

A MISSION TOO FAR ... PACIFIC COMMITMENT Bonus Chapter 17 [MTF-XVII]

Expansion 1843 - 1844

Via South America.

The eighth group of Marist missionaries, twelve in all, destined for the newly erected Vicariate of Central Oceania, was divided over two Navy vessels, both leaving from Toulon, both following the western route (round Cape Horn) for the new French territories in the East Pacific. The first band to leave was led by Father Philippe Calinon. With him went two priests, Jean-Baptiste Bréhéret and Jean-Victor Favier and two Brothers, Annet Pérol and Jean Raynaud. They travelled on the *Phaéton* and sailed on Sunday 24 April 1843. The second band with Bishop Guillaume Douarre saw them off at the wharf while waiting for their own departure.

The *Phaéton* was anchored at a safe distance from the shore and people were rowed out by dinghy. Several dinghies capsized or were swamped. Once out in the open sea not only the passengers were seasick but the crew as well. As Calinon describes it: 'Imagine a nutshell bobbing on the Rhône.' Conditions were exceptionally rough but the missionaries managed remarkably well and, he adds proudly: 'I even better than the others.' He puts it down to the inner calm with which they kept looking towards the home country that most likely they would never see again. The men felt quite safe. They got along well. The spirit among them was good: 'The Lord will take care of his workers!'

The Captain put his saloon at their disposal for Sunday Mass and he attended Mass with his senior staff. The officers were nice and helpful and admired the idealism of the missionaries. The priests had their meals together with the officers and were served by the Brothers. Apart from the meals which the Brothers took afterwards, Fathers and Brothers were always together. The regular observance of daily prayers was taken care of. As Calinon put it: 'Father Colin should not worry!'¹

The *Phaéton* was an old sailing ship fitted out with a steam engine, the first steam powered ship of the French Navy to go to the South Seas. Under steam she was said to be as slow as she had been under sail. In fact, it took the *Phaéton* twelve days to reach Gibraltar where she dropped anchor on the morning of Saturday, 6 May 1843. It gave Calinon a chance to get a letter away for Colin. They all signed. The *Phaéton* left Gibraltar probably on or shortly after Monday 8 May, heading for Rio de Janeiro.

Bishop Douarre

Ten days after Calinon Bishop had sailed Douarre himself left Toulon, Thursday 4 May 1843. With him on the fast and beautiful frigate *Uranie*² were six Picpus missionaries and six Marists: three priests, the Fathers Mathieu, Roudaire and

¹ Calinon to Colin, 6 May 1843, APM 1405/20053.

² Roudaire to Cholleton, LRO 2, Doc 292, 7. Also Rougeyron to Claude-Joseph Favier, LRO 2, 293, 6 (paragraphs in *italics*).

Rougeyron, two Brothers, Blaise Marmoiton and Jean Taragnat, and the seminarian Isidore Grézel. Also on board was Captain Bruat the newly appointed Governor of French Territories in Oceania and his wife. They passed in sight of Gibraltar and the Baleares and called at Santa Cruz de Tenerife where they were very kindly received by the saintly Bishop who remembered the first band of Marist missionaries who had called there under Bishop Pompallier in 1837. [3] From Tenerife they sailed to Gorée where they all could say Mass [3] and then to Dakar where Bishop Douarre sang a Pontifical High Mass that was attended by the Governor of Senegal and Captain Bruat. The missionaries visited the mosque and sung a few songs to Our Lady that delighted the marabouts present. [4-6, 4]

The *Uranie* crossed the Atlantic and reached Rio de Janeiro on 8 July 1843. The Apostolic Nuncio received them kindly and the next day Douarre presided at a Holy Eucharist in the chapel of the Picpus Fathers filled with French people from the town. 'For a moment we believed we were back home again'. [7] They enjoyed the fine climate of Rio de Janeiro.

The *Uranie* lost no time and left again on 12 July 1843 for Valparaiso. Somewhere during the trip around Cape Horn they ran into a violent storm that lasted for two days. At the height of the storm the pious missionaries threw a medal of Our Lady into the sea. Two hours later the sails were torn to shreds which slowed the ship down and thereby probably saved it. 'Thanks to Mary we had done the right thing.' The last days of July the weather turned very cold with heavy snowfall. A few sailors suffered of frostbite. Life came very uncomfortable when the weather and the sea kept them inside the twelve by six feet cabin that the twelve missionaries had to share with a canon and all their luggage. It became worse when the drinking water ran out and they were only small amounts of putrid water to drink. [8]

On 24 August 1843, after only six weeks the fast *Uranie* reached Valparaiso, where they were very well received by the Picpus missionaries. Douarre celebrated High Mass in honour of Saint Rosa of Lima, he confirmed five thousand people and baptised a Polynesian from the Marquesas Islands with Captain and Mrs Bruat as godparents. An old Bishop who was expelled from his country in South America by its anticlerical government and who lived with the Picpus community, gave Douarre his pectoral cross. [8-10]. The *Uranie* stayed three weeks in Valparaiso which gave the missionaries ample time to rest and regain their forces and courage.

On or around 13 September 1843 the *Uranie* with Bishop Douarre and his six companions sailed for the islands of the Pacific. The Picpus Fathers stayed in Valparaiso which made life on board a lot easier but for a large number of all sorts of animals including donkeys that the ship carried for the French colony. In just one month, on 14 October they reached the island of Tahuata. Douarre said a Solemn Mass for the garrison on Nuku Hiva. At the elevation the islanders showed their composure by not flinching at the salvo of fifteen guns of the *Uranie*. After Mass they moved to the French compound where Bruat was acclaimed Governor of the French Pacific possessions. [11]

The missionaries were told they had to abandon the *Uranie* that was going to Tahiti where on 8 November 1843 Captain Armand-Joseph Bruat officially took

command of the French possessions in the Pacific³ in succession of Admiral Dupetit-Thouars. The commanding officer at Nuku Hiva put the small warship *Bucéphale* at the disposal of the missionaries to continue their way to Wallis. As there was no sign yet of the *Phaéton* - still battling its way around Cape Horn - the question was, should they wait for the other five missionaries. The French authorities had picked up rumours of Catholic missionaries in Tonga and Wallis being harassed by Protestants and decided that a visit by a man-of-war was called for. When the admiral promised to send the other group with the luggage⁴ by some other ship, Douarre agreed and on 1 November the *Bucéphale* set sail for Tonga. Douarre left instructions behind for Calinon to collect the large cases sent from Brest as well and bring them along even if it meant further delay. [13]

Tonga

The *Bucéphale* under Captain Julien Lafernière took good three weeks to reach Tonga where, on 22 November 1843 they found the Fathers Chevron and Grange with Brother Attale, not in any real danger but in extreme poverty. [14] The visitors were appalled to see them barefoot and dressed in rags. They were weakened to the point of being barely able of any activity. Living on the food people occasionally gave them they had all been seriously ill from deprivation. The Tongans were used to the Protestant missionaries buying the food they needed. Tongans also sold food to passing ships, but not for money which they did not know and had no use for. Food was sold in barter for cloth and iron utensils but the Marists had not been given the trade goods needed for barter. The visitors admired the saintly resignation with which the three accepted their plight, determined to stay on and ready to die. Douarre gave them what he could. [10]

Accompanied by a few of the ship's officers Douarre visited chiefs on different places on Tongatapu, especially the Tui Tonga, Laufilitonga⁵ and invited them on board for a meal. The Wesleyan missionaries⁶ had belittled the Catholics as coming from a small and unimportant country. The visit of the warship and the presence of a Bishop with a team of missionaries shook the Tongans. Roudaire wrote to Father Cholleton that when the Wesleyan ministers were not there, a few Protestant chiefs admitted they were not sufficiently educated to judge the relative worth of the different religions that the white people presented to them. [20]

In spite of it all, the work of the missionaries showed some results. There was a substantial church built in Pea and it was clean and nicely decorated (*d'une élégance rare*). Roudaire was told that there were 100 people baptised, some 200 catechumens under instruction and about 2000 adherents. [15] He marvelled at their singing in church.

Father Matthieu was so put off by the destitution of the missionaries that he took it upon himself to report to Colin: 'The mission was simply not founded as it should. You cannot drop missionaries on a beach with nothing to live on! To start a mission one must

³ To intervene in the conflict that had broken out with Queen Pomare over the raising of the Tricolor and the landing of French forces on the island. Léonce Jore, *l'Océan Pacifique au temps de la Restauration et de la Monarchie de Juillet* (Paris: Besson & Chantemerle, 1959) volume 2, 304-12.

⁴ Part of the luggage had already been in Brest when departures were rearranged for Toulon. It was sent by another ship from there. Cf MTF XV, 9.

⁵ Sione Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga*, (reprint by University of Queensland Press, 2014), 149.

⁶ There had been Protestant missionaries in Tonga since the midtwenties, first LMS from England and after they abandoned the mission, Wesleyans from Australia. Lātūkefu, *Church in Tonga*, 26ff

provide them with a house to live in and a piece of land where they can grow their food. They must get enough food to support them until their gardens become productive. As money has no meaning here they must be given enough trade goods and iron tools to barter.' Douarre agreed. 'Only Bishop Pompallier, Matthieu added, seems to think differently'. He found that Colin should intervene: 'It is up to you Father, to judge and give the necessary instructions'.⁷ Chevron, Grange and Attale wrote letters to Colin and their families that Douarre took along for mailing⁸ and the *Bucéphale* sailed for Wallis.

Bataillon

They came in sight of Wallis on 26 November but for two days the sea was too rough for the *Bucéphale* to attempt entering the lagoon. Douarre and his men went ashore in a canoe that came out to the ship. Close to the shore the Wallisians on the beach waded in and carried the canoe on their shoulders. Matthieu stayed on board to clean up.

The news that Bataillon was to be their Bishop was received with great joy by the people on Wallis and passed around to every corner of the island: *Pataia epikopo*.⁹ On Sunday 3 December 1843, feast of Saint François Xavier, Guillaume Douarre ordained Pierre Bataillon a Bishop in the church of Saint Joseph, exactly the day that, six years earlier, Bataillon had said the first Mass on Wallis. The entire population of Wallis attended with the Lavelua Vaimua, the King of Wallis and the other chiefs and a few officers of the *Bucéphale*. After Mass a huge feast was held that ended with a solemn kava ceremony.

A few days later Bataillon wrote an emotional letter to Colin:

I want you to know that I have always been, and always want to be the least of your sons and that I shall always respect your right, yours or your representative's to call me to account and correct me. I always want to be a true Marist and I promise always and everywhere to take the interests of the Society at heart.¹⁰

Bataillon reports on the state of the mission: Wallis is now entirely Christian and the people are fervent Christians: fifteen hundred people at Mass every Sunday and four to seven hundred Communions every Sunday. Futuna is mostly converted and baptised. Tonga is a promising mission with a good number of converts and one convert even in Fiji. Bataillon plans to send Bishop Douarre to New Caledonia or wherever it is possible to open a mission and as soon as possible start missions in Fiji, Samoa and Rotuma. Bataillon agrees to Father Viard's request to return to New Zealand however much he would like to keep him. [7] He is going to ask Bishop Pompallier to return the remains of Father Peter Chanel to Central Oceania where, he argues, they belong. [8]

Along went a touching letter of three Wallisian women, Susanna, Penetiketa and Sotana to Father *Kolotio* (Claude) in which they thank him for having sent them Father

⁷ Matthieu to Colin, LRO 2, Doc 291, 1.

⁸ LRO 2, Docs 285 & 286, 289, 290.

⁹ Rougeyron to Claude-Joseph Favier, 31 December 1843, LRO 2, Doc 301, 3.

¹⁰ LRO 2, Doc 296, 4.

Bataillon who has taught them about the love of God and who has put them on the way to heaven. They want to thank the Pope for having chosen Father Bataillon to be their Bishop. And, interestingly for people with a background of ancestral worship, they regret that their forbears never knew of God and they ask Colin to pray for them too. Colin must have been profoundly touched when they told him in their own language: *Aloa Kolotio ko si amatou tamai koe*, 'Dear Father Claude, you are our father.' Bataillon translated their letter and suggested to Colin to send each of them a nice dress with their names embroidered on it. The new Bishop had a heart for his people!

Brother Joseph Luzy uses the opportunity to write to Colin for the first time since he had come to Wallis, six years earlier.¹¹ He complains that Bishop Pompallier had promised to visit them in six months and in fact waited more than four years to do so. [2] He tells Colin of his problems with elephantiasis and of the treatment by the doctor on the corvette *Embuscade*¹² that had at least relieved the pain.[3]

New Caledonia

After about ten days Douarre left on the *Bucéphale* with the Fathers Pierre Rougeyron and Philippe Viard and the Brothers Jean Taragnat and Blaise Marmoiton.¹³ Philippe Viard asked to be allowed to go back to New Zealand where he could work with Bishop Pompallier who wanted him back.¹⁴ Bataillon did not object but there was an outburst of emotion when it became known that Viard was leaving. Bataillon even had to stop the King and a few chiefs from taking him a hostage until the ship had left and when the canoe took him to the ship a large crowd swam out with it.

Douarre was so imprudent as to invite a young man to join him on the mission to New Caledonia. The young man was immediately prepared to do so. His relatives objected and he had to be restrained forcibly but succeeded all the same to swim to the ship on its departure. Six men caught up with him in the water and took him back. [9]

They paid a short visit to Futuna where they met with the Fathers Louis Servant and Joseph-François Roulleaux. Brother Marie-Nizier showed them the churches being built on many places and the fervent Christians busy building small chapels in their little villages. After a couple of days they continued their voyage and reached New Caledonia on 21 December 1843. The Captain chose Balade, on the north-west end of New Caledonia that was on sea charts marked as a safe anchorage. Douarre and Rougeyron took a few walks and, more than any other place that Rougeyron had seen so far, its size, 80 leagues (400 km) by 15 (60 km), its mountains and forests, its fertile valleys and waterfalls reminded him of his native Auvergne.

The first contact with the local people was friendly. Fortunately, one of the locals, they met, a man named Uamo, came from the island of Uvea, one of the three Loyalty Islands, north-east of New Caledonia.¹⁵ Father Viard had worked more than a year on

¹¹ LRO 2, Doc 297.

¹² On the visit of the *Embuscade* of Bataillon to Colin, 4 November 1842, LRO 2, Doc 214, 1.

¹³ Rougeyron to Favier, 31 December 1843, LRO 2, Doc 301, 8.

¹⁴ Douarre to Colin, 10 January 1844, LRO 3, Doc 304, 13.

¹⁵ As the name Uvea (the Polynesian name of Wallis) indicates the island must have been settled in prehistoric days by Polynesian migrants from Wallis. The people speak a sort of Wallisian.

Wallis so with Viard and Uamo on hand, Douarre could immediately communicate with the local people of Balade.

Within a few days he was able to buy a small property close to the anchorage where the sailors of the *Bucéphale* constructed a small house. On 24 December Douarre celebrated Mass on the deck of the frigate with a few local chiefs attending and others, including women, looking on from surrounding canoes. On Christmas day Mass was celebrated ashore under a huge banyan tree. The local people had been invited and a good number attended in a reverent way with an appropriate drum roll of the sailors.¹⁶

On 31 December 1843 (some sources give 1 January 1844) after lengthy explanations translated by Viard and Uamo, the local chiefs agreed with cheers to a declaration written by Captain Laferrière by which they accepted the sovereignty of France under the symbol of the Tricolour that promised French protection against other foreign powers.¹⁷

Philippe Viard would have preferred to continue to New Zealand but because he was the only one who spoke Wallisian Douarre asked him to stay for a few months [24]. The *Bucéphale* sailed on 22 January 1844. It carried the first letters for Colin from New Caledonia. Rougeyron wrote to his friend Favier: 'So far the local people have received us well. How sincere they are is hard to say. It could be fear of the warship for anchor. We hope things will be alright'.¹⁸ Douarre was equally optimistic.¹⁹ The mission to Melanesia had started on a promising note.²⁰

Calinon and his band

The slow *Phaéton* reached Rio de Janeiro on 2 August 1843 and heard that the *Uranie* with Bishop Douarre on board had left about two weeks earlier for Valparaiso. They found the frigate *Allier* at anchor. It had just arrived on her way home from New Zealand carrying mail for the Marists in Lyon and for Rome. Captain Du Bouzet could tell them that all was well with Bishop Pompallier and the missionaries in New Zealand. He told them that Father Tripe had left New Zealand for France on the *Rhin* and he was keen to hear how Father Épalle was doing. He hoped to meet with him in France.

Calinon and his companions were about a month in Rio de Janeiro and noted how worried the Picpus Fathers were about the fate of their mission ship *Marie-Joseph* on which Bishop Rouchouze had left France on 15 December 1842 with six priests, a subdeacon, eight brothers and ten sisters. The ship had gone straight to Florianopolis where it called to bury a Sister who had died on board ship a few days before it came in sight of Brazil. They sailed again 20 February 1843. The ship was probably seen on 13 March²¹ near Cape Horn but no other word was ever heard. When the Picpus mission heard that the party had not arrived in Valparaiso as expected, they thought and hoped that the *Marie-Joseph* might have changed course and gone directly to the Marquesas Islands but as time went on this seemed less and less likely and the Picpus Fathers feared

¹⁶ LRO 3, Doc 304, 27.

¹⁷ Douarre to Colin, 10 January 1844, LO 3, Doc 304, 28

¹⁸ Rougeyron, LRO 2, Doc 301, 11.

¹⁹ Douarre, LRO 3, Doc 304, 26.

²⁰ Georges Delbos, *L'Église Catholique en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: Desclée, 1993), 35-8.

²¹ The identification is unsure. Ralph Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania, 1825 to 1850*. (Canberra: ANU Press, 1979), 319.

the worst. The Captain of the *Phaéton* promised to call in at various places on the way to make enquiries and for that reason he decided to pass through the Strait of Magellan.²²

The *Phaéton* met with violent storms and huge seas and it lost a lot of time calling in at places to make enquiries. As a result it took eighty days to reach Concepción on the Pacific coast of Chile. The first thing they did there was enquire about the *Marie-Joseph* but the message they got was definite: the *Marie-Joseph* had not reached the Marquesas. On 2 November Calinon wrote a letter to Father Pierre Colin in which he told him of the perilous voyage and the fruitless search. He told him of his contacts with the indigenous people of Patagonia: they are not the giants that people in Europe believe they are. Well built but ordinary people and, '(...) as far as we could find out not yet contacted by the Church. Good for a Marist mission!' ²³

The *Phaéton* resumed its course for Valparaiso and from there to the Marquesas Islands where they arrived on 2 January 1844. In Nuku Hiva the missionaries were told of the tense political situation that had developed in Tahiti, reason why the newly appointed Governor Bruat had left orders for the *Phaéton* to continue immediately to Tahiti. Calinon got the letter that Douarre had left for him telling him not to continue to Wallis until he could bring the large cases that Douarre had filled with mission goods in Paris and sent to Brest from where they were shipped by a commercial vessel to the Marquesas Islands. The cases had not yet arrived and the missionaries were stranded in Tahiti.

Just as the first Marist band, under Bishop Pompallier had found out in 1837²⁴ the London Missionary Society had over a period of more than ten years already gained the allegiance of many Tahitians. The leading figure in the Society, George Pritchard exercised great influence over Queen Pomare Vahine IV and was determined to keep Catholics and their informal protecting power France out of Tahiti. Although she considered herself somehow the Sovereign of all the islands in the Eastern Pacific the Queen's power barely touched the far away Gambier and Marquesas groups that the Picpus missionaries had already succeeded in converting to the Catholic Faith.

On the basis of vague instructions French naval commanders had established a provisional *de facto* protectorate over both Tahiti and the Marquesas. On the basis of his own reports the French Government mandated Admiral Dupetit-Thouars to raise the Tricolour and declare both island groups to be subjects of the King of France and under his exclusive protection. Dupetit-Thouars raised the flag in the Marquesas and then took his ships to Tahiti to do the same there.²⁵

It so happened that when Dupetit-Thouars reached Tahiti, Georges Pritchard was away, trying to raise the alarm in Sydney and London on the danger of a French take-over. The French consul, Moerenhout was using the absence of Pritchard to promote the idea of a French *prise de possession*. Although formally an independent Kingdom under Queen Pomare Tahiti had suffered for years of confused and ineffective governance through the activity of many contesting parties: local chiefs furthered their own interests and power plays; British and French settlers fostered the interests of their respective countries as well their own; whaling and trading vessels used Tahiti as a safe place to maintain their ships and rest their crews. Last but not least, zealous missionaries of the

²² The British Navy had charted the Strait a few years earlier (cf MTF, 82).

²³ Calinon to Pierre Colin, 2 November 1843, APM 1405/20053.

²⁴ MTF, 92-4

²⁵ Jore, *L'Océan*, II, 275 ff.

London Missionary Society as well as Catholics did their utmost to gain the allegiance of the Polynesians. In this turmoil the Admiral persuaded Queen Pomare to ask for the Protection of France,

On 9 September 1842 Queen Pomare had signed a document, written by Dupetit-Thouars himself, that guaranteed in the name of the King of France, the sovereignty and authority of the Queen and local chiefs over their peoples. All laws and regulations had to be approved and signed by her. She retained all lands and properties according to local usage and custom and there was to be full freedom of religion and Church. Relations with foreign powers would be in the hands of the King of France under whose protection the Kingdom of Tahiti would henceforth stand.²⁶ During the rest of 1842 and in early 1843 the stipulations of the treaty of 9 September were scrupulously adhered to. In November 1843 Captain Bruat arrived on the *Uranie* and was installed formally as governor of all French possessions in the Pacific. He took over command and organised in a short time an effective administration. Dupetit-Thouars left for Valparaiso.

When Georges Pritchard returned from Australia he was appalled at what had taken place in his absence. He tried to gather the support of the British settlers who, left to themselves, were happy enough with the law and order established by the French administration. Pritchard wrote alarming reports to the British authorities in Sydney and London, asking for a military intervention. He and Moerenhout revived the contentions of past years. Tensions mounted and when Calinon arrived there he described Papeete as a town under siege but he put it all down as a sort of insurrection.

The French landed a sizable contingent of troops in Papeete at which Queen Pomare panicked. As often happened in similar situations²⁷ in the Pacific she had a very different understanding of what she had signed. She took refuge in the British consulate run by Georges Pritchard and wrote to Queen Victoria a *Dear Sister* letter asking for help. The situation calmed down somewhat after Bruat had Pritchard arrested and deported and especially when, some time later, official letters arrived from Paris putting its seal on what Dupetit-Thouars had done and from London to the effect that the Queen's Government had no objection to what the French had done.

The first three months of 1844, Calinon and his men stayed in Tahiti with the Picpus Fathers Caret and Murphy, both passionately involved in local politics. As on earlier occasions the Picpus were great hosts and the Marists got along well with them. Profiting of a ship leaving for France Calinon got a letter away to Pierre Colin on 19 March 1844.²⁸

In the meantime the boxes from Brest had arrived in the Marquesas but not yet in Tahiti so they had to wait a little longer. Calinon told Pierre that there was no doubt now that Bishop Rouchouze was lost at sea with all the missionaries he had brought for Eastern Oceania. While the Marists were in Tahiti a few Sisters arrived from the Sisters of Cluny, the first ones to open a Catholic school in Tahiti. Henry Garnett, the English candidate for the Society from New Zealand, passed through Tahiti on his way to France. Not long afterwards the boxes from Brest did arrive in Tahiti and Calinon chartered a small ship, the *Adolphe* that took them straight to Wallis where they arrived on 17 May 1844.

²⁶ Jore, *L'Océan*, II, 280 ff.

²⁷ Notably with the British at the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Cf MTF 231.

²⁸ Calinon to Pierre Colin, 19 March 1844, APM

Founding the mission in Fiji

Bishop Bataillon lost no time to charter the same *Adolphe* for a first visit to his different missions and take his new missionaries to their posts. He left Father Matthieu in charge on Wallis and took Calinon, Bréhéret and Favier with him as well as the two Brothers Jean Raynaud and Annet Pérol. They went first to Futuna where the Bishop left Favier to take the place of Roulleaux who volunteered for Fiji. He then went to Tonga where he left Calinon to join Chevron and Grange while Raynaud joined Brother Attale. Bataillon left Tonga on 26 July for Fiji with the Fathers Bréhéret and Roulleaux and Brother Annet. Two Wallisian catechists on board, Pako and Apolonio joined the venture.

In June 1842 Pompallier had tried to open a mission on the Fijian island of Lakemba but soon found that Tongan influence was so strong that it made little sense to start anywhere else than in Tonga itself. On the invitation of the Tongan chief Fifita'ila he continued to Tongatapu, the main island in the Tongan group and succeeded to get the high chief of Pea to allow Father Chevron and Brother Attale to stay in Pea.²⁹

Now Bishop Bataillon did not hesitate to try again.³⁰ On 9 August 1844 the *Adolphe* dropped anchor in front of Lakeba where Pompallier had left the Tongan catechist Mosese (or Moïse) who had become a Catholic on Wallis. Captain Morvan sent his pilot Simmonet ashore to see if the visitors were welcome. He was soon back with the news that the Wesleyan ministers had gone for their annual synod but had left strict instructions not to allow papist priests to come ashore. Mosese, he was told, had left Lakeba for his native island Namuka.

Bataillon went ashore all the same. He met Tui Nayau, the high chief of Lakeba on the beach and asked for help and protection for the missionaries whom he wanted to leave on the island. The chief answered contemptuously 'Your people can remain here if they wish but I cannot house them, feed them or protect them'. Bataillon slept alone on the beach but when next morning the chief's attitude had not changed he decided to sail to Namuka to ask Mosese for advice. He found the island about a hundred kilometer to the south in the same Lau group after a very rough trip. It proved a small infertile island without good water supply and with barely eighty inhabitants.

They were told that Mosese had very recently returned to Lakeba what nobody had told them there but they were welcomed all the same and given the impression they would be allowed to stay. Bréhéret planted a large cross on a hill behind the village and the Bishop said the first Mass in Fiji, and again on 15 August, feast of the Assumption. The Captain of the *Adolphe* was increasingly reluctant to continue cruising through the uncharted waters of Fiji where Tongan war canoes could easily overpower a small ship like his. He considered it beyond the project he had signed up for. In any case, thinking that with the exceptional welcome on Namuka he had succeeded in opening the first

²⁹ MTF XIII, 6. Lātūkefu, *Church in Tonga*, 146.

³⁰ MTF XIII, 5. The following account is taken mainly from Alfred Deniau, SM (1836-1907) *The Catholic Church in Fiji 1844-1886* (ms in APM, translated by John Crispin, SM, private publication, Suva, no date).

mission in Fiji, Bishop Bataillon left the three missionaries there and returned to Wallis where he arrived on 18 August 1844.³¹

Shortly after the Bishop's departure a canoe arrived from Lakeba and the Namuka people were told that Tui Nayau had already refused to receive these same visitors and that on orders of King George of Tonga all the islands in the Lau group were strictly forbidden to allow them ashore. The Namuka people took fright and the missionaries were told they could not stay. In the meantime they had come to see that Namuka was too small anyhow, and not a suitable place for a mission station.

They decided that Roulleaux would return to Lakeba. He asked the man who had come from Lakeba if he would take him and Pako there and on Lakeba he went to look for Mosese. He found him in utter misery, 'prosecuted by the chiefs, abandoned by his family, hated and scorned by all for his faith, scarcely able to find a little food. (...) Under pressure of the Wesleyan ministers he had begun reading their bible and stopped wearing the rosary around his neck.'³²

Hoping he could get rid of these 'popi' Finau, the representative of King George on Lakeba, took it upon himself to pick up Father Bréhéret, Brother Annet and Apolonio from Namuka. Finau even offered to take them all to Somosomo on the large island of Taveuni if they wished. All sorts of complications delayed their departure and while waiting they walked all over Lakeba and made a few contacts. When Finau became ill and died he was replaced by another Tongan governor, Ma'afu, who intensified the persecution to the point that people insulted them and sometimes threw stones at them if they walked through a village.

Ma'afu's behaviour was so extreme that one day, in July 1845, Tui Nayau came to see the missionaries and said:

'Priests, don't worry, we Fijians know that all the words of the European Wesleyans, all the words of Ma'afu are pure lies. We know that their conduct in your regard is unworthy and we are revolted by it. See, here is a piece of land, establish yourselves here, build your house on this land and remain in Lakeba.'³³

They moved from the old grass hut where they had stayed with Mosese, to their new place and built a house with material they gathered in the bush themselves. Several years of destitution and persecution followed but in the end the unwavering determination of the missionaries won the day. The mission on Fiji had begun.

An odd situation

With all these brave and promising developments a strange situation had developed. The Apostolic Vicariate of Western Oceania was divided and reduced to New Zealand. In mid 1842 the islands in Polynesia as well as Melanesia that according to the founding act of 1836 belonged to Western Oceania³⁴ were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the

³¹ Bataillon to Colin, 20 August 1844, LRO 3, Doc 345, 6.

³² Deniau, *The Catholic Church*, 21.

³³ Deniau, *The Catholic Church*, 26.

³⁴ MTF, 16.

Vicar Apostolic Bishop Pompallier to form the new Vicariate of Central Oceania. But a year and a half later the Bishop himself did not know it yet!³⁵ Moreover, equally unknown to Pompallier, without his advice and agreement one of his priests had been promoted to the bishopric and had taken over the administration of the new Vicariate to the point of moving missionaries from postings where Pompallier had put them and of founding a new mission in the Fiji Islands. To top it off this new Bishop even had an Auxiliary who had opened a new mission in New Caledonia.

Because of the problems of communicating with Oceania, Propaganda in Rome had from the beginning taken the easy way of sending most letters and even official documents to the Marist general house in Lyon, leaving it to Father Colin to forward them as and when possible. On his part, Colin had found it soon more convenient, safer and cheaper to keep all letters, documents and money until the next departure of missionaries. As a result nobody in Oceania knew of new groups of missionaries on the way until they actually got there.

On this occasion too, nobody had considered it necessary to send a fast letter by ordinary mail via London and Sydney which would have taken four to five months. Admittedly, in this case it had the advantage of not giving Bishop Pompallier an opening to interfere in the implementation of the changes taking place while everyone who knew him would have expected him to object. That the missionaries travelled on French naval vessels going round Cape Horn meant that everyone including Bishop Pompallier remained ignorant of things happening until January 1844 when the *Bucéphale* called at the Bay of Islands³⁶ after dropping the first missionaries in New Caledonia. With a little creative management Bishop Pompallier could have been spared the humiliating situation he was put in by the way things were in fact done.

³⁵ Cf above, p 6.

³⁶ Cf above, 6.