garonne* from where pilgrims used to walk up to Verdélais.²⁸ They stayed with the parish priest.²⁹ Petit and Epalle returned to Bordeaux to meet Baty.

²³ Pompallier had already allowed exceptions to the rule, LRO, doc. 17 [10].

²⁴ Claude Otto (*Plutôt trois que deux, seuls jamais!* FN, I, 3, September 1990, p. 280) ascribes the change to letters from the missions about missionaries being put alone. The appointment of Bataillon and Chanel on different islands, separated by 200 km of open ocean, could conceivably have triggered Colin's increased concern, only Colin did not know about that when he wrote. He had not received any letters from the missions by then!

²⁵ MM, IV, 550.

²⁶ Jesajah, 52, 7.

²⁷ CS1, p. 80, from Mayet, MM. I, 234f. *Plus simple, plus fraternel!*

²⁸ Information from Fr. H. van de Wielen, sm, for many years the parish priest of Verdélais.

²⁹ CS, doc. 46.

Baty wrote Colin an emotional letter of farewell and left Lyon with the three Brothers on Sunday 26 August. They arrived in Bordeaux on Wednesday³⁰ and had a look at their ship, the *Basque*, and at the accommodation on board. Loading was nearly finished and the ship was on the point of moving to Pouillac, near the mouth of the *Gironde*. The missionaries received a lot of help from the Mother Superior of the *Marie Thérèse Sisters* and from a fine Catholic layman, Mr. Fresquet, who ran a business in the port.

As Archbishop Donnet planned to go to Verdélais for the installation of Fr. Chanut on Sunday 2 September, Baty and Épalle went there as well. Petit and the three Brothers remained in Bordeaux. There were plenty of bright ideas on what last minute purchases could be useful, but Baty as superior and Petit as bursar held the purse-strings. Perhaps because of that there was a bit of friction between the priests and the Brothers. They had never lived together in one community before.

Shortly after Baty left, Colin received Pompallier's letter from Sydney that put an end to all the uncertainty.³¹ He rushed the letter (or a rapidly made copy) to Bordeaux. It just caught the men after they had boarded already. Thus, only on the point of leaving they found out where they had to go! They now knew that Bataillon and Luzy were on Wallis, Chanel and Delorme on Futuna. They also knew that Pompallier, Servant and Colomb had reached Sydney and would by then most probably be in New Zealand. The new missionaries also understood that London – Sydney was definitely the only route for the future, but obviously the present arrangements could not be changed. Baty was grateful:

We received the letter of Mgr. Pompallier that you have been so kind to forward to us. It has given us great pleasure. We have blessed God for the protection he has given to our confreres, we are all anxious to join them and share their labours...³²

Money matters

On 20 July Colin could tell Franson that the Propagation of the Faith had given 33.000 francs over the financial year 1837 and 30.000 for the year 1838. A total allocation of 63.000 francs. This was to cover both the travelling expenses for the second group and the allowance for Bishop Pompallier and his men.³³

Perhaps recalling the lost 8.700 francs, the directors of the Propagation proposed to give the missionaries 50.000 francs in hand and to keep 13.000 back as reserve. Colin approved.³⁴

When the missionaries were about to leave, the Propagation of the Faith handed the fifty thousand francs to Pierre Colin, who as superior of Puylata, acted as general bursar. Pierre Colin deposited the money in a bank and got the bank to write out a personal cheque for that amount on the name of the bursar of the group, Maxime Petit. Baty carried the cheque when he left for Bordeaux³⁵ and passed it to Petit. Four days before their departure not all bills had come in yet, but Petit reported that they had spent 21.700 francs and reckoned that by the time they would reach Valparaiso, their funds would be down to 43.000 francs.³⁶

³⁰ CS, doc. 47.

³¹ How could a letter sent from Sydney in December arrive only in September? Did Pompallier entrust it to a whaler or to a French ship going via Valparaiso, instead of using the ordinary mail via London? He occasionally did so even later from New Zealand, cf. the complaint of Colin, 22.04.40, CS, doc. 154 & LRO, doc. 84, [1].

³² Baty to Colin, from Pouillac, 07.09.38. APM, 1404/20033.

³³ CS, doc. 42 [1].

³⁴ CS, doc. 43.

³⁵ Pierre Colin to Petit, 18.08. CS 1, p. 80f.

³⁶ It means they had received more and large gifts on top of the 50.000 from the Propagation of the Faith.

Handling the large cheque proved not as easy as they had thought. By some sort of misunderstanding the cheque stipulated that it could be cashed only in Paris. The bank in Bordeaux wanted to charge Petit 5% on the 50.000 francs for the days it would take to forward the cheque to Paris and get the endorsement back. Petit decided to take only part of the money in cash and leave the rest with Fresquet who would deposit it in a bank. The ship's owner and the captain gave Petit a cheque for the same amount, to be paid out in Valparaiso. They would then charge 5% for the time it would take to send the cheque back to Bordeaux and have it refunded by Fresquet. At first sight this might look a serious loss, but as Maxime pointed out to Pierre Colin, for the same number of days the same money was gaining an interest in Bordeaux and with a bit of luck one could even make a profit!³⁷

Catholic theology of the time considered lending for interest immoral and the professors at the seminary where the missionaries lodged, were horrified.³⁸ They saw Maxime Petit heading for eternal damnation. For a businessman like Fresquet it was the most natural thing to do. The rector of the seminary, Cambis, sided with his staff, but granted that Petit could have a special grace of state,³⁹ allowing him to make a responsible decision! Petit suggested to Pierre Colin that if the superior general disapproved of his solution, one could ask Fresquet to take up the deposit. Because of all the fuss Petit missed the party in Verdelaïs, but when he finally got there, Baty and Épalle put his mind to rest and approved of what he had done.

On Monday 11 September 1838, at eight o'clock in the morning, the *Basque* sailed out of the *Gironde* into the *Golfe de Gascogne*, heading for Valparaiso. The six Marist missionaries joined about forty passengers, men, women and children. Many of them were practising Catholics, happy to have priests on board, and to attend Sunday Mass whenever the weather permitted. One was the Marquis de Larrea, the Ecuadorian ambassador to the Holy See, to Rome and to France, a widower with two children.

On the other side of the world

While, on one side of the world, the second group of missionaries started on their long voyage to Oceania, both Pompallier and Servant, on the other side, used an occasion, unknown to us, to send mail to France. Servant had made another copy of Pompallier's letter of 14 May.⁴⁰ The bishop added some notes to it, dated 4 September 1838, and mailed it together with a new letter on 14 September. He added a letter for his mother and one to the priest at Vourles. Servant added an eight-pages letter for Colin, dated 16 September.⁴¹

There was good news to tell. As already arranged with Archbishop Polding, Thomas Poynton had given a plot of land to the Church in Papakawau, three hours by boat upstream from Totara and Pompallier had a small house built there for himself and his companions. There was a larger room to celebrate Mass for the local Catholics, and three minute rooms: 'The whole episcopal palace!'. He enclosed the property deeds to be forwarded to Propaganda in Rome. As they moved by boat up the Hokianga they were accompanied by Irish and English Catholics as well as by canoes with Maoris of different tribes. On 29 June he said Mass for the first time in the new house and gave his first sermon in Maori. In Papakawau some tribes built rest houses so they could come and listen to the missionaries.⁴²

³⁷ Petit to Pierre Colin, 08.09.1838 (postmark), APM, 1404/20033.

³⁸ Cf. Exodus 22, 25.

³⁹ A theological nicety, assuming one gets special graces and enlightenment for the work one has to do.

⁴⁰ Cf. above, p. 71f.

⁴¹ Resp. LRO, doc. 29, 30 and 31. The letters to Mme Solichon and the priest have not been preserved. In May Servant had written to his parents and to two friends, but not to Colin, cf. above, p. 72.

⁴² LRO, doc. 31 [11]. Simmons, op. cit., p. 36.

There also was a plot of land on offer in the Bay of Islands, but for the moment Pompallier did not have the 1.500 francs to buy it. He was already 1.200 francs in debt.⁴³

Pompallier was in need of everything: clothing, candles, altar linen, tools, a printing press and holy pictures ('people come from 200 km to look at them!').

Fr. Servant wrote of the good reception by the Catholics of the Hokianga area and the new house where they had installed a chapel and could say Mass. He wrote at length of the attack of 22 January, and how they were defended by the European people. In the end the Maoris had said they did not want to get involved in the wars of the Europeans. 'Let them sort out their differences among themselves.' The two missionaries had enjoyed their first visits to Maori villages in the interior where they were received amicably and were presented with a large pig. He told Colin of his attempt to speak of the Blessed Trinity with the help of his three-cornered hat.⁴⁴

The letters show how Pompallier was becoming more and more frustrated. His patience was wearing thin. On 4 September he expressed his extreme regret of not being able to go and visit Wallis and Futuna, mainly for lack of money. An additional reason however, he wrote, was that he could not leave Fr. Servant a long time by himself. Servant did all right with good-willing people but in front of a hostile opponent one could not rely on him. Evidently, relations between the two were not improving.⁴⁵ The good news was that Pompallier felt now sufficiently fluent in the Maori language to work effectively among the tribes and as a consequence he noticed a growing sympathy for the Catholic religion.

In his letter of the 14th Pompallier kept up his complaints. Only for lack of money he could not build the chapel for which people had donated the timber! He lamented about the humiliating position of a bishop without money to do things, which, he added, in the eyes of the Maori chiefs was a sign of weakness. His frustration had reached the point that he was tempted to jump on the first available ship and go to Rome to complain to the Holy See of the way in which he felt he had been abandoned.⁴⁶ His position was becoming desperate and the strain on his mind was showing.

On 12 October another French warship entered the Bay of Islands. It was the *Venus*, under the command of captain Dupetit-Thouars, who on orders of the French government, had tried to intervene in July in Hawaii in favour of the right of French citizens to settle in Hawaii. The presence of British and American men-of-war had cramped his style and he had achieved nothing.⁴⁷ In August, in Tahiti, there had been no disturbing foreigners about and he had succeeded.⁴⁸ Dupetit-Thouars accompanied the bishop on a formal visit to the British resident, Mr. James Busby. Together they paid an official call on the Maori chiefs in their *pa* (fortified village) and visited a settler, Mr. Robinson, who gave Pompallier a piece of land to build a chapel. Again Pompallier was honoured with nine volleys to underline that this bishop came from a powerful nation just as able and willing as Great Britain to look after its citizens.⁴⁹

Realizing that with the return of the *Raiatea* to its owner in Tahiti, it would be known there that he was living on the Hokianga, Pompallier wrote to Moerenhout to tell him that ships coming into his direction should not enter the dangerous river mouth of the Hokianga River, but go to the Bay of Islands and send a message overland to let him know.⁵⁰

⁴³ LRO, doc. 24 [12 & 13].

⁴⁴ LRO, doc. 31.

⁴⁵ Cf. above, p. 72.

⁴⁶ LRO, doc. 29.

⁴⁷ Cf. Jore, op. cit., II, pp. 31 – 34.

⁴⁸ Cf. above, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Jore, op. cit., II, pp. 86.

⁵⁰ Baty to Colin, 18.04.1839 from Tahiti, APM, 1404/20033.

The voyage

Before reaching the equator the *Basque* was becalmed for a time and later went through two violent storms. One squall became very bad during the night and a sailor fell overboard. The search went on all night and till eight in the morning, but without result. For the rest they had favourable winds, often making two leagues (i.e., about 11 km) an hour for days on end. On 20 September they sailed closely past Madeira. Brother Élie was the only one to be seriously seasick. Baty admitted having felt a bit sick at times, but never to the point of vomiting. He enjoyed the sailing, and grew poetical about the small white caps of the waves around the ship, comparing them to lambs in a fertile meadow. He described with pleasure the dolphins playing around the ship, the flying fish and the whales blowing close to the *Basque*.

On 18 October they passed the Equator and Neptune gave the priests a special dispensation to cross the Line without the usual baptism. The voyage was not without excitement. One day a fire broke out in the galley that had women and children screaming. Another time a row broke out between some young fellows and a married man about his wife. The officers and the ambassador sided with the man but most of the passengers were against the captain. The pious Marists were thoroughly shocked at the shouting and the swearing that went on.

On the latitude of the Falkland Islands they had some very fierce storms, with huge waves that threatened to swamp the ship and got into the cabins so they had to bail them out. Épalle quoted the psalm *Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me*⁵¹, and assured Colin later that he slept soundly through the bad nights. When they got to the feared Cape of Horn, not only did they happily sail along in fine quiet weather, it did not even get really cold. Experienced sailors had never seen the like of it, and the *Basque* could sail close enough to the land for the passengers to see the mountains of the Cape.⁵²

Maxime Petit showed himself a promising missionary. He managed to give catechism to the sailors and two of them made their first communion. He spent a lot of time with the ambassador, who told him of the lamentable state of the Church in Ecuador.⁵³ On the one hand good and pious people, thirsting for instruction in the Faith, and longing to receive the sacraments; on the other hand a poorly educated clergy, the large majority not living the state of celibacy and especially during the carnivals misbehaving grossly. They insisted on generous stipends (Mass stipends of one piastre, as compared to one franc in France), so that many people were deprived of the sacraments because they could not afford them.⁵⁴ What Ecuador needed were good French priests, and the ambassador intended to write to Father Colin. Petit later urged Colin to give an eventual request from Ecuador serious consideration. It could also be very useful, he added, as a supporting base for the missions in the Pacific, a source of vocations and of financial support.

Colin receives the first letters from the missions

Some time in October 1838, a good month after the departure of the second group of missionaries, Colin received Pompallier's letter of 14 May, written in the Bay of Islands

⁵¹ Ps. 22, 4.

⁵² Br. Élie-Régis to Champagnat, 12.01.1839, LO, Clisby009 [5].

⁵³ Petit to Colin, 15.01.1839, APM, 1404/20033.

⁵⁴ The piastre was worth about 5½ francs.

after the visit of the *Héroïne*.⁵⁵ In his Sydney letter the bishop had written: ‘This is what I would like: one priest to join Chanel, one for Bataillon, four priests and two Brothers for Rotuma and Pohnpei, and four priests with two Brothers for New Zealand’.⁵⁶ Now, in New Zealand, his dreams have expanded. He now needs ten priests and seven brothers for New Zealand, two priests for Wallis and Futuna, two priests and one Brother for Pohnpei. Rotuma is not mentioned here, but a page later it is. As on other occasions⁵⁷ Pompallier does not mind using figures for their rhetorical effect.

Pompallier’s first letter from his mission field gave Colin a lot to think about, and he shared his views with the Marist community at the *Capucinière* in Belley. Fortunately, the faithful Mayet was present and his notes⁵⁸ give us valuable insights in Colin’s thinking at the time. Even when pressed by the urgent requests of Pompallier and Frasoni, Colin did not take the initiative to invite this or that man for Oceania. He organized prayers and waited for volunteers for the third group. The Blessed Virgin would choose her missionaries and inspire them to come forward.

As to the 20.000 francs that Pompallier needed to buy a schooner he said: ‘That money does not worry me. The Blessed Virgin will provide it: if she wants the goal, she will provide the means.’

For the first time we hear Colin reflecting on the mission as more than saving souls from eternal damnation, and as more than providing Marists with unique opportunities to strive after holiness. He speaks of the Christian community founded by the Picpus missionaries in the Gambier Islands and calls it a small Christian republic comparable to the reductions of the Jesuits in Paraguay. The small communities on the islands of Polynesia lend themselves to this approach. It is easily done, he says (*très facile*). In New Zealand the model is not appropriate, he explains. because of the large scale presence of Europeans and the commercial activities that the Maoris become involved in.

Where did Colin pick up this for him rather unusual strategic thinking? The story of the Jesuit reductions may have been part of the Church history taught in the seminaries of the time. Contact with Jesuits in Lyon is not impossible, although there are no indications of it in the documents. The reductions had recently been mentioned in the *Annales* of the Propagation in Lyon, but only in passing.⁵⁹ There is nothing among the books that Colin regularly used to explain these insights.⁶⁰

The religious ideal of the Picpus missionaries, says John Garret, was ‘the assembling of non-christian populations into *reductions* - villages gathered together around a nucleus of priests who followed a religious rule... The forest reductions of the Jesuits in Paraguay established their general model for the small islands of the Pacific’.⁶¹ If this had been indeed the way the Picpus missionaries spoke about their work with the visiting Marists, one would have expected Pompallier or Chanel at least to allude to it in their letters from Tahiti, or Servant later on from New Zealand, but nobody did. The more likely

⁵⁵ LRO, doc. 24. Cf. above p. 71. In contrast to the Sydney letter, that took eight months (from December to the first days of September) the first letter from New Zealand, sent by the *Mississippi*, a French whaler, did it in three to four months. The *Mississippi* must have gone straight west, over the Indian Ocean, which was not unusual. cf. LRO, doc. 53 [1]. Servant had not written to Colin on this occasion, but he did write to his parents (LRO, doc. 25) and to two friends (LRO, docs. 26 & 27) and Colin read these letters.

⁵⁶ LRO, doc. 22 [5].

⁵⁷ LRO, doc. 24 [7].

⁵⁸ The notes on this important conference are in the *Mémoires Mayet* (MM), I, 614 – 616. They are in the handwriting of his friend Philippe Dupuy, to whom Mayet had entrusted the task of editing his notes. Cf. OM, II, pp. 116 – 121. The notes are published in CS, doc. 52.

⁵⁹ *Annales*, 9 (July, 1837), LIII, p. 524.

⁶⁰ A. Greiler, *Colins ‘Bibliothek’*, *Colin Studies* I, pp. 27 – 47.

⁶¹ John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars*, p. 88. Garret ascribes this ideal to the Picpus missionaries of the time. He does not tell us what documents he has for the attribution.

scenario is that the idea comes from Fr. Caret, whom the first Marist group did not meet, and that he developed it only when in Rome or in France. In that case it could have been another topic in the discussions between Caret and Colin when they met in Lyon.⁶²

Colin's talk to the community of *la Capucinière* contains another remark that does not ring a Colinian tone. He spoke of the need to form a local clergy in due time but, he adds; 'there are countries, China for one, where indigenous priests do not succeed, although they are very pious'.⁶³ This last remarks confirms the suspicion that Colin had recently talked with somebody who had a wide knowledge of the missions of the time, but therefore the Jesuits in Lyon come to mind first.

Pompallier, Colin and Propaganda

As soon as Colin had received the parcel of letters, he had a faithful copy made of Pompallier's letter as asked and, on 10 November, he forwarded it to Cardinal Frasoni in Rome with a covering letter of his own.⁶⁴ He expresses his intention to send another eight or ten priests in 1839. He underlines Pompallier's need for a small ship and thanks the cardinal for the faculties the last group of missionaries received in August, just before their departure.⁶⁵

Quite casually, in between other considerations, Pompallier had written to Colin, if the Society has not got the manpower, why not ask for another solution in Rome? He evidently felt no longer bound by his commitment of two years earlier not to call in other missionaries.⁶⁶ In his covering letter of 10 November to Frasoni, Colin did not refer to this suggestion of Pompallier's.

However, by the same occasion, on 21 May, Pompallier had also written to Frasoni himself and that letter expressed the need for more missionaries in the most vivid terms. Having mentioned that he had asked the Society of Mary for a good number of new missionaries, the bishop becomes specific and adds: 'if Propaganda College in Rome could give my mission a few of those good men that it has in abundance, what benefit it would mean for the flock that would then, I trust, soon know Jesus Christ, their true shepherd.' His move was evidently not as casual as the letter to Colin might suggest.

Pompallier also mentions a Mgr. Palotti, director of the *Catholic Apostolate*, whom he had befriended in Rome, and who had shown a great interest in the new mission, and suggests that a copy of the present letter might be forwarded to Palotti.⁶⁷

Propaganda must have received the bishop's letter at about the same time as Colin did, and without wasting any time (10 November), the secretary, Mgr. Ignazio Cadolini, wrote to Colin. With fine diplomatic ambiguity (he had not yet received the copy, and thus did not know that the bishop had mentioned the same thing to Colin as well) he tells Colin that Pompallier had urgently (*le più vive premure*) asked for 'other workers' (*altri operari Evangelici*), leaving it open whether 'altri' meant more or other, i.e. non-Marist missionaries. Less diplomatically the secretary writes: 'Even though I am fully convinced that, with

⁶² Cf. above, p. 69. Interestingly, in the Introduction to Laval's book on Mangareva (p. X), Maurice Desmedt quotes an article of a certain P. Lesson in the *Revue d'Orient*, 1844, and in *l'Univers*, 1846, that also alludes to the Paraguay reductions, however, no mention of them has been found in Laval's own text. Honoré Laval, with Francis Assisi Caret and Columban Murphy, had pioneered the mission of the Gambier Islands.

⁶³ Colin adds: because missionaries cannot be everywhere (sic!). CS, doc. 52 [5]: *il y a des pays où les prêtres indigènes ne peuvent guère faire, par exemple en Chine, quoiqu'ils soient très pieux.*

⁶⁴ CS, doc. 54.

⁶⁵ Faculties had first been asked 19.05 and granted 26.06 (CS, doc. 35 [3 & 4]). As the missionaries were not satisfied, further specifications were asked 20.07 (CS, doc. 42) and granted.

⁶⁶ LRO, doc. 4 [8].

⁶⁷ ACPF Congressi Oceania, vol. I, 485r – 488r.

your characteristic zeal, you will do your utmost to respond to the desires of the good bishop, I consider it my duty to unite my requests to his, and that you will do everything possible to rush to the aid of the bishop new missionaries who await the rich harvest you mention yourself”.⁶⁸ Propaganda was not going to be rushed into another panicky decision, as it did under the influence of Fr. Caret the year before, but it surely looks as if Pompallier’s impatience made a better impression in Rome than Colin’s ponderous management.

The two letters, Colin to Propaganda and Propaganda to Colin, both of 10 November, crossed in the mail.

Valparaiso

While Propaganda in Rome, and Colin in Belley, looked at the future, the six new missionaries were sailing across the Atlantic and turned around Cape Horn into the Eastern Pacific. On 12 December 1838, after ‘three months and a day’, as Baty counted, the *Basque* sailed into the harbour of Valparaiso. A very fast voyage indeed. The Picpus Fathers somehow knew they would be on that particular ship⁶⁹ and two of them came out in a small boat to meet them.

Like the first group eighteen months earlier, the Marists were fraternally received, ‘as if we were of their own’. There was no mail waiting for them, nor did they expect it. They enjoyed the hospitality of the Picpus Fathers who refused to accept any remuneration. The Brothers gave a hand to the builders putting up a convent for the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts who had arrived in late August with Caret to join in the missionary work of the priests, first in Chile, later in Polynesia.⁷⁰

The stories that the Marists had picked up from the Ecuadorian ambassador were confirmed when they saw the splendid work of their Picpus hosts among the local people: baptising children that the parents could not afford to have baptised by their own priests, confessing laity and priests alike, even running a language school. The only thing the Picpus Fathers could not do was bless marriages to help couples living in irregular situations. People were full of praise for the French priests. Baty exulted: ‘Poor America! May God preserve France, the glory of Christendom, the glory of the priesthood!’⁷¹

Jean-Baptiste Épalle renewed his vows all by himself before the crib, during Christmas night. Colin had overlooked authorizing someone officially to receive the renewal of vows, but it did not worry Épalle too much: ‘I trust the Council of Trent will not mind’.⁷²

On 12 January 1839 Baty wrote a first letter to Colin and a second one the 16th. Épalle and Petit joined in and the mail went with the *Charles Adolph* sailing on the 17th for Bordeaux. Fr. Colin had asked Baty to make copies of any letter and send them by another ship. Dutifully Baty sent a third letter on the 25th, mostly repeating what he had told in the earlier ones.⁷³

The Marists were well received by the commander of the French naval station, Captain de Villeneuve, and by another French captain who happened to be in port. They went to visit them several times and did what they could to develop good relations with the navy officers. De Villeneuve showed a letter from Pompallier but it did not tell them much they

⁶⁸ CS, doc. 55.

⁶⁹ Cambis (or someone else) may have got a letter away as soon as the Marists were booked on the *Basque*.

⁷⁰ APM, Baty to Colin, 12.01.39. Other information thanks to Jean Louis Schuester, SSCC Archives, Rome.

⁷¹ APM, Baty to Colin, 12.01.

⁷² APM, Épalle to Colin, 14.01.

⁷³ APM 1404/20033: Baty to Colin, 12.01.39, 16.01.39, 25.01.39. Épalle to Colin, 14.01.39. Petit to Colin, 15.01.39.

did not already know from the bishop's letter from New Zealand that Colin had forwarded just before their departure.

The missionaries could only confirm what Pompallier had found, namely that few ships went from Chile to New Zealand, and only in certain seasons. They agreed that communications between France and Oceania could in the future only go via Sydney. Although Caret would have brought the strange Roman decree with him that allowed the Picpus Fathers to extend their activities further into the Western Pacific⁷⁴, there is not the slightest hint of it in the letters from the Marists. As the situation had changed radically, the Picpus Fathers must have agreed among themselves not to bring up the subject.

Futuna⁷⁵

Peter Chanel stayed about a month with Bataillon on Wallis⁷⁶ and returned to Futuna on 27 April 1838. Warfare was gradually abating (28-04) although there still were occasional threats of violence (30.04). The Futunans had evidently become used to the presence of Peter Chanel and Marie Nizier Delorme on their island. They were not the only Europeans. Thomas Boag lived mostly with the missionaries and there was an Englishman, Mr. Jones who had a small schooner and employed an English sailor, Georges. The schooner made occasional trips to Wallis, which allowed Bataillon and Chanel to exchange letters (30.08). It even went as far as Fiji (30.08). Sometimes other Europeans are mentioned without further information as to who they were (e.g. 24.06).

After the cyclone of February a new house had been built for the missionaries, but due to the fighting in March it took a long time to finish. In May they moved in, but it was not completed until late June (23.06). Chanel then asked and got permission to build a second house on the other side of the island, among the Singave people (13.08). Most of the time the missionaries got plenty of food from Niuliki, or other islanders, often the nicest fish, and the choicest bits of pork (25.07).

Even when they still lived in a corner of Niuliki's house, the two used to get up very early to say their prayers and celebrate Mass before people came in to chew the kava roots. Everyone apparently felt free to move in and out of the missionaries' house at any time (13.07). On their walks over the island Chanel and Nizier often stayed the night in people's houses. Chanel notes he sometimes had to listen to coarse or obscene stories, which means he understood more of the language than he admitted (31.07)!

He soon had a place built on the Singave side of the island to say Mass and when the first Mass was said in Poi, on the North coast, Niuliki told the people of the area to attend. He gave the good example and Chanel was edified by their respectful behaviour (06.05). They obviously understood that whatever the missionaries were doing somehow connected up with their own feelings for the sacred. The silence was broken only by a few crying babies whom Chanel called his choir (*mes servant chantres* 06-04). People loved to assist at ceremonies, listen to Chanel and Nizier singing, and gaze with admiration at the colourful pictures with which the little chapels were decorated. Seeing the missionaries make the sign of the cross, some imitated them. One woman took the initiative of decorating the picture of Our Lady with flowers (18.07).

The two missionaries had soon taken to the local kava culture. They took it first thing in the morning with the King or with the neighbours (11.06) and on every thinkable occasion, several times a day. Like the Futunans, they received and donated kava roots

⁷⁴ Cf. above, p. 67f.

⁷⁵ Information in the following two paragraphs, on Futuna and Wallis, is taken mostly from the diary of Peter Chanel for 1838, EC, pp 318 – 403. The dates refer to the diary. Many items occur more than once in the diary.

⁷⁶ Cf. above, p. 73f.

whenever custom demanded it (e.g. 22.06), and accepted an offering of kava in honour of their God (09.08). They often were present and enjoyed the dances, that could go on for a good part of the night (30.06;13.09).

Especially during the Southern winter, whaling ships frequently called or came in view. Every time they caused great excitement with people rushing to possible landing sites to sell food, fruit or pigs. Sometimes the two missionaries too bought things. Chanel shows his anger at the unfair trading that sometimes went on, sailors paying with worthless trinkets for valuable food, and obtaining girls for guns and powder. One girl that the sailors got onto their ship did not like their behaviour and jumped overboard (21.05). Chanel was frustrated at not knowing enough English or Futunan to tell them what he thought of it all. When Marie Nizier heard that the whaler *John Adams* of Nantucket was on the way to New Zealand, Chanel tried to send a letter or a message to Pompallier in case he was there (31.08), but nothing came of it.

Life on Futuna had its charms. After a trip with Jones' schooner around the island Peter wrote with admiration of the beauty of Futuna and walking across the island he admired the carefully tended taro plantations (09.06). He enjoyed taking part in extended picnics on the uninhabited island Alofi, admiring the luxuriant vegetation, and looking at the remnants of earlier occupation. He enjoyed the plentiful fruits and foods as well as the crayfish, the crab and fish they caught (25.07). He tried his hand at catching eel, but dropped his keys in the process. Once the two lost count of the days and ate meat on a Friday (20.07).

Later in the year Jones came back with the news that a French warship had bombarded villages in Fiji in reprisal for the murder of a French captain. Chanel regretted the use of violence, but also considered it a useful lesson that would bear its fruit on all the islands. He hoped the ships would call at Futuna but they did not (12.12).⁷⁷

The two missionaries quickly got into the habit of constantly giving presents, a custom at the heart of Oceanic cultures (24.11). Pieces of cloth were always welcome, and once he made Niuliki happy with a pair of underpants (30.60). Marie-Nizier was liked and sought for the many useful services he rendered. He regularly shaved the King and members of the royal family (21.06), being grumbled at when the King's brother-in-law found the knife not sharp enough (21.07). He discovered how to turn nails into iron fish-hooks that were very popular (11.10; 04.11). His talent for tailoring came in very useful when he made a dress for the King's granddaughter (08.08). The American James, who had managed to get himself a Futunan wife, brought her along for Nizier to cut her a dress, which he did (10.11).

They got into trouble when they broke a taboo by putting up a latrine behind their new house in Singave: a threat to the countless streamlets of drinking water running down the hills of Futuna (04.01.39). After all, what are beaches for!

Chanel expressed grief when people were sad and lived so close to them that he was liked and respected by many. One grandmother showed him her granddaughter and said she would not want her to marry anyone but a French nobleman, but the only French nobleman present told her kindly to teach her granddaughter to be a good girl (04.07).

Both were often called to visit the sick. Occasionally Chanel could secretly baptize a dying child or adult, but he was aware of the danger of being accused of sorcery and

⁷⁷ Captain Bureau, of the *Aimable Joséphine* was killed in 1834 on the small Fijian island of Viwa, the islanders massacred his crew and pillaged the ship. Four years later Dumont d'Urville on the *Astrolabe*, bombarded Viwa. Although Jore does not mention a second ship, we can guess from the rumour that Jones picked up, that the *Astrolabe* was assisted by the *Zélée*, the other ship under the command of Dumont d'Urville. Chanel did not know that the captain in question was Dumont d'Urville, whose book he happened to be reading at the time (22.07; 09.12; most likely *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde: Résumé général des voyages de découvertes*, Paris, L. Tenré, 1835; cf. LRO, doc. 28 [3], n. 3). Cf. Jore, op. cit., I, p. 100 & II, p. 163. Jore puts the reprisal in 1839, but in the light of Chanel's diary this must be corrected to read 1838.

would not go to the funeral of a person he had baptized (22.08). Nizier too did baptisms (20. 01.39). Although there was interest among the people to know more of the *lotu* (i.e. the religion 28.08) and adults at times asked for instruction or baptism, it was clear that Niuliki would not hear of Futuna becoming Christian. Chanel bided his time (21.08; 16.09). The growing sympathy for Chanel did not stop someone from stealing a precious bottle of *eau des Carmes* (26.09).⁷⁸

Their health held out reasonably well. Nizier badly hurt his arm, and Chanel, when climbing over the hill in the dark, hurt his back as he slipped three times ‘*sur mon derrière*’ (15.12). When the kava had been too strong his stomach could be upset, sometimes leading to serious vomiting (05.10). He had fever at times (06.05), but his sense of humour survived the miseries. Some nights an itch kept him from sleeping, but, ‘the local lice came and comforted me’ (06.12).

Wallis

As time went on, the Wallisian people, like the Futunans, became used to the presence on their island of the two white men, so very different from the familiar sorts of strangers they knew: visiting sailors, beachcombers and (in neighbouring Tonga) Methodist missionaries. The two were allowed to move around everywhere and attend traditional religious ceremonies (31.03). They certainly had gained the respect of many people, and often received gifts of food and the nicest bits of pork at feasts (30.03, 07.04). They were allowed to visit the sick, often even asked to come, and, given an opportunity, Bataillon would baptize a dying person (22.04).

Apart from occasional bouts of bad temper, Lavelua, the paramount chief (king) on Uvea (Wallis) liked the missionaries and invited them very often to his house for kava and meals. They sometimes went with him as he went visiting villages on the island. Lavelua let Niuliki on Futuna know that if he did not want the missionaries to remain, he could send them to Wallis where they would be welcome (20.04). Another chief threatened the Futunans he would take revenge if they dared harm their missionaries (25.04).

By the end of 1838 the whole of Wallis knew that these two *papalangi* (Europeans) had their own *lotu*, and that it was not the same as the one in Tonga. The people could see the religious ceremonies in the missionaries’ house and the two felt free to speak about it (08.04). Bataillon and Luzy refrained from saying they had come to convert Uvea to their *lotu*. The island was very divided on the issue. Most people felt secure in their old religion, and there was a deep distrust of any *lotu papalangi*, always associated with the Methodism in Tonga. Quite a few people, including a brother of Lavelua (12.04), were inclined to accept the *lotu* of Bataillon (17.04), and he secretly had a small band of catechumens who met on one of the twenty odd little islands on the ring of the vast lagoon that surrounds Wallis. Lavelua did not approve of it but mostly pretended not to know. Some people urged Bataillon to force the issue by putting the king for the choice, either to accept the *lotu* or to send him away (04.04). But all through 1838 the missionaries thought it better not to come out into the open.⁷⁹

Cultures in contact

By the middle of 1838 our missionaries had lived for half a year in the midst of Polynesians. Remarkably, at about the same time, three of them felt they should start writing down what they had observed. Joseph-Xavier Luzy, on Wallis, started an eight-pages

⁷⁸ A medicinal liqueur they used for all sorts of ills.

⁷⁹ Cf. LRO, doc. 28 [26].

description of the island and its inhabitants in May 1838, he added a few pages in May 1839 and two more in May 1840, before he succeeded in mailing them.⁸⁰ Pierre Bataillon started a *Notice sur l'île et la mission de Wallis* (22 pages) in May 1838, he added a few pages in May 1839.⁸¹ The two sets from Wallis are very much alike, as one would expect. Still, it shows an active involvement on the part of Brother Joseph in the study of the people. Servant did not put his impressions in a report, but the letters to his parents and his two friends in May (each of four pages)⁸² and his letter to Colin in September (eight pages) contain all the material of a good report. Peter Chanel started a diary, or chronicle, on 12 November 1837, four days after arriving on the island. It soon got lost and on 26 December 1837 he started anew. Nearly every day he noted down the small events and impressions that make up the warp and woof of grass-roots history and ethnography.⁸³

One would have expected all the symptoms of culture shock. The way they had reacted to the local people on the Canary Islands⁸⁴ and the romanticism that Mangareva aroused⁸⁵, prove they had no natural immunity. Still, on Wallis, on Futuna, and along the Hokianga River in New Zealand, all of them tell us of the Polynesian people in ways that are singularly free of the jolts that intensive involvement in those alien cultures could easily have caused. They see nothing ridiculous and nothing wrong in the people's way of life. Nor do they romanticize.⁸⁶ They display a remarkable objectivity. Although they came with the prospect of having to convert barbarous cannibals, they are in no way judgmental and describe what they see with sympathy. They came full of the usual prejudices, but after a few months the prejudices have melted away in the face of reality.

Nizier and Chanel appreciate the local food (no *cuisinophobia!*) and the kava, they enjoy the music and the dances, admire the food gardens and the people's fishing skills. The missionaries disregard Colin's injunctions on moving about alone and Brother Nizier happily measures a local lady for a dress.

Bataillon wonders how the Polynesians ever managed to build their vast houses and canoes without the steel axes and knives they had only recently obtained. He too admires the gardening skills of the men, the variety of their food crops, the rotating use of the land, the courtesies of the kava ceremony. Luzy admires the huge ocean-faring canoes, and the courage with which the Wallisians take to the open ocean. Where Colin fears indecent nudity, Bataillon finds people modestly dressed in colourful tapa⁸⁷, and men and women bathing on separate spots, far apart. On Wallis he finds no sign of idolatry, but great respect for the taboos. He sees that some chiefs may have two or more wives, but that the common people are monogamous and that they are generally faithful to their spouses. He sees people sharing their food and notices their generosity to strangers: a well-ordered, hierarchical society where authority is respected, where men grow and prepare the food, women take care of the children and produce the tapa clothing.

In New Zealand, Servant admires the Maoris, strong and well-built men who work hard. He looks at them with respect from his house on the river, easily paddling their canoes even in rough weather: people of good and forceful character, with a sense of humour, who have fun imitating the whites.

⁸⁰ LRO, doc. 23.

⁸¹ LRO, doc. 28.

⁸² LRO, docs. 25, 26 & 27; cf. above, p. 72.

⁸³ Cf. EC, pp. 313ff.

⁸⁴ Cf. above, p. 46f

⁸⁵ Cf. above, p. 58f.

⁸⁶ Cf. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, pp. 203 – 222. With a wink at his own experience in Papua New Guinea, Luzbetak identifies *cuisinophobia* as a symptom of culture shock. Cf. p. 206.

⁸⁷ Laval too, *op. cit.* p. 35, makes the point that, even before contact, the women of the Gambier Islands were always modestly dressed with a long *tapa* knotted over one shoulder.

What was it that went right? The Marist missionaries were defenceless, unarmed, entirely dependent on their Polynesian hosts. They displayed an incredible trust in the people's goodwill. In comparison with the Methodists in New Zealand as well as in the islands, they were poor, and had very little to offer but a strange *lotu*. Unlike the visiting sailors, they respected the women and showed compassion with the suffering. The Polynesians responded with kindness. May we think that it was their very dependence that guarded the missionaries from the feelings of superiority which so easily lead to culture shock? And, may we think too, that it was precisely their trust that brought out the best in their hosts?

SUMMARY

Two years after the Marist missionary venture had started, it still consisted of different plays, enacted on different stages, with little connection between them. In fact the people involved in one place often knew nothing of what was happening elsewhere. Under the direction of Jean-Claude Colin two groups of missionaries had left for the South Pacific: the first one in December 1836, consisting of one bishop, four priests and three brothers; the second group in September 1838: three priests and three brothers.

As it should be, Colin was the best informed. He had received letters from Santa Cruz, Tenerife, Valparaiso, Chile, Tahiti, Sydney and New Zealand. The missionaries had done everything possible to keep him *au courant* and by the end of 1838 all except the last batch of letters (sent in September 1838) had in fact reached him. He now knew that the first group had in fact safely reached its destination.

Colin had sent money (8.700 francs) in May 1837, after receiving Pompallier's letter from Tenerife, and mail in November 1837, after receiving the letters from Valparaiso and hearing of the death of Fr. Bret. He had entrusted another parcel of mail and a large sum of money (50.000 francs, not counting other gifts) to the second group in September 1838. By the end of 1838 neither the letters nor the money had reached the missionaries.

When the second group left, Colin knew that they would take nine or ten months to get there. But he also knew that letters could go much faster via London and Sydney. He could have put the bishop's mind at rest by letting him know that a second group was on the way and by which route. Unfortunately, he did nothing.

Christmas and New Year must have been difficult days for Pompallier. He will have held Christmas services for the Catholics on the Hokianga, perhaps he paid a pastoral visit to the Bay of Islands. But his thoughts will have gone back over the two years since he had left France. All that time, no word from France, from Colin, from his friends in Lyon, from other Marists, from his family. No word from Rome where he had felt so much appreciated. No new missionaries, no money. He knew nothing of what Colin had done, or of what was on the way. He felt abandoned and let down. His letters, begging for a response, for help, for encouragement, remained unanswered. Was nobody listening?

His two companions did not seem to share his impatience and his frustrations. Perhaps they were less ambitious, happy enough to do the things at hand. At least Catherin Servant showed no sign of the mental strain that plagued the bishop. Unfortunately, the three had not grown into a community of warm support for each other. In fact, relations were strained and unpleasant.

Bishop Pompallier still had no idea how his four missionaries on the two Polynesian islands had fared. Fourteen months after he had dropped them with scant resources: no word from them. They could have been killed, or they could have died of disease for all he knew, and he lacked the money to charter a ship to visit them.

In actual fact the four missionaries were in good health and holding their own in an environment that was tough and strange, but they related well to the local people. During the first four months Bataillon had not even known that he had a confrere on Futuna. After five months Peter Chanel had been able to spend a month with Bataillon on Wallis, and from that time they continued to exchange letters. Since the sails of the *Raiatea* had disappeared over the horizon, the four of them had received no word from their bishop and superior; just a sailor's yarn about a French bishop in New Zealand. Like him, they had received no mail, no money, no sign of life, neither from home, nor from him. Unlike him, it did not worry them much. Their work was not fruitless. They were slowly winning the hearts of the Polynesian people, by making friends, by learning their language and by being close to them in the joys and the sorrows of life.

By the end of the year, the second group, had safely reached Valparaiso after a fast and relatively easy voyage. They were gracefully received by the Picpus missionaries and were busy absorbing all the new insights and perspectives of another world. Like their predecessors they were on the wrong side of the Pacific and wondering how to get to their destination, but at least, unlike their predecessors, they knew where to go.