Tubuan

and

Tabernacle

1882 - 2007

The life stories of two priests of Papua New Guinea

The Most Reverend Benedict To Varpin CBE
Archbishop Emeritus.

Reverend Father Bernard Franke MSC, CBE
Missionary in New Britain

by

Mary R. Mennis
MA, MSocSc, Dip Ed.

Mary Mennis has always had a great interest in the Oral History of the people of Papua New Guinea, and had spent many years in researching their traditions. This research has led to her two Masters Degrees, the first from the University of Papua New Guinea and the second from James Cook University, Queensland. Apart from her degrees, Mary has also published several books based on her research.

By the same Author:

They came to Matupit (Vunapope Mission Press)
Tolai Myths of Origin (with Janssen and Skinner) (Jacaranda Press)
Time of the Taubar (Kristen Pres)
Hagen Saga (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies)
History of St. Dympna's School and Parish
Kain, Friend of Maclay (Kristen Pres)
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Sailing for Survival (Unpublished Masters Thesis)
Hullo Eccles (Lalong Enterprises)
Book of Eccles (Lalong Enteprises)
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In writing this book, Mary Mennis utilized many sources, including existing publications, interviews, letters and old documents, acknowledgement to which is given in the text.

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Design and photographs by Brian Mennis.
The *tubuan* was photographed on Matupit Island in 1974.
The tabernacle was photographed on the altar of St Michael's Parish Church on Matupit Island in 1971. Constructed of bronze in the shape of a coconut, the tabernacle is an early example of Papua New Guinean influence coming into the rituals of the Catholic Church.

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Author's Note

This year, 2007, is the 125th anniversary of the Sacred Heart Missionaries in New Britain. They arrived on Matupit Island on the Feast of St Michael, 29 September 1882. To commemorate this event, there will be celebrations in Rabaul, Vunapope and all over Papua New Guinea. The history of the Mission and the traditional culture and beliefs of the Tolai people provide the background for this present book.

This story is about two priests: one a German and the other a Papua New Guinean from the Rabaul area of New Britain. Fr Bernard Franke arrived from Germany in 1928 when he was 26 years old, full of missionary zeal and spent the following 50 years in New Britain. Archbishop Benedict To Varpin grew up in the Tolai society with all the traditional tribal customs. Both were wonderful men who exemplify St Paul's message about the importance of love.

Fr Franke, an expatriate, viewed the people of New Britain and their culture from the outside looking in, whereas Benedict To Varpin, a Tolai man, viewed the culture from the inside looking out.

Fr Franke wanted his biography to be called *A Priest is not His Own* to emphasis the fact that once he was ordained, he belonged to the people. Benedict To Varpin, however, wanted his biography to be named, *Thy Will be Done*, stressing more the obedience to his vows in his life and doing what was asked of him. Both amount to the same idea really: *Doing God's will in the Service of Others*. Both had the same goals as priests giving their lives to God and were united in their love of the Tolai people.

The title finally chosen here illustrates the place of the church alongside the traditional culture of the people. The missionaries in Rabaul and other places of Papua New Guinea are succeeding in contextualizing the Gospel to make it more relevant in the people's lives. The tabernacle on the cover is in the shape of a coconut and is found in the St Michael's Church on Matupit Island, which was Fr Franke's Parish between 1951 and 1984. The coconut is seen as the "Bread of Life" in the tropics just as is the Eucharist, so that too is meaningful. The importance of the image of the *tubuan* will be seen throughout the book. The *tubuan*, for a long time looked upon with absolute disfavour by the Church because of its "heathen connotations", is now allowed. Much of this change in attitude was achieved by Herman To Paivu when he was Archbishop of Port Moresby and Benedict To Varpin when he was Bishop of Bereina. Together, they worked and succeeded in having the better aspects of this important Tolai custom recognized. And now, as they say, it is everywhere and the Tolai people are happy with the decision. An Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, by Pope John Paul in 1990 has confirmed this attitude to inculturation.

In several letters over the years, Fr Franke expressed surprise that I wanted to go ahead with the book about him. "Is it not too much?" When I had suggested that he write his autobiography, he replied: "Please forget about an autobiography by poor old Fr Franke.

I will be only too happy to provide you with answers to some questions. It would be better if you would do it in your own way as an experienced writer and quote as much as you like from all my written memoirs."

So in writing this book, I have included parts of Fr Franke's articles including ones he sent home to his monastery at Hiltrup. One was about his little blind friend, Leda, whom we will meet down on the West New Britain mission. Other articles were about the time he burnt his feet when he climbed Pago volcano twice while it was erupting and faced down the fiery monster. The people believed that it stopped erupting when he blessed it.

Fr Franke merely referred to the translator of these articles as a "good lady in Kokopo" without giving her a name. I am deeply grateful to her. Although I did edit the translations slightly, they could still be used as primary source material about those early mission days in West New Britain. Joan Brierley, a friend of mine and, at that time, secretary of District Commissioner in Rabaul, typed up these diaries so I thank her for this, long after her death. Fr Franke accepted the translations that were made and sent me copies of them. Of course, I also interviewed Fr Franke on a number of occasions and was able to incorporate this information into his story. In addition, he was interviewed by Rob Moore of the ABC Rabaul and Fr Franke gave permission to use this material.

By combining these two life stories we get a book that overlaps both their lives. Fr Franke is no longer with us and I cannot ask his permission to do this but I know he would be honoured. Bishop Benedict is very happy to be linked with Fr Franke, "his best friend". So here we have stories from the old days and some very amusing anecdotes to keep memories of those days alive.

For the last 45 years I have been part of this story, albeit a small part on the periphery. I first met Fr. Bernard Franke in January 1962, soon after I arrived in Rabaul. He had just finished saying Mass in the Cathedral and, as usual, was greeting everyone as they left the church. He encouraged everyone to "Keep Smiling". When I was teaching on Matupit Island, I met Fr Franke again in his parish there and he introduced me to Paulina Ia Dok, an elderly woman whose life spans most of this book. His house had the words of the song on one wall about love not being love until you give it away. He often recited these lines. One day school children took me over to the Tavurvur Volcano and, after we reached the top, I climbed down inside it on a rope. It was always smoking in those days and smelt of rotten eggs from the sulphur yellow rocks, which caked the bottom of the crater. Thirty years later, this volcano erupted with such ferocity it destroyed the town of Rabaul. These two priests, Frs Benedict and Bernard, had first hand experiences of eruptions, earthquakes and tidal waves in Rabaul and West New Britain.

Brian and I married in 1964 and over the years, Fr Franke baptised our first two children John and Paul. We called our first-born John Bernard after him. Sometimes, Fr Franke told us about his life and it sounded fascinating. During a trip to Europe in 1980, I visited his hometown of Warendorf, met his family and saw the house, dating back to the 17th century, in which he was born.

Fr Franke loved the old customs of his hometown especially at Easter and Christmas. Often in West New Britain on his mission stations he was nostalgic about them and wished he could give the village children presents which he had enjoyed. There is a photograph of him giving dolls to all the Valoka children, much to their delight, although the concept was foreign to them. But, over the years, he learnt to appreciate the people's own feasts, customs and dances.

Benedict To Varpin was born in July 1936 at Volavolo. Initially he wanted to be a builder and carpenter as a tradesman but he went on to be builder in the church in his years of service between 1971 and 2001.

In 1965, Fr O'Hanlon asked me to tutor Benedict in Latin. He had been studying in the Sacred Heart Seminary but had left. One reason was his Latin was a bit shaky. He followed external courses to Junior and Matriculation. Benedict was a serious student and he seemed quite a devout young man. I thought at the time that he would make a good priest and I was proved right.

Benedict was ordained in 1971; became Bishop of Bereina in 1980; and Archbishop of Madang in 1987. A devout man, he spent his life building up the church not only physically with buildings and but also spiritually. Bishop Benedict is a man of integrity who through his example showed his own people the way to the future. He met Pope John Paul II on several occasions in PNG and in Rome.

Unfortunately, we were in Mt Hagen at the time of Benedict's ordination in 1971 in Rabaul and were unable to attend. We saw him there later in the middle of that same year when the area was struck with two strength eight earthquakes, when Fr Benedict held the fort at the presbytery and Fr Franke was at Matupit. Soon afterwards we moved to Madang and eight years later to Port Moresby. We were still there when Benedict became a Bishop in Bereina and travelled down the coast to the great celebrations. It was a great achievement for him.

Benedict remembered our family:

> I was based in Rabaul as the assistant Parish Priest and I had no way of going for a swim but Mary and Brian would pick me up to go for a swim. I had no car and they worried about me, I said "Oh I have my work, I don't need a car". But they said I could have their old car for a cheap amount, which I got from my father. Then they taught me to get my licence and I was able to drive around town. I was just a young *raskel* in the village doing my work. When I was being consecrated Bishop in Bereina they were already in Port Moresby so they were able to go to the ceremony at Bereina. There is a tie there. I know a lot of people, but they have a special tie.

Bishop Benedict found the culture of the Bereina mission to be very French in history and outlook. In many ways, it was different to the Rabaul mission with its German influence. Furthermore, he had to co-operate with the different Orders as he moved from one Province to another: In Bereina and Rabaul it was the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart; In Madang,

it was the Society of Divine Word, where the missionaries were from America, Poland, Korea, Ireland, Germany and many locals from Papua New Guinea. As Bishop he was in charge of all the parishes in the Province and everyone brought their problems to him. But on the reverse side he was able to have a great influence in the wider community on the people, the parishioners, the clergy and the other religious. It as a great responsibility but his attitude was, *Thy Will Be Done*.

We had moved to Australia by the time Benedict became Archbishop of Madang but we continued to keep in touch. Sometimes when he came to Australia for meetings or for medical reasons, he stayed with us. In 1994, when I returned to Papua New Guinea for a few months on long service leave to continue my research into the Madang people, I stayed at the Catholic Mission in Madang. Benedict, as Archbishop, was on call for Confirmations on the furthest mission stations and asked me along. We visited Bundi by light aircraft, then down the Ramu River to Kayan on canoes and lastly to Utu not far from Madang. At each place the people were dressed in their feathers and finery and it was wonderful the way the people have brought their culture into the church, which seems to be flourishing. They liked Archbishop Benedict because "he is one of us."

I think the most interesting story is the fact that Benedict To Varpin's grandfather welcomed the first missionaries to Volavolo. He was attracted to the Latin when they sang the *Te Deum*. So this book is also about our *Te Deum*. Thank you God for Benedict To Varpin and Bernard Franke and their lives and souls. They were Two of God's Men.

This book is dedicated to all missionaries in Papua New Guinea, past and present, who have lived similiar lives and made similiar sacrifices to those of Fr Bernard Franke and Archbishop Benedict To Varpin.

Te Deum Laudamus.

Acknowledgements:

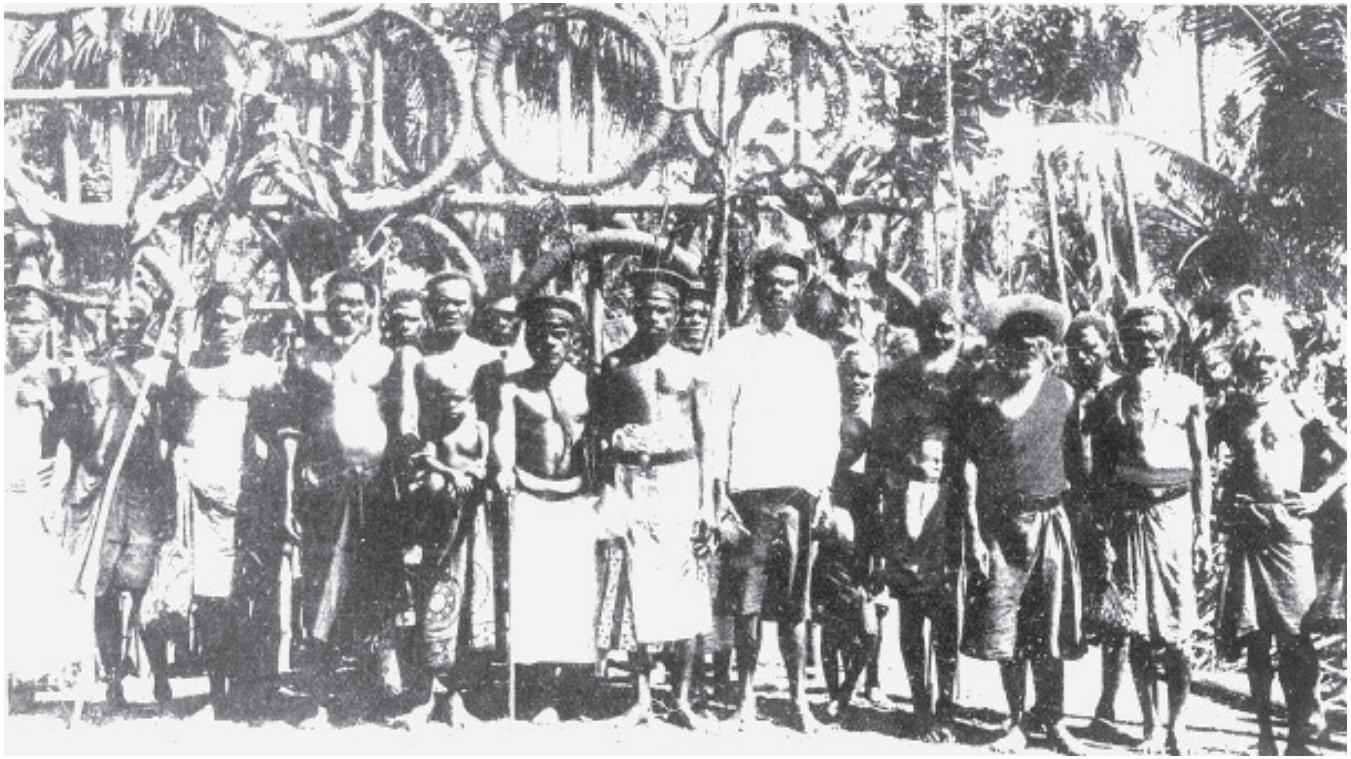
In 2006, I was contacted by Sylvia and Stephen Chow who were organising a reunion of ex-students of the Yang-Ching/Sacred Heart School. As these ex-students have fond memories of Fr Franke, I was encouraged to finish this book in time for the dinner to be held in Brisbane at the end of June 2007. Stephen and Sylvia were instrumental in arranging for the photographs of the Chinese community to be made available to me. Furthermore, their friends, John Seeto and Peter Humphries sent the photographs of the modern churches of Valoka and Bitokara. James Woo and Sir Julius Chan were very helpful with their memories of Fr Franke.

In writing this book, there are many other people I would like to thank: Ed Newman for acting as "postman" between Bishop Benedict and myself; Jacinta Mennis for help with sorting the photographs; my daughter Joanna Hoy, my son Gregory Mennis, my cousin, Fr Ian Howells S.J, and Alan Tarbit for the tedious work of editing; Mrs Christiane Harding helped with translations on the photographs of West New Britain; Fr Bill Talentino OFM Cap of St Fidelis College, Kap, in Madang; Moira and Martin O'Sullivan; Cathy and Agatha Lui; Fr Bob Mitchell MSC has been a fund of knowledge about the MSC mission in Rabaul; in the Kensington Monastery in Sydney I received much assistance and encouragement from the librarian, Fr Tony Caruana MSC, and Fr Paul Stenhouse MSC, editor of the *Annals* Magazine; my husband, Brian, gave his unfailing support and technical knowledge in putting the text and photographs together: without his help and expert knowledge this book would not have been produced.

The photographs have come from many and varied sources: some were obtained from friends; some were given to me by Fr Franke and Archbishop Benedict; some of them are mine; some were obtained from old books which are out of copyright; and last, but not least, many are from members of the Chinese community from Rabaul, now resident in Australia. Unfortunately, the names of many of the donors are unknown or have been lost, so the decision was taken that no attempt would be made to acknowledge each photograph in the text. However, I thank you all for allowing me to use your photographs, as it is the photographs that help to make the book.

Lastly, without the help and co-operation of Bishop Benedict and Fr Franke, who allowed themselves to be interviewed over the years and who provided written and photographic records, this book could not have been written.

Mary Mennis,
Brisbane
June 2007.



Group of Tolai villagers at a feast in 1904. Note the luluai *and* tultul *in the front with their caps of office and the coils of* tabu *on the fence behind the group.*

Foreword

Very often in life, children do better than their parents, or in scholastic terms, the tyro or student does better than the master or teacher – but not always! Fr Franke guided my early steps when I was newly-ordained – but I could never come near him in practice as a priest and missionary. At the same time, at Ulapia and Bomana, I taught Benedict To Varpin – but, like several others I taught, he accomplished so much more for the Church than I could ever dream of. I thank God for knowing both of them and welcome this unique biographical work of Mary Mennis where their lives are in wonderful tandem.

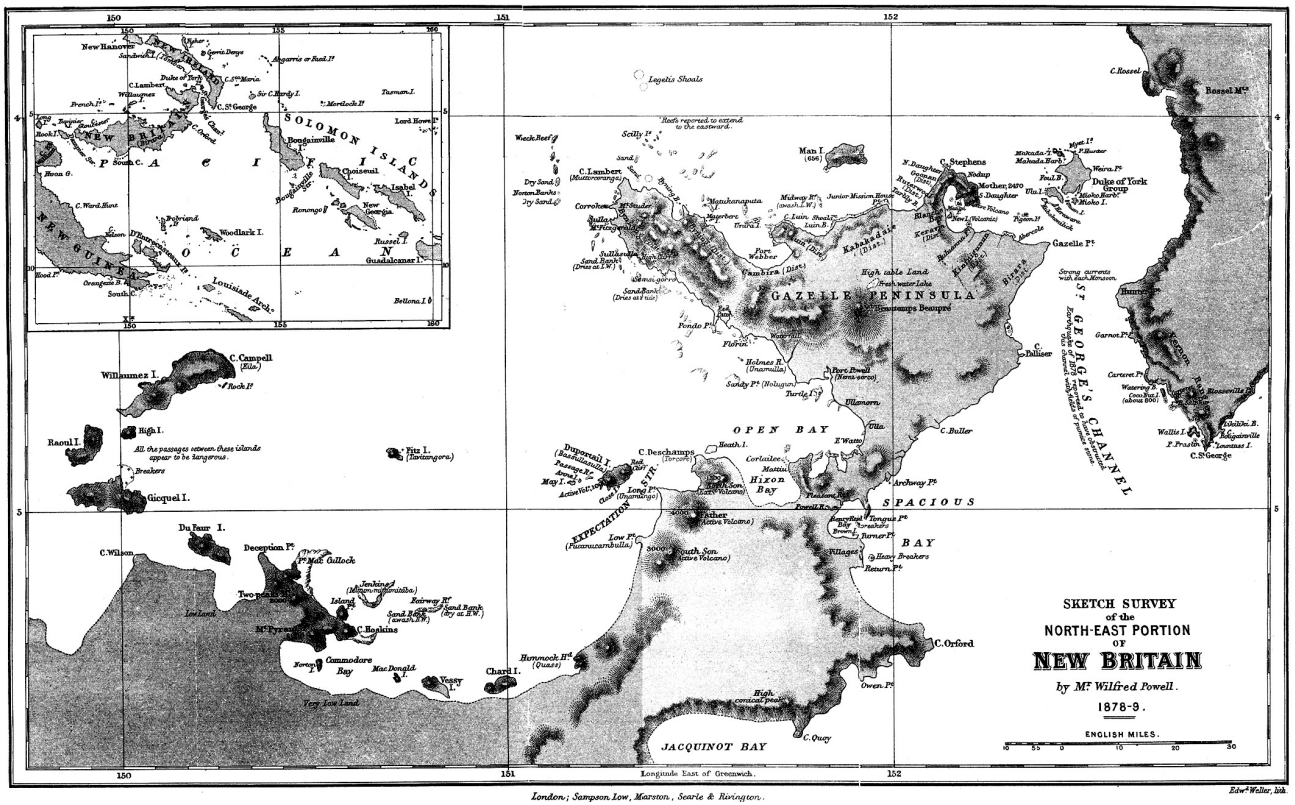
Recently, Pope Benedict told how a bishop once asked a humble, hidden Canossian Sister, now Saint Bakhita, what she did in the convent. She replied: "The same as you do", meaning, "God's will". There is much linking the lives of Franke and To Varpin, as the authoress of this book brings out so well. But surely the real nexus of their lives is their persistent and long-lasting faithfulness in doing what God asked of them – whether hard or easy, whether in this place or that.

There are many places and people whose names are mentioned in this book, which will be familiar to those who lived and worked in New Britain or elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. Memories of such will have new meaning when given life by the experiences and personal anecdotes woven together by Mary in her book.

May the lives of Fr Franke and Archbishop Benedict To Varpin provide interesting and informative reading to many in Papua New Guinea and Australia. And, still more importantly, may those lives give example and encouragement to all who have in them even the smallest spark of missionary enthusiasm!

Fr Bob Mitchell MSC
16 April 2007.

Fr Bob Mitchell MSC



East New Britain as known at the time of the first MSC Missionaries.

(See Powell, 1883)

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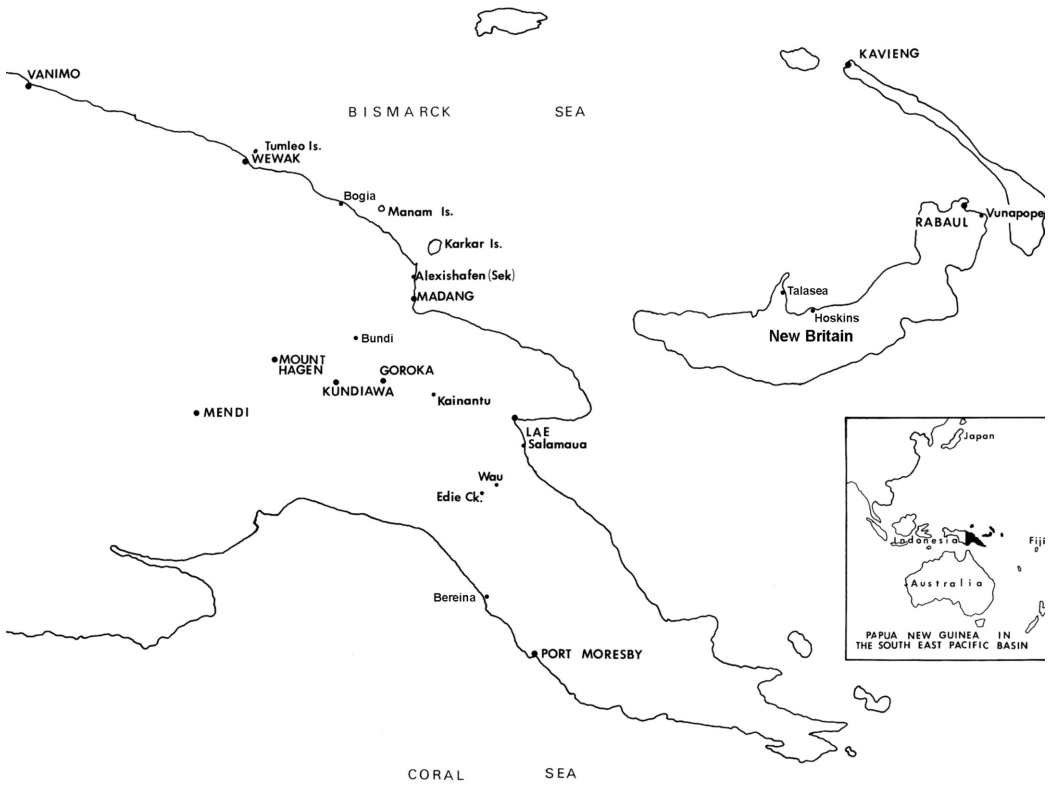
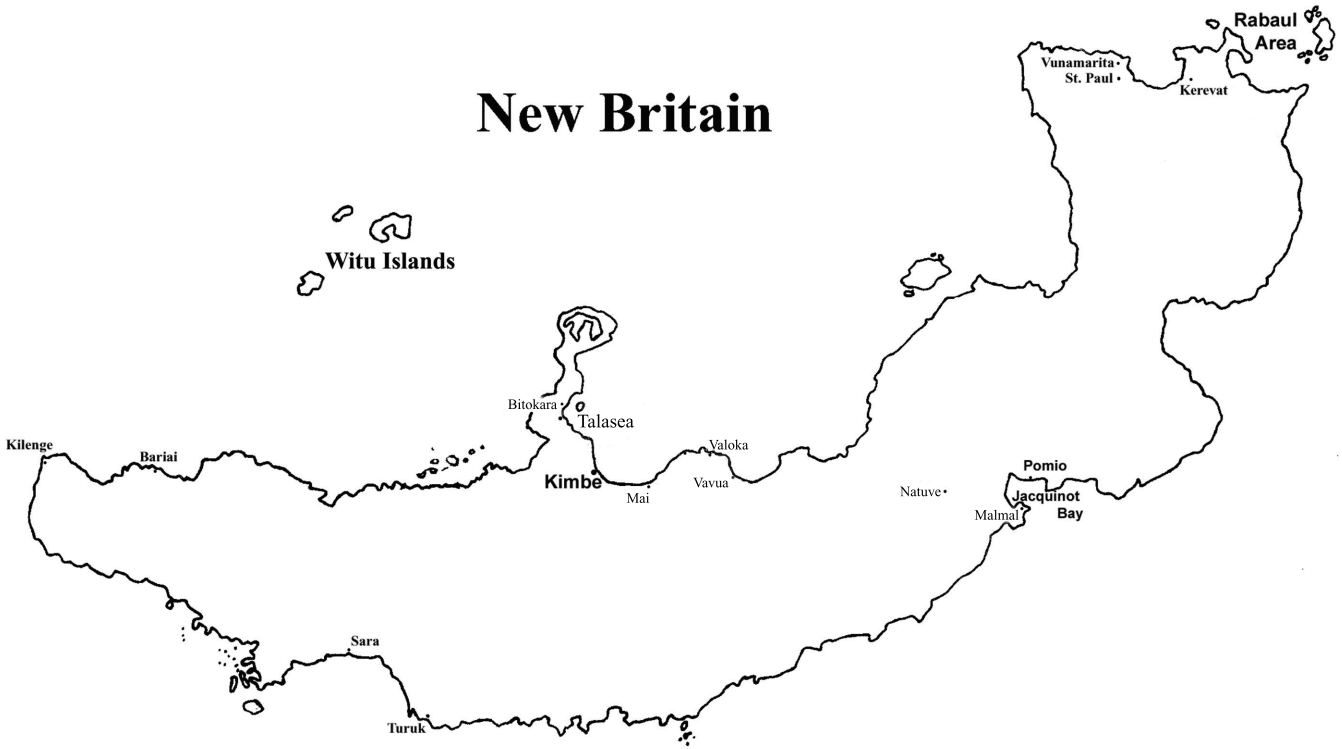
A dukduk *on left and a* tubuan *with a face painted on it.*

PAPUA NEW GUINEA




New Britain
Rabaul
Area
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Chapter 1

Time of the *Tubuan*: New Britain before the Missionaries

The Great Kaia,To Lagulagu, was alone; all, all alone; he lived in deep darkness. To Kabinana and To Purgo had not come yet. There was deep darkness; only deep darkness. The Kaia drew two male figures on the ground. He scratched his skin and wet the drawings with the dripping blood. He broke off two leaves and covered the figures with them. Later they became two men, To Kabinana and To Purgo. To Kabinana and To Purgo came and with them the sun. Both said, "it is still night, but tomorrow the sun will shine, so there will be times of day and times of night". Both created these areas. Both made the gardens.

To Kabinana then ran and climbed a coconut palm, plucked two unripe coconuts, both light yellow, and threw them to the ground where they burst open and became two women. When To Purgo asked him, "where did these women come from?" Kabinana said to him, "pluck two young coconuts and throw them down". To Purgo threw two coconuts down, but the lower end of the nuts struck the ground. Because of this, his two women had crushed, battered noses.

When To Purgo saw that his brother's women were more beautiful than his own, he did not rest until he got one of them as his wife, disdaining his own two women because of their crushed noses. If now a brother-in-law takes his sister-in law, it stems from To Purgo who insisted on marrying his sister-in-law. To Kabinana found fault with what his brother had done and said, "you corrupt our mortal race" (Collected by Fr Joseph Meier MSC in early 1900s).

Overlooking Matupit Island is the yawning crater of Tavurvur which is said to be the home of To Lagulagu, the great *Kaia*. His wife was reportedly Ia Kupia who was a *tubuan*. To Lagulagu created the two culture heroes, To Kabinana and To Purgo. The two brothers were the first men and created the sea and places on the land. To Kabinina created all the good

The white gaping crater is Tarvurvur. In the foreground are the Davapia Rocks.

places and things, but To Purgo created all the bad places and the ugly people. Because of To Purgo's misdeeds, man lost his immortality.

Some Tolai myths were collected before any outside influence may have changed them. Fr Joseph Meier MSC, Fr Meyer MSC and Fr Kleintitschen MSC collected the myths and as much information they could about the culture of the people so they could understand their beliefs and customs. Myths like the one above were used to reinforce the people's laws about morality. No one wanted to be dubbed another To Purgo! Fr Hermann Janssen said that religion in traditional Melanesia is based on a few assumptions: in the beginning gods (or one god) created the world; in order to achieve success in any personal or social activity, men have to perform the proper ritual in the name of the relevant god; spirits of the dead are supposed to be the protectors of the interests of their living descendants; in return for these services men have to honour the spirits of the dead in dance, song offerings and feasts (Janssen, 1972a: 13). Through their own cultural environment they had their own idea of a supreme being or beings that had to be supplicated.

Archbishop Herman To Paivu had this to say about his Tolai people:

> The Tolai people had religion. Some belonged to a secret *iniet* society and made gods out of wood or stone. They believed in various higher beings. The members of the secret society were forbidden to eat pig and that is the reason for the lack of pigs in this district even today. The chiefs sought to obtain as much *tabu,* shell money, as possible in order to become higher beings in the spirit world. To obtain *tabu*, they traded in taro, coconut and women for marriage. They had the idea of sacrifice for they would place well-cooked food in the bush to be eaten by the departed spirits. ——Every *tubuan* is supposed to have a stone, called *palavat*, which is to enrich the clan. Every altar is supposed to have an altar stone on which the sacrifice of the Holy Mass is offered for the salvation of mankind (Steinbauer, 1974: 145, 153).

Dukduk *on canoes at Matupit Island.*

Fr. Kleintitschen MSC wrote extensively about their spirit world. The people believed there are various levels of spirits, the highest are the *Kaia*, the next are the *tutana viriket* and the lowest are the *tabarans*. When they die, most people become *tabarans* and the treatment they receive depends on how much of their money was distributed on their death. Because of this belief, every Tolai strove to accumulate as much *tabu* as possible. This was stored in great coils which were usually only broken on the death of the owner (Kleintitschen, 1907).

A poor man is very badly off in the spirit world. He is driven out by the more successful and dashed against the trunks of the banyan tree, and then left to take up his abode in a flying-fox. It was thought that when a person is dying, the *tabarans* come for his spirit and show him no mercy. Often they fly off with a spirit before the person dies because they believe there are two stages in death: firstly when the spirit leaves the body; and secondly when the body stops functioning. There could be as much as several days between the two stages. As soon as the *tabarans* have conquered a soul they abduct it to the *mata na Kaia*. These are eerie caves in thick bush and are the entrances to the spirit world. The *iniet* society was associated with very strong sorcery. Members could enter crows or sharks if they wanted to harm their enemies.

At Matupit in the 1960s, I (the author) spoke to an old man, Daniel Kaputin, who told me that the sprit of an *iniet* member could enter shark's bodies and swim across the bay. I inquired what would he do if he were out fishing and caught a shark. "How would you know if it was inhabited by a man's spirit? If you killed the shark, you may kill its spirit too". He replied that the men would know by the way the shark shook its tail. If it shook it in a certain way, they would not kill it but would release it.

Iniet figures or stone statues were purported to make any uninitiated member paralysed if they touched them. The *iniet's* sacred ground was known as the *marawot.* A.L.Epstein wrote that, according to the Vunapope papers, most adult Tolai males belonged to the *iniet*. The dances of the *iniet* were sometimes seen as great entertainment and, in the 1880s, there is a record of crowds gathered to watch a dance held on a high platform.

Even in recent times, payback killing was associated with the *iniet*. A Highlands man on one of the oil palm settlements allegedly killed a Tolai man, who was a member of this society. In retribution, as the story goes, a member of the deceased's clan, a *tena iniet*, put his spirit into a shark, and swam all the way to Cape Hoskins to kill the perpetrator (Epstein, 1999).

There was second type of secret society amongst the Tolai people and that was the *Tubuan* Society which was not as harmful as the *iniet*. There are various versions of the origin of the *tubuan* but most go like this:

> The first *tubuan* came to the people on Duke of York Islands not many generations past. It was found by a woman at Birara, New Britain, floating on four coconuts. She took it up, tried it on, found it too long as it went to the ground. She made braces to suspend it with, and so it remains now. She dressed in it and soon exhibited it and got

> lots of shell money. The men, however, got jealous and said that the women were not tall enough for it and so they bought it and forbade women to go near it ever afterwards (Brown, 1910: 68).

George Brown, a pioneer Wesleyan Minister who lived in New Britain in 1878, gave an account of the *tubuan* and *dukduk* both of which imitate the cassowary.

> The *dukduk* was dressed in a full leaf girdle, composed of rings of leaves strung together extending from the breast to below the knees. The upper part of the body was covered by high conical mask gaily ornamented, made of wickerwork, and covered in leaves or cloth. This extended down over the shoulders and arms and rested upon the leaf girdle, so that the whole of the man's body was covered with the exception of the legs. The female ones, the *tubuan,* breed new *dukduk* (ibid: 63).

The dress of the *tubuan* is very similar to the *dukduk* but its mask is wider and has a large face painted on it. *Tubuan* masks have a cane frame open enough for the man to see where he is going without tripping over. As it hides the wearer's face, the only way a *tubuan* can be identified is by its legs. For this reason, the *tubuan* will squat to hide its legs under the fluttering leaves. The *tubuan* had a special area a sacred piece of land and a house like a clubhouse, the *taraiu*, surrounded by a fence made from high woven mats supported by posts to stop prying eyes. Women and uninitiated men or boys dared not go near the area. It was inside the *taraiu* that the outfits of the *dukduk* and *tubuan* were prepared. From here the *tubuan* went out, whooping and dancing, to terrify or amuse the people. At the time of initiation into the *tubuan* society, the father took his son to the *taraiu* to meet the *tubuan* who sat inside. The boys were charged ten fathoms of shell money to join and

A taraiu *where the* tubuan *meet. Two* tubuan *are in the middle and the figures on the sides are* dukduk*. The* tubuan *are the "mothers" of the* dukduk

were then beaten by other members, but not too much. While in the *taraiu*, they would be initiated by learning the customs of the tribe and what it meant to be a man in the village. The *tubuan* were much tamer than the *iniet*, which had their secret place in the *motonoi* where the fish-traps were made for fishing. Women and uninitiated men or boys dared not go near the *motonoi* either.

Neville Threlfall said that the early Methodist missionaries initially opposed both the *iniet* and the *tubuan* "because of the oppressive actions of members towards the rest of the community; but the *tubuan* was seen as the less harmful of the two and Danks looked forward with prophetic insight to the time when, if it continued, it would only be as a harmless social custom" (Threlfall, 1975: 58). Now the *tubuan* are accepted everywhere and it is quite common for schools to have their own *tubuan* with its special name and to have initiation ceremonies to teach children the rules of the society.

The Tolai had two main types of sorcerers: the *tena papait*, the good sorcerer who could cure the sick by using medicines. If a person had experienced the first stage of dying and his spirit had already left his body, it was believed that the sorcerer could be successful in bringing the escaped spirit back into the body so that death did not set in; the other is the *tena agagar* who is out to harm people with his sorcery.[1]

To Mulue, an old chief whose story was known to his descendants, was born about 1820 or 1830. He was a member of both secret societies, the *tubuan* and the *iniet*. He was also a *tena papait* and was paid to cure other people when they lay ill with fever or dying from a spell of the *tena agagar*. To Mulue had been taught which plants in the bush could be used for medicine and what quantities to use. He had learnt the special rituals that must be followed and secret words that must be said. Often he dusted the patient's body with lime and then blew it off. This was thought to chase away the evil spirit who had caused the disease and bring back the spirit of the patient if it had already left the body in the first stage of dying.

As a young man,To Mulue paddled a canoe from Matupit to the Duke of York Islands. He must have been brave to travel that far alone because the people living along the coast were all enemies of the Matupit people. Had he been caught in a storm and washed ashore, he would have been killed and eaten for certain. While at the Duke of Yorks, To Mulue was given a *tubuan* of his own in secret ceremonies. He called his *tubuan, Ia Maka,* after his dead mother. *Ia Maka* became one of the most famous *tubuan* on Matupit Island. The shell money which the initiates paid when they joined the *Ia Maka tubuan* was added to To Mulue's hoard. After many years his coils of tabu were so great he gave it a special name, *To Paia*, and built a larger hut to contain it, and it was known as the *Pal Tabu*, a house for shell money. To Mulue was sure he would have a high place when he died, for didn't he have enough saved to buy all his material needs in the spirit world?

Shell money did not come locally but was imported from Nakanai, West New Britain, as a trade item, or collected there by the Tolai people themselves. A piece of shell money from 4 to 10 shells is called a *tip,* whereas 20 shells is termed a *tabu na arip*. *Tabu* was used in the markets as currency long before the outsiders ever came to Rabaul and each

Coils of tabu *or shell money. These are broken and distributed after a funeral.*

piece had a set monetary value used to buy vegetables, fish, canoes, bush materials and brides in marriage. Markets to exchange trade items for food were often held on the beach or in clearings on the boundaries of two tribal areas.

Rev R. H. Rickard attended one of these markets and reported on it in 1890:

> People of two or more small districts meet every third day to buy and sell. Here the women begin to assemble early in the morning, bringing with them burdens more suitable for horses than for human beings – baskets of taro, yam, betelnut, coils of cane, and various other articles which they carry on their backs, suspended by a strap passed over their heads. Those who arrive first sweep the grassless market place, making it perfectly clean [to safeguard against sorcery]. Soon the place is crowded with hundreds of men and women. The latter sit or squat down with their baskets and spread out their taro or yams in sixes for sale. Their chatter is almost deafening, while they do a little trading amongst themselves. The men are standing about in little groups, some talking or joking boisterously, others speaking in a low voice, giving and receiving private commissions most secretly. Two old friends meet, one of whom takes a bit of *tabu*, about an inch long containing eight shells out of his basket, which he carries under his arm, and buys four or five betel nuts which he proffers to his friend. Like giving him a glass of wine (Rickard, 1915).

These trading scenes happened all over Papua New Guinea and show that various tribes could meet peacefully, and were not always at war with one another. The Tolai traded using the *tabu* shell money and exchanged goods and tools for food so badly needed by those who could not grow certain foodstuffs in their areas. In this way, their staple diet was extended. If they were inland people, they might want to buy fish freshly caught in the fish traps off the coast. The coastal people might buy the rolls of cane from the bush people to make the fish traps or to use as cane on which to thread the shell money. The fish traps were made on the beach and special magic was made over the traps before they are set in the sea to bring in fish but also to protect the trap from thieves.

Explorer and adventurer,Wilfred Powell, noted that the women had a tough life in the traditional society. Because the men spent long periods of time secluded in the *taraiu*, the women were the main carers of the family and also worked the gardens and cooked the meals:

> The women when young are well-made and upright, but as they grow older get, from the immense burdens they carry, an unnatural stoop, which they afterwards retain, whether carrying or not; they also age very quickly which may be partly the effect of the climate, but perhaps is more from the ill-treatment they receive at the hands of the men, who look on them as quite inferior. The women work in the yam patches to prepare them for planting, they turn up the ground with sharp sticks, and burn all the grass and weeds, then they plant the tubers which, when grown, the men condescend to dig it up. The women also do most of the marketing, the men as a rule only accepting payment (Powell, 1883: 54).

Women, who work in the fields and make some *tabu* by selling goods at the market, may be fined, for example, laughing at a man and making him feel bad in front of his friends. The women had no redress and should have been entitled to their own earnings. While the men were sitting in their *motonoi* or *taraiu* with the *tubuan* the women did most of the work and could become victims of the *dukduk* or *tubuan,* who could blackmail them. If the women were returning from their gardens, the *tubuan* could appear on their pathway and then fine them for seeing the *tubuan* figure. The *tubuan* and its members were a type of self imposed government laying down laws of their making and extorting shell money through fines and having a say in all tribal matters. In carrying out punishments, they were allowed to burn houses and even to kill people. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the German Government banned that side of the *tubuan* and it became more innocuous as time went on.

In the middle of the Rabaul Harbour are the Davapia Rocks[2] where Ia Dok, To Mulue's niece, was born in a tiny fishing village. Up until this century these rocks were much larger than they are today and canoes were pulled up high on the rocks for safety. Ia Dok's father, To Kurotete, was a strong sorcerer who was feared by many people. Ia Dok remembered how angry he was over the death of a near relative called To Vuvung. To Kurotete and his brother To Malan planned a payback killing to avenge his death. They decided that To Lakua, a man from Raluana, had caused their relative's death by poison and they set out to trap him. They pretended to be very friendly with him and invited him over to Davapia Rocks from Raluana. They brought him over in a canoe and asked him to make a *peo*, a large basket which has stones placed in it and which is used as an anchor for the fish traps.

The three of them worked on it and when it was finished, they all lay down to sleep. To Kurotete and his brother did not sleep though. They waited until To Lakua slept and then they killed him and put his body in the *peo* he had helped to make. Heaping stones on top of him, they put the basket into a canoe and pushed it out to sea. They paddled over

towards Malaguna and threw the body into the sea. When news of the killing spread to Raluana the relatives of To Lakua were very angry and planned to attack the two brothers on Davapia.

Soon the whole bay was full of canoes from Raluana and Kininigunan for To Lakua had relatives in both these areas. They brought their spears, slings and clubs and were all prepared for a big fight. However they didn't get very close because the two brothers were standing on top of Davapia Rocks, slinging rocks at the canoes. Their aim was good and they hit many in the canoes. Those in the canoes tried to throw their spears and rocks back but their aim was bad and their weapons did not even reach the beach. Suddenly they became frightened as they could see To Kurotete and his brother clearly making the *malan* charm to protect themselves and make their enemies in the canoes lose all their ability to throw their weapons. The two brothers were well known sorcerers and the people shrank from their strong magic. One after the other, the canoes turned and went home. All this time, Ia Dok was hiding in her house on Davapia. She was very frightened for she was sure her father and uncle were not strong enough to fight all those people at once. When she was ten she went to live in Matupit Village and looked after her uncle, To Mulue. Ia Dok lived to a very old age and well remembered the traditional way of life.

As can be seen, the Tolai people were famous warriors and liked to fight. Wilfred Powell went to Kininigunan across the bay from Matupit Island in 1878 to witness a fight and noticed how the men used slingshots with great accuracy and considerable force; "indeed I have seen a native discharge a stone to the distance of two hundred and fifty yards" (250 metres). A great shouting was raised by the Kininigunan tribe with the *too tooing* noise they make when excited" (ibid: 82). George Brown succeeded in bringing about a peace settlement between the Matupit and Kininigunan people in 1876, a peace that has never since been broken. Kininigunan is now the site of Vunapope Mission

Rev Fr. Bley MSC had quite a bleak view of the people's lives before the missionaries.

> They gave themselves to fighting, immorality, stealing, killing of infants and everywhere there was fear and sadness. The men of one place could not go to another place for fear of being killed. They were afraid to walk outside in the darkness because of the fear of evil spirits and fear even of their friends. Even inside the house they were afraid of the evil spirits or an enemy putting poison in the food or something. The devil degraded and held in chains the men of former times and was not happy about them following the light afterwards (Adela, 1968:9).

Some of this was true as described already but it was not all darkness in the time of *tubuan* as the people did enjoy their lives to a certain extent. It is doubtful the race would have survived if they were always killing each other and were completely downtrodden by fear. They had a great sense of humour and enjoyed conviviality with each other. The men went out fishing in their canoes or laid their fish traps and provided for the families; the women supported each other when they could and everyone enjoyed the market days when various groups came together for gossip, trading and bride purchases. The dances by the *tubuan* were seen as entertainment. It must be remembered that they had developed

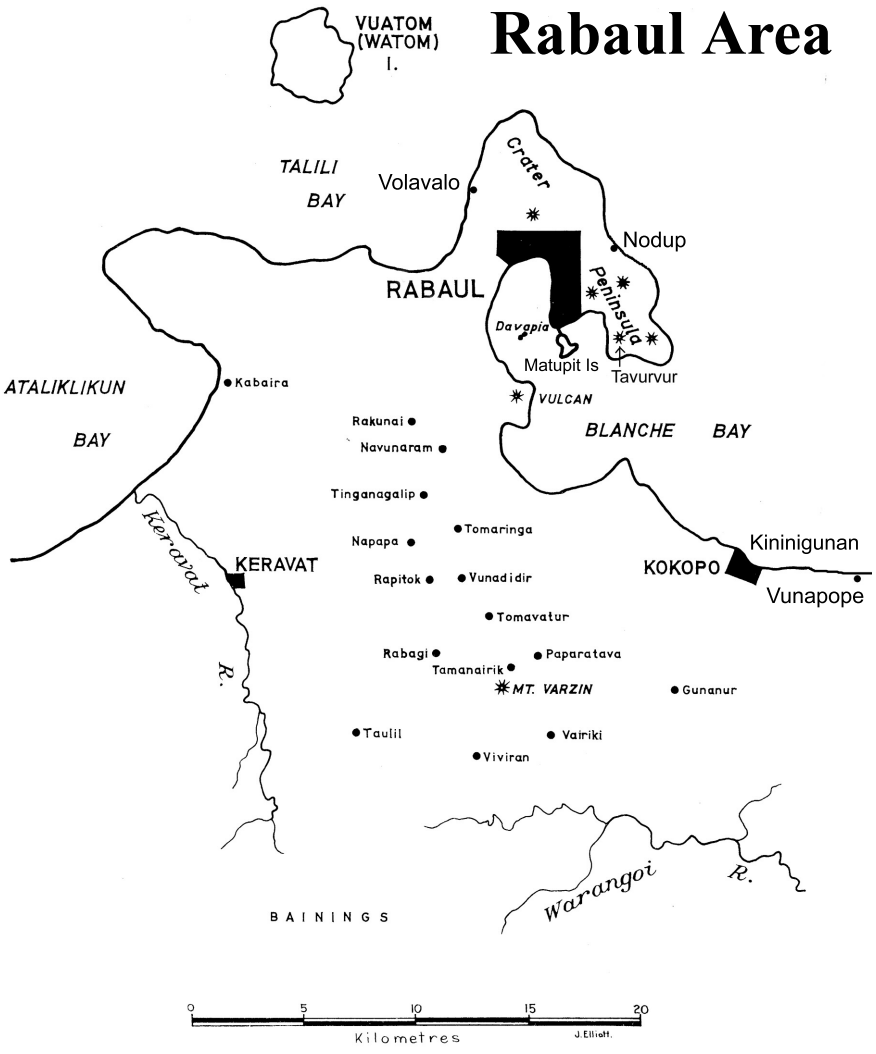
a way of life that helped them survive for thousands of years far from any European influence or help. They had their own artefacts, trade routes, and ways of building houses and large fish traps. They used the forests for materials for their tools, food and clothing. As shown, they had spiritual beliefs, which left the people living in fear: a fear of sorcery of warfare or of being extorted but, at the same time, they had their feasts and celebrations in life, their market days and social occasions.

God was there in the time of the *tubuan.* The people could sense his presence and had their own interpretation of him. The missionaries were usually well received and given every respect which shows there was already an ordered, social and political system in place. All was not mayhem, and Fr Franke, in particular, was amazed at how well he was received by people who had never seen a white man before. It was as if the people were waiting for him with his message of peace and hope.

Footnotes:

[1] *Any person who fainted or was unconscious would have been in the first stage of dying.*
[2] *George Brown recorded that the Davapia rocks were sinking in 1878.*

Fish-traps are made from cane, bamboo and vines. The big basket on the left is a peo *and is filled with stones to anchor the trap in the water.*


Rabaul Area
VUATOM
(WATOM)
I.
TALILI
BAY
Volavalo
Crater
Nodup
RABAUL
Peninsula
Davgpia
Matupit Is
Tavurvur
VULCAN
ATALIKLIKUN
BAY
Kabaira
Rakunai
Navunaram
BLANCHE BAY
Tinganagalip
Tomaringa
Napapa
Kininigunan
KERAVAT
Keravat R.
Rapitok
Vunadidir
KOKOPO
Vunapope
Tomavatur
Rabagi
Paparatava
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MT. VARZIN
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J.Elliott

Chapter 2

Volavolo, the First MSC Station in New Britain

Matupit Island with its central position and good anchorage attracted many traders during the 19th century. One trader, John Nash, even settled there for a short while in 1873. He got on quite well with the people who lived near his store. However, others further away became jealous and trouble developed after only a few months. When he was being attacked, he broke through a wall of his house and, firing shots in all directions, he ran for his boat which was anchored just below. He shot five people as he ran and barely managed to escape at all. After this no trader dared go to Matupit for fear of payback and the Matupit people acquired a reputation for being fierce fighters.

In 1875, Reverend George Brown, a Methodist Minister, landed at Port Hunter at the Duke of York Islands. He brought eight Fijian and Samoan teachers with him and set about establishing the first mission in the area. He bravely went unarmed on his visit to Matupit Island. The visit went smoothly and the Matupit people told him they did not want traders but were anxious to have a Fijian teacher. They could not bear to think that their great rival, Nodup, had two teachers whereas they had none. Without delay, the *lualua*, chief, To Porapora, sold Rev Brown some land on the point overlooking the volcanoes and he set about building a house for the teacher. However the Nodup *lualua* was so angry at the idea of losing one of his teachers that he attacked To Porapora who happened to be carrying a musket. Blood would have been spilt if Rev Brown had not intervened. Despite this trouble, Peni Caumi, a Fijian, went to live on Matupit and took his family with him. For some time, life went on as usual on Matupit Island.

In April 1878, when four of his Fijian missionaries were killed and eaten near Kabakada inland from the coast, George Brown was one of a group who made reprisal raids against the culprits (Brown, 1908: 259). Another tragedy occurred in 1886 and there were counter attacks against the Tolai and Baining people by the Germans trying to restore law and order. Many disputes were over the ownership of the land. The people often thought they were leasing the land for a certain amount of time. It was against their thinking to sell the land as it belonged to the tribe as a whole and was inherited through the mother's line.

After 1878, the Matupit people were no longer against traders, and Mr. Hernsheim established a trading station where German, English and Australian ships called into the deep anchorage off Kikila Bay. In 1884, when the Germans raised their flag on Matupit and declared the area a German Protectorate, Mr Hernsheim was made German Consul. In 1886, the first German judge took up residence on the island. Thus began the period of German Administration which was to end with the First World War

Father Rene-Marie Lannuzel was the first Catholic priest in the Rabaul area. He had come out with the Marquis de Ray's expedition but, when this failed, he contacted Mr Hernsheim and discussed the setting up of a Catholic Mission near Rabaul. He travelled over the saddle between the North Daughter and the Mother (Kombiu) volcanoes to Nodup where

Houses used by the missionaries at Nodup in 1882.

To Litur, the *lualua*, befriended him. Later he shifted to Volavolo where he was attacked by tribal warriors, but managed to escape. After sometime, he left New Britain and went to Auckland, New Zealand where he became a parish priest, no doubt regaling his new parishioners with tales of wild New Britain.

In 1881, the Prefect of the Propagation of the Faith, John Cardinal Simeoni, sent a letter to Fr Chevalier, head of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), requesting them to undertake the difficult task of the evangelization of New Guinea.

> Very Reverend Father,
>
> For several years the Vicariate of New Guinea has been vacant because no Religious Community has been anxious to take charge of it. The Holy Father has a great interest in this important country where there is no Catholic mission, but where protestant ministers are working. He knows well, Father, your zeal and the zeal of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

In spite of having few priests in his order, Fr Chevalier accepted. "In offering the Holy Father our profound respect please tell him that he can count upon our blind obedience and upon our absolute loyalty." As a result, in 1881, Pope Leo XIII gave the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart the immense vicariate of Melanesia and Micronesia as a missionary field.

The first MSC missionaries left Europe in September 1881: Father Durin, the superior, Father Navarre, Father Cramaille, Brother Fromm and Brother Durin, nephew of Fr Durin. They left Barcelona bound for Manila, from where they were expecting to sail directly to New Britain. However, they experienced terrible storms, long stoppages and trouble with

ships. The journey which should have taken three months, took 12 months. The missionaries had to backtrack to Batavia but, before they arrived there, Father Durin, the superior, became so ill he had to return to Europe with Brother Durin. There were now only three missionaries left: Fr Navarre, who became the new Superior, Fr Cramaille and Br Fromm. Eventually they went to Sydney where the *Chandernagore* was due to sail for New Britain. Their arrival in New Guinea was described by Father Navarre in a letter dated 3 October 1882:

> Blanche Bay is one of the most beautiful bays I have ever seen, the coast is fertile and is inhabited. The *Chandernagore* anchored in this bay, near the Island of Matupit where a German mercantile house has established its headquarters. We went ashore on 29 September 1982, the Feast of St. Michael, a coincidence we considered auspicious. The same day after calling on Mr Mickelson, the representative of Mr Hernsheim, I made it a point to have an interview with To Litur who is said to favour the Europeans and especially the Catholic Missionaries. He had been appraised of our arrival and expected to see us. The captain and Mrs Poufain of Nantes accompanied us and four or five natives led the way (Mennis, 1972: 33-34).

As they neared the dwelling place of To Litur, some forty men, standing in three rows "began to dance and make dreadful contortions whilst others played on a sort of flageolet and kept thumping a hollow log. They wore waistbands made of ivy leaves, their heads were bedecked with feathers, and they held small branches in their hands. The whole performance was grotesque in the extreme, but not unseemly at all". After this, they found To Litur sitting on a log wearing an old hat and shirt. He happily welcomed the missionaries who gave him two shirts and some trinkets, and promised to come back next day. They were supplied with goods and guns from the ship and asked To Litur if they could use a small house in the village. This house had only two small rooms and, when it fell down during an earthquake, they built a stronger house. The Nodup people were very kind to them and gave them fruit and vegetables.

The missionaries chanted the *Magnificat*, and the Tolais, being very

Fr Benedict in 1977 pointing out To Tolitur's name and that of his son, Talet. Both of them helped the new missionaries.

musical, were attracted by the singing, so the potential was there for them to learn hymns. The missionaries found the children attractive and intelligent and became particularly fond of Talet, son of To Litur.

> Not long ago I was showing some religious pictures to a group of little children. To Litur's pet son Talet, who is twelve years old and very intelligent, was amongst them. Seeing in one of the pictures a man with two wings, he was anxious to know who that was. I told him that it was a good angel. The idea of angels, invisible beings, pure spirits enters easily into the minds of the people who believe in the existence of a bad spirit, whom they call *tambaran*. To their mind, *tambaran* is the cause of all evils. If anybody dies, it is *tambaran* who takes his life away; if anything startles them, their fear makes them see *tambaran* in a falling leaf or in a porpoise tumbling in the water, and makes him afraid of every noise in the night. They know and say that a *tambaran* has no body; that the life which he takes away cannot be seen by the eyes, so that it is not difficult to make them understand that God is a spirit, and that besides *tambaran*, the wicked angel, there are also good angels, Guardian Angels. Talet interpreted the new ideas he was being taught in the light of the beliefs he already held (ibid: 37-38).

However in stressing the power of the devil, the missionaries entrenched the general fear of evil spirits the people had always held. The evil *tambaran* were equated with the devil and so the new teaching was incorporated into their old beliefs.

The missionaries were grateful to Talet when they fell ill. He went hunting every day and killed large amounts of game. They recovered from their illness and continued to work in the Nodup area. However they soon learned that the area had several drawbacks: it was hemmed in by the sea on one side and Mount Kombiu on the other; and the land they had settled on did not belong to To Litur as they thought, but to Mr. Farrell, a trader in the area. Even though this proved to be false, they decided to move (Mouton, 1974; 76).

In 1883, they bought land near Kininigunan Village and built a house where the Kokopo Club was later established. Father Navarre described the site as being "most desirable, commanding as it does a view of the sea which permits us to watch the vessels bound to Meoko and Port Hunter on the Isle of the Duke of York. The new site will be a good starting point when we visit different sections of the Bay, on the peninsula of the Gazelle, and is a most healthy spot". They moved into their new native-material house in April 1883. Two months later the house was burnt to the ground in the middle of the night and the missionaries were lucky to escape alive. Mr Mouton and his father heard the bamboo exploding and rushed to help. "We found the missionars (sic) moving all they could from the fire, they saved very little but fortunately for them the fire started at one end and they saved the main important matters such as documents etc. By the statements of the native which I managed to investigate, the cause of the fire was one of Farrell's doing – He paid a gun to a native to do it" (Mouton 1974: 76). Farrell was a partner of Queen Emma who, with Richard Parkinson, had bought large areas of the Gazelle Peninsula for plantations. The last thing Farrell wanted was missionaries and he did his best to discourage them.

Missionaries arriving. They faced the fierce warriors and then sang the Te Deum. *(This is a representation of the arrival of the missionaries by Blasius To Una)*

Having stayed the next few days with Mr Mouton and son, the missionaries went to Matupit to buy some new clothes from Mr. Hernsheim's store. Fr Navarre decided to go to Sydney to replenish stocks and supplies lost in the fire and to meet new missionaries arriving from Europe. Hearing a boat was due to leave the Duke of York Islands, they set off there with Mr Mouton on the 3 July1883. They ran into a terrible storm. For six hours they were tossed by the angry billows, shivering with cold, exhausted by fatigue and hunger, in the darkness they had no knowledge of their whereabouts, sailing at random in their frail craft (Waldersee, 1995: 111).

Br Fromm wrote:

> Mr Mouton, the trader, wanted to bring us to the Duke of York Islands so we could catch the boat going to Sydney. But on the way a very strong wind came up after we got as far as Pigeon Island. The sail broke and the boat was washed ashore at Makadao, part of the Duke of York Islands. We slept there the night in the house of a Methodist missionary. We left again next morning but just drifted until nightfall and we did not know where we were. In the morning we came to Watom Island. We rowed hard and came up to Volavolo.

They approached the shore apprehensively. To Litur of Nodup had told them scary stories about the Volavolo people. They were his traditional enemies and not to be trusted. It was early morning and the coastline was lit by the rising sun. Fearfully the missionaries regarded

the shore. Who was hiding behind those coconut trees along the beach? Seeing the boat approach, armed warriors gathered on the beach. They had seen white men before and had dealings with traders but they were in no mood to have more people land on their doorstep. Holding spears and clubs aloft, they danced and shouted: "What do you want? Who are you? Will you steal our men like the others?" The chiefs began to argue amongst themselves. "That tall one in the hat I'll have him." "Well the other one looks good to me." They began to lick their lips and sent out orders for the cooking pits to be readied.

Aware of the threats against them, the four men bravely stepped ashore. Their names were Fr Navarre, Fr Fromm, Fr Cramaille, and Mr Mouton. Bravely they faced the prancing tribesmen and turned to God for protection. A small group against so many fierce tribesmen they lifted their faces to the sky and began to intone the *Te Deum* in Latin in clear ringing voices:

Te Deum laudamus: te Dominum confitemur.
Te aeternum patrem, omnis terra veneratur.
Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates:
tibi cherubim et seraphim, incessabili voce proclamant:
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra maiestatis gloriae tuae.
Te gloriosus Apostolorum chorus,
te prophetarum laudabilis numerus,
te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus.

The *Te Deum* is a hymn of praise to God acknowledging him as the eternal Father. It pictures the company of the cherubim and seraphim angels who proclaim God's holiness and majesty in unending song, and links them with the white robed army of martyrs singing songs of praise to God, as in the Book of Revelation 7: 9-12. When the missionaries got to the words about the white robed martyrs they glanced nervously at each other, wondering if they would join that throng very soon. After glancing at the tribesmen they intoned the next verse:

Te per orbem terrarum
sancta confitetur Ecclesia,
Patrem immensae maiestatis;
venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium;
Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum.
Tu rex gloriae, Christe.
Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius.
Tu, ad liberandum suscepturus hominem,
non horruisti Virginis uterum.

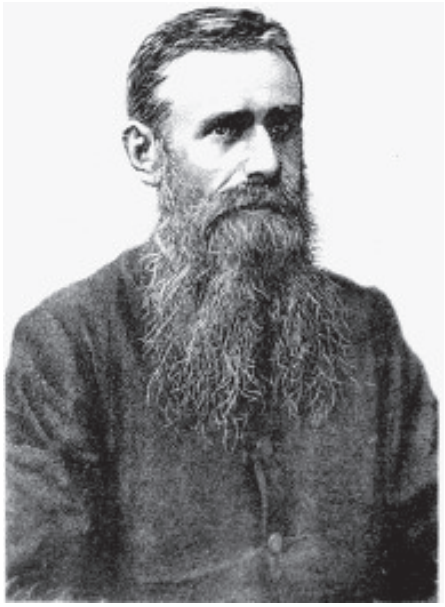
In these words, the missionaries were saying how Jesus gave witness to God, undertaking to liberate humanity by becoming man. The meaning of the words struck a chord with the missionaries who had indeed left home to come to this wild place to bring his message of peace. Rather then stare back at the armed warriors the missionaries turned their eyes

heavenwards again and continued chanting. If they had looked they would have noted a visible relaxing on the faces of the chiefs and their spears were no longer held at the ready. The warriors were listening to the unknown words and the beautiful lilting Gregorian chant. The priests, not noticing the difference in attitude, kept up their prayers. Maybe their last prayer?

Tu, devicto mortis aculeo,
aperuisti credentibus regna caelorum.
Tu ad dexteram Dei sedes, in gloria Patris.
Iudex crederis esse venturus.
Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni,
quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.
Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari.
Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuae.
Et rege eos, et extolle illos usque in aeternum.

Here the missionaries asked for God's help through his son, Jesus, who overcame the sting of death to open the gates of Heaven. Then they remembered their own judgement, which could be happening very soon, and asked for eternal redemption. "Save your people, Lord and bless your inheritance and rule them and lift them up to eternity."

Bravely they faced the armed warriors who by now were listening with wide-eyed wonder. Never before had they heard such voices, such wonderful music and those foreign words. They were entranced. They whispered to each other, "we cannot kill these men. They know magic words: a secret language and wonderful songs!" The lilting music of the missionaries' hymn won them over. Amongst the group was the *lualua* of Volavolo Village, To Momulue, who was particularly taken with the words. "These songs would be good for serenading", he whispered to the others.



Bishop Navarre who was the leader of the first missionaries in New Britain. He was the first Bishop of Yule Island.

At once, To Momulue decided that he would give these newcomers land and build them a house near his village. He must keep them there and learn the secret language himself. It was July 1883, and this first meeting between the missionaries and the people of Volavolo has become part of the tribal

memory. In 2001, at the death of one of his descendants, the story of this first meeting was told. Did the missionaries ever realise it was the blessed hymn, the *Te Deum* that saved them? Amazingly, Benedict To Varpin, grandson of To Momulue, went on to become a priest, Bishop of Bereina where Fr Navarre had also worked a century before and an Archbishop before he retired. By then he could read and write and sing in the Latin language; his grandfather would have been so proud of him.

Benedict To Varpin said of this first meeting:

> My grandfather, To Momulue, heard the new missionaries singing the *Te Deum* and he thought it would be a good song for serenading and he welcomed them ashore at Volavolo in 1883. They settled there and established the first parish in Papua New Guinea and from there they went to Yule Island.

But even though the Volavolo leaders welcomed them and offered them land, it was not all plain sailing. There was still much opposition from the villagers.

Br Fromm wrote in 1883:

> We stayed at Volavolo but our health suffered. Fr Navarre got malaria again. We did not have a bed to sleep on and often had to go without food. We were very poorly off. We ate some of the native food - some was good but other we could not eat. We wondered if it had been poisoned. The Volavolo people cursed us and wanted to fight us and frightened us with their spears and their muskets. The young boys threw stones at us and tried to burn our house down. Mr Dupré (the resident trader) could not help us, we could only think that the Nodup people had not treated us this roughly.

However things soon improved. This mission was to become one of the best and biggest mission stations in New Britain. To Momulue became a devoted member of the church and helped Fr Navarre set up the parish, providing him with bush materials and timber for the buildings. His descendants were faithful to the church.

On 4 October 1883, Father Navarre and Brother Fromm sailed from Matupit in an English man-of-war for Sydney to get more supplies. Meantime, Father Cramaille kept the new mission station going and began to make a dictionary of the Tolai language.

Trader Dupré wrote a glowing letter about Fr Cramaille's efforts in Volavolo.

> For some time now Fr Cramaille has been working wonders among the people through his zeal. Nearly every day he is among them, carrying this bag of remedies for the sick who are very numerous since the beginning of the north-west monsoon. He has cured a good number and baptized those whom he could not save. As well as visiting the sick, he distributes clothes. If you were to come back you would not recognize your old parishioners. They come to prayers and instruction in bands of fifty or more. These poor people are exceedingly pleased with the missionaries who bring them medicines when they are sick and give them *laplaps* for nothing. They are beginning to understand what a missionary is. The time he devotes to them and the little things

> he gives them have tremendous effect. Next Sunday he is to baptize two children whose parents have asked be bathed in Father Cramaille's prayer-water. Times have indeed changed since To Viring with his arrows and Father Cramaille revolver in hand confronted each other (Dupré to Navarre, 25 January 1885 (quoted Waldersee, 1995: 456).

Fr Cramaille was later joined by newcomer Fr Vatan who took over the education of the children, having first learnt something of the language. In 1885, the people burnt down the Volavolo Church on purpose, not because they were hostile, but because they wanted to build a larger one. Father Cramaille was rather aghast at the burnt timber and the extra sawmilling that had to be done for the new structure.

> The Volavolo people willingly helped me; without their assistance, we could not have built such a structure. And now they are proud of their church! None of the teachers' prayer houses are as big, as well made or as solid. More than once they have congratulated each other for having burnt down the old structure. Our new church is thirty-six feet long and thirty feet wide and is hence twice as big as the old one. It has cost us forty-four pounds of tobacco that is about a hundred and ten francs. – The Volavolo people willingly helped me and now they are proud of their church (ibid : 456).

Fr Vatan reported that even this church would soon be too small as some sugar cane workers [kanakas] had returned from Queensland, eager for the services they had attended in Australia. Fr Vatan composed tunes to match the songs he had written in the local dialect. The local children even presented them at a concert for the few Europeans in the area. Fr Cramaille reported that the mission was going well and he had baptised 56 people, 46 of them being children. Quite rightly, he was reluctant to baptise more adults until they were instructed properly. He and Fr Vatan lived amongst the people who still followed their tribal way of life. They liked the gentle white men in their midst who invited them into their home. Living a lonely existence and being short of supplies, the two priests persevered when lesser men might have given up.

Women dancing at Volavolo

In January 1884, in Sydney, Fr Navarre met the new missionaries arriving from Europe including three more priests and one brother. However, they had to wait two months before they found a ship to take them to New Britain. They arrived at Matupit on board the *Catherine* in April 1884. Early next morning, they took a canoe to Malaguna and walked over to Volavolo, probably following the same route as Tunnel Hill Road does today. Father Cramaille and Father Vatan were delighted to

see them after their lonely wait. It was Easter and they celebrated High Mass in the little chapel at Volavolo and Father Navarre adds, "we sang the *Magnificat* and the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for our happy passage". To Momulue and his people were again entranced by the hymns. However, Fr Navarre was critical of Fr Cramaille's ability to organise or teach the local people and he was also critical of Fr Vatan's knowledge of the local language after he had been there so long. Navarre, unable to give a good report of progress to Fr Chevalier, the founder of the MSC Order, may have been feeling stressed at all the adversities the new mission had suffered, but he could have been more grateful at the sacrifices the two priests made in their lonely vigil.

One of the new priests with Fr Navarre, Fr Gaillard, took over the new station at Malaguna. It was from this mission station that the first real contacts were made with the Matupit people across the bay but it was to be another ten years before a mission station was to be set up on the island itself. In 1887, Fr Vatan died having spent only a few years on the mission fields and was buried at Volavolo. The small congregation of the Sacred Heart sorely grieved his loss. Fr Gaillard had to go to Sydney because of ill health and Fr Navarre left New Britain for Yule Island.

Meanwhile Fr Cramaille battled on by himself at Volavolo, and there were still many hostile people around them ready to pounce if he did not keep his guard up. During a visit to Mouton's trade post, Fr Cramaille stayed with Jean Baptiste Mouton, junior, and waited while his father rowed off to Mioko with for four local oarsmen. When they were delayed the local people decorated themselves in war paint. Jean Baptiste could understand *Kuanua* and knew of their plotting. They were talking amongst themselves how they would kill Fr Cramaille and Jean Baptiste as payback if the rowers did not return safely. When they did return after battling heavy seas, they were not welcomed happily but were received with long faces as their survival meant no feast (Mouton, 1974: 78). A year later, Navarre was visiting Cooktown where Mr Mouton senior lay dying and was able to give him the last rites.

During his years of solitude, Fr Cramaille had made some progress but had trouble keeping order in the mission particularly with the children. This is understandable as they had been free spirits for so long, playing, swimming, climbing coconut trees and cooking their freshly caught fish. On 29 December 1888, when Fr Couppé arrived in Volavolo with two German priests, they were horrified at the state of the mission station. They considered that the church and temporary native mission houses needed to be re-built. Fr Couppé, straight from the orderly church buildings in Europe and years of European values and traditions, was critical of Fr Cramaille's lax attitude to the local people: "During our lunch, our hut was invaded by these grown-up children who Father Cramaille used to let enter at will to keep him company. Today, however, since he is no longer alone, there is no further reason to let them come during our meals. At some distance from our hut we have put up a temporary wire fence." (Waldersee, 1995: 459). In his defence it must be remembered that even though he became a bushie due to loneliness, Fr Cramaille kept the light burning in Volavolo at a difficult time. He left New Britain in May 1889 soon after Fr Couppé's arrival. However, Fr Cramaille's lengthy periods of solitude paid off when

The orphanage at Volavolo. Sisters and children pose with Rev Fr Zwinge, who became the superior of the Order, and Brother Kuenne on the right.

Couppé was able to prove that the MSC missionaries had been in continual residence in the mission field since their arrival in 1882. This at a time when he was trying to argue with the new German Administration that he was seeking not only to open new mission centres but keep old ones going (Waldersee, 1995: 465).

Meanwhile, in 1884, Fr Navarre had returned to Yule Island and was consecrated its first Bishop on 30 November 1887. His new mission suffered poverty and hardship in those early days although more missionaries continued to arrive. Four Sisters came to begin a convent and school there although the Mission was still impoverished. In 1887, Navarre decided New Britain should become a separate prefecture-apostolic and Fr Couppé was named as the first Bishop of New Britain. It is just as well that Couppé and Navarre had quite separate areas of operation as they had quite different ideas and personalities. This was acknowledged by Couppé himself, who wrote to Fr Chevalier in October 1889: "I have never been at ease with Bishop Navarre. Ever since the difficulties I had with him in Sydney, there has remained a cloud between us. He is far too reserved with me and I with him, especially when we have different ideas on important issues" (ibid: 464). Each in their own way proved great builders in their mission stations.

It is disputed as to which place was the first mission in New Britain, Nodup or Volavolo. Although the missionaries initially lived at Nodup for 6 months, they decided it was not central enough and bought land at Kininigunan near present day Vunapope. After setbacks already described, they began the mission at Volavolo, which thus became the first permanent mission ahead of Vunapope. In the centenary book, *Yumi Pipel Bilong God 1882 – 1982*, mention was made that Volavolo was the first Catholic Mission Station in New Britain. *"Volavolo i kamap olsem as ples bilong lotu katolik. Nambawan haus lotu*

i sanap long Volavolo." [Volavalo is the starting place of the Catholic Church and had the first church.] (Archdiosese of Rabaul, 1982).

Meanwhile in those early days, it was decided to extend the Volavolo mission with a two-storied house as the location was surrounded by many villages and the population was quite intense. A convent was built for the Sisters who arrived in 1891. Then an orphanage was developed for which Volavolo became well known. Some children previously sold into slavery were brought there for education and care.

There have been many outstanding men who were parish priests at Volavolo including Fr Reischl, Fr Laurence Biermann, Fr Tor Hecht, Fr Holz, Fr Herman Taliva, Fr Albert Guat and Fr Herman To Paivu. The present Bishop of Bereina, John Ribat MSC, was born there and is Benedict's cousin. The Volavolo Mission became the central place for 6 parishes including Watom Island, Nodup, Tavui and Korere. Fr Sebastian was Parish Priest there when Tavurvur and Vulcan erupted in 1994. In 2000, the Parish Priest was Fr Alois Escher MSC but, by 2002, there was no resident priest but only visiting priests from Vunapope.

The old chief, To Momulue, who gave the land to the missionaries, had many descendants and relatives amongst whom are priests, sisters and brothers. One became a Bishop and another an Archbishop. Six priests were ordained from Volavolo – Fr Velim, Fr Hermann, Fr Albert, Fr Cornelias To Vauta, and two Bishops: Benedict To Varpin and John To Ribat MSC. The Volavolo mission is very blessed with these vocations and the parish remains strong and vibrant. Monsignor To Paivu, Parish Priest there for many years, had a strong influence amongst the youth and many vocations have been accredited to his teaching.

I (the author) attended the first Mass said in *Kuanua* at Volavolo in the late 1960s in the aftermath of Vatican II. Monsignor To Paivu was the celebrant and had taken great care over the translation from Latin to *Kuanua*. I sat alongside one of the elders of the village and watched his face during the Mass. Most of the Tolai people present were appreciative of the fact they could now understand the liturgy without the need of a missal but this man seemed visibly upset.

Afterwards we stood outside in sight of the sea, and looked down the sweeping lawns and the well kept gardens to the line of trees along the beach where the first missionaries had arrived in 1883. At that time the missionaries were apprehensive and had sung the *Te Deum* in Latin: now the scene was peaceful with the beautiful church, the convent, school and presbytery. As I stood there looking at the perfect tropical setting, I noticed the Tolai elder who had been sitting next to me and I approached him, speaking in *Tok Pisin*.

"Did you like the Mass said in *Kuanua*?'

"O, no missus."

"But it's your *ples tok*. I thought it would be good to understand the language."

"Oh no", he repeated emphatically. "No! No! I do not want to understand it".

"You like the Mass in Latin better?"

"Yes! Latin is a good language. It is a secret language. We Tolais like it."

When I told this to Monsignor To Paivu, he laughed and agreed that his people were reluctant to let go of Latin. He could understand their mentality and knew that secret words, that only a few people knew, were part of the traditional secret society of the *tubuan* and its *taraiu*. So there it was. Latin was still seen as a good, secret language even in 1970. Latin, the language, which had saved the missionaries was now a thing of the past and this elder, for one, regretted its passing. Bishop Benedict, in his turn was happy to be able to say Mass in *Kuanua*, *Tok Pisin* or English and not in Latin. Learning Latin was one of the stumbling blocks to his training at the seminary. But in the end he could read, pray and sing in that language. What would his grandfather To Momulue have said?

Volavolo played a very big role in the life of Benedict To Varpin. He was born near the mission station, baptised in the church and attended a nearby school. His family has belonged to this parish for generations, fostering their faith and supporting the missionaries of the Gazelle Peninsula. It was the home parish he continually returned to. Yes, Volavolo is important in this story. It was here he celebrated after his ordination in 1971, his ascendancy to Bishop of Bereina in 1980 and to Archbishop of Madang in 1987.

Matupit Island, where the first missionaries landed in 1882 was Fr Bernard Franke's parish from the 1950s to 1984. In the 1880s, Matupit may have appeared to be a better location than Volavolo for a first mission: it had a central position and was a busy trading port, but the fact remains that the Island just wasn't big enough. It is only about half a kilometre wide and one kilometre long and already had a Wesleyan Church. It did not develop as a Catholic mission until many years later as an offshoot of Malaguna. Still Matupit is important to this story. It was where it all began.

Men of Matupit, taken in the 1880s. Of the seven men shown, To Gorona, To Ngut and To Loren and two unknown are in the back row. To Bua, Titipen and Teteret are sitting.

St Paul's Mission in the Bainings, where ten missionaries were murdered in 1904.

Chapter 3

German New Guinea and Vunapope

After 1884, the Sacred Heart missionaries had to contend with German political and economic interests as well as the traders, the Wesleyan missions and the local tribes. At first, the Neu Guinea Kompagnie ran the new German Province, but local sovereignty was handed over to the Reich in 1899 with the capital of German New Guinea at Herbertshoe (Kokopo), New Britain. Earlier in 1895, even before the takeover by the Reich, Albert Hahl had been appointed Imperial Judge. He was a short, stout man who did more than any other German to improve relationships with the people. In 1902, he became Governor of German New Guinea, increasing the profitability of the German Colony and laying the foundation of a strong government.

Over the years, Dr. Hahl was on friendly terms with many of the Tolai leaders and spoke their language, *Kuanua*. Pacification was Hahl's main objective (Firth, 1983: 93) and, as a result, three quarters of the revenue was spent on protecting the colonists, on the police and the government steamer, which was the main means of contact between the different settlements. Governor Hahl understood the attitude of the people. When he discovered that chiefs paid their village workers with food and feasts after a house or canoe had been built, he decided to do likewise. When a village finished the road past their villages, German officials organised a feast to celebrate and the workers were paid in food rather than money. The system worked, much to the amazement of other government officials.

For the country to advance into a moneyed economy, Hahl imposed a head tax on each adult male to be paid in cash not shell money. Because of this, the Tolai people became keen businessmen, selling their dried coconuts for German marks. Previously they had been fierce warriors, now they put this energy into building up businesses and adapted well to the new economic circumstances. However, transactions between the local people in shell money have continued until modern times and are still happening. The German Annual Report for 1900-01 stated that: "By an ordinance of 26 July 1901, the use of shell money was prohibited in all transactions between Europeans and natives to take effect from 1 April, 1902" (Sack: 1979: 221). The people were very aware of this law even in the 1960s. In the Rabaul market where one could buy baskets, necklaces, carvings, fruit and vegetables, the Tolais still used shell money amongst themselves to buy their produce. I watched fascinated one day as a fish was measured against the length of shells on a cane to estimate a price. I decided to use one of my own lengths of shell money to buy some tomatoes. The Tolai woman was astonished and called her friends over. There was a big hue and cry. How dare I try to use this shell money as currency? Didn't I know there was a law against it? I was a European and must use coins. Having been put in my place, I whispered, "*me traim tasol*" and pulled the required shillings out of my pocket. I found out only recently about Governor Hahl's ban in 1902, but those Tolai women had never forgotten it!

Hahl was instrumental in beginning a policy of protecting native land, while at the same time increasing the economy and spreading pacification of the tribes. Firstly, he tried to clear up misunderstandings between the colonists and the people over land deals. He was only partially successful in this venture. Secondly, the appointment of *luluai* and *tultul*, village officials, was a significant step in bringing order and pacification to the village people. The *luluai* wore a black cap with red band and as "a symbol of government authority they carried a black stick with a white metal top" (Firth, 1983: 68). In some cases a paramount *luluai* was appointed over several villages and they held court over minor disputes (Mair, 1970: 56)[1]. Not all village people liked the idea of *luluai*[2] and *tultul*. The traditional leaders felt their authority was undermined and that these new positions also interfered with the traditional method of "government" with the *tubuan* and *dukduk* in their *taraiu.*

Lulu Miller, born in 1893, was Queen Emma's great niece[3] and was familiar with Rabaul in the early 1900s. She remembered[4] seeing Dr Hahl driving his carriage along the road between Rabaul and Kokopo as he went about his duties. His residence on Namanula Hill had views over the town and had sweeping stairs leading up to it, which have survived until today. Dr Hahl was welcomed by the villagers around Christmas as he always provided bags of rice, *laplaps* and tobacco to pay for their *singsings*. Lulu also remembered the beautiful botanic gardens in Rabaul and the colourful markets where artefacts and food could be bought. She fell in love with Heinrich Rudolph Wahlen[5] who brought the first car to Rabaul in 1910. It was Daimler-Benz, which Lulu enjoyed driving around in. Her family warned her that Wahlen would never marry her so she settled for another German planter. When all Germans were being ordered back to Europe, he divorced her so she could stay in Rabaul. Two years later she married Jack Miller, an Englishman and in her later years she lived next to the Vuvu School on the North Coast. When Brian Mennis had to survey her land, the local villagers got very upset over one cocoa tree. He had to shift the boundary 100mm to include it in their side. Once this happened all were happy. Lulu lived to a grand old age and attended Fr Franke's golden jubilee in 1977.

Development of the Mission at Vunapope

Fr Navarre had thought Kininigunan would make a good, central position for a mission station and had bought land there, but the dispute with Farrell had caused them to put these plans off. Subsequently, there was a court case with Queen Emma and Farrell on one side and the Catholic Mission on the other with the German Neu Guinea Kompagnie also wanting a piece of the pie. "The German Government decided the matter with a Solomon-like judgement: The land north (sic) of Kokopo was to go to Queen Emma; 40 hectares south (sic) (Vunapope today) was to go to the mission whilst the disputed land around Kokopo was kept for the German Government itself." (Adela, 1968: 19). The result of the court case was a two-fold blessing: first it showed that the mission was accepted as being part of the establishment and secondly the land allotted to them was in an excellent position. The mission was initially dubbed as the place of the "popies" by the opposition but the Catholic missionaries thought to take on the name and match it with *Vuna* which means place in the local language: hence the name Vunapope.

The German Report for 1889-90 mentioned that, "The activities of the Catholic Mission have also been extended - - Two brothers and two fathers of the same order arrived from the mother house in Salzburg and have a good command of German. They will be followed by five sisters of the same order, who are travelling out via Australia" (Sack & Clark, 1979: 54). It was now imperative that Catholic missionaries came from Germany or could at least speak German. French missionaries were now sent to Papua where they did wonderful work. However, one French priest who did stay on was Fr Couppé who spoke German fluently. Louis Couppé was born in Romorantin in the Diocese of Blois, France, on 26 August 1850. He was ordained a secular priest on 30 May 1874 and entered the MSCs in 1880. While on his way to New Britain in 1885 to join other Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, he became gravely ill with typhoid fever. He finally arrived at Yule Island on 1 July 1886 where he met Fr Navarre. Four years later, in 1890, he was consecrated Bishop of New Britain in Antwerp, Belgium.

Bishop Couppé established Vunapope as the centre of a large mission area. A cathedral, houses for the Priests and Brothers, orphanage and convents for the sisters were built there. He travelled extensively on horseback, by foot or by boat around the coast looking for locations for new mission centres. He even examined the sites for new jetties by swimming under the water to test their safety for small ships. The Vicariate Apostolic of the Bismarck Archipelago established commercial ventures including plantations, and sawmilling. By 1900, they had planted 460 hectares in coconuts on three plantations and dominated the sawmilling industry in the islands region for over 70 years. A sawmill was opened at Ulamona mission, near the Father Volcano with a 10-kilometre railway to connect it to the jetty to carry the sawn timber for loading onto ships.

Couppé was also keen to open up the Bainings, then the furthest outpost of German contact. In the two years up to 1886, six new priests arrived at Vunapope, amongst whom was Fr Rascher a renowned linguist. Bishop Couppé decided to send him to the Bainings so he could learn the language, which was different from that in Blanche Bay. Bishop Couppé accompanied the group of missionaries to Massava Island and stayed with them for the first three weeks. The mission station, to be named St Paul's, was soon shifted to the mainland opposite, which Fr Rascher described as the gateway to the Bainings. Fr Rascher was a good friend of Dr Hahl, since they were both

Bishop Couppé, the first Bishop of New Britain.

from the same part of Germany. Because of this, Hahl visited St Paul's whenever he could. One result of this was that the line between Church and State became rather blurred there. Fr Rascher, in effect, became the German representative in the area, a job he was reluctant to have. Work on the mission had been progressing well and a sizeable church, convent and presbytery as well as school were all built in those early years. The missionaries were preparing for the opening of the Church when disaster struck.

A few problems were beginning to emerge to hinder the peace of the mission. When they bought land for a large plantation, there were problems with the people who believed they could still have access to it and often made raids on the plantation. They felt they could do so with impunity as no one stopped them. When Rascher complained to the German authorities nothing was done.

Another problem was the threat that the mission, unwittingly, posed to the trade between the Bainings and the coastal people. Traditionally, the coastal people traded fish, shells and salt inland to the Bainings in exchange for *taro*, spears, tools and other trade goods. "When the MSCs set up a large plantation in the area some of this traditional market was diverted to the disadvantage of the Baining people" (Waldersee, 1995: 507). The people of the Karar Range above the mission were getting angry because the mission tradestore

Confirmation at Vunapope with the Bishop. The priest in the black Biretta can speak many languages and is probably Fr Rascher.

had a ready supply of salt, tinned fish, food and tools and their traditional goods were no longer in demand. To Maria, the main perpetrator in the revolt against the missionaries, had been nurtured by the missionaries from his earliest years when he had been saved from slavery and was boarded at the orphanage at Volavolo. To Maria was angry with Fr Rascher who admonished him for wanting to marry Savunut, a married woman. To Maria's anger grew and he organised angry people from Karar Range to support him but was unable to persuade the people in the nearby villages to join him. Even Dr Hahl knew about the rumours of the revolt and was prepared to send a detachment of troops to the mission but Fr. Rascher felt nothing would happen to him

Fr Rascher knew of the simmering trouble and tensions. Students had warned him that "the people on the Karar Range had designs on his life". Regardless, he again dismissed the rumours (Waldersee, 1995: 508). However on 13 August 1904 a terrible massacre took place in St Paul's. Ten missionaries were killed in a short space of time: two priests, three brothers and five sisters were murdered by To Maria and his henchmen. It began when To Maria borrowed Fr. Rascher's gun on the pretext of shooting birds but then turned the gun on Fr Rascher as he lay in bed sick with a fever. Sister Anna was killed by an axe - she had been cleaning the presbytery and hid when she heard the gunshots. Brother Bley ran upstairs to see what the noise was about and was also shot by To Maria. Other sisters were killed as they carried out their work. Sister Agatha was dressing wounds at the dispensary; Sister Agnela was killed as she decorated the altar; and Sister Agnes was on the porch of the convent. They were preparing for the opening and dedication of the new church (Michael, 1957: 32, 33).

In the German Annual Report for 1904-05, only one paragraph mentioned the massacre: "Ten members of the mission of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus were killed at St Paul and Nacharunep on 13 August 1904. The rising of the natives remained confined to its point of origin, a section of the inhabitants of St Paul and the natives of Mt Karar and the Krau Valley. None of the guilty parties escaped punishment" (Sack, 1979: 251). The same report mentions the Madang Revolt of 1904.[6] Couppé wrote a report which he sent back to Germany, blaming Dr. Hahl for using Fr Rascher as an unofficial representative of the German Government and claiming that the government had done nothing about raids made by the coastal people on the mission plantations. However there were counter claims made by the German Government, as it was thought Fr Rascher was forewarned and had done nothing.

Whatever the causes, the massacre at St Paul's was an absolute tragedy for the mission and for Bishop Couppé personally as he knew all those killed: they were two priests, Fr Rascher and Fr Rutten; two brothers, Johann Schellekens and Edward Plasschaert; a Trappist lay brother Ludwig Bley; and five young sisters Anna Utsch, Sophie Schmidt, Agatha Rath, Angela Balka and Agnes Holler. They became known as the Bainings Martyrs. Their tragic deaths encouraged many other missionaries to take their place including one sister who escaped the massacre. She returned later to work in that same mission for forty more years (Waldersee, 1995: 509).

On the day of the murders, a sailing boat with Volavolo people on board came into Vunamarita and heard the news. They immediately sailed back to Volavolo and sent a messenger across the bay to Vunapope. By Sunday, Mr Siwansz and some native police went to Vunamarita, not knowing if they too would be killed. There they found the bodies of the victims. It was a sad time. The missionaries were buried locally in individual graves and St Paul's has become a big memorial for the martyrs of New Britain. To Maria was shot outright but the other perpetrators were taken to Kokopo. Before they were executed, nine of them were baptised (Michael, 1957: 34).

The Vunapope mission continued to grow in numbers over the following years. A few years later, the German Report for 1909-10 was quite glowing in their praise for the mission:

> The Catholic mission of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus has 28 main stations and ninety outstations. At the present time it numbers twenty-seven priests, thirty-five brothers, thirty-one sisters and 120 catechists under the direction of a bishop. New head stations were established at Tapapal on New Ireland, at Mope in the Sulka reserve on St George's Channel and at Vunadadir in the vicinity of Mt. Varzin. Of the 23,000 natives baptised since the mission was founded, about 17,000 are still living. The people are becoming steadily more receptive to Christianity. The mission maintains 107 primary schools with a total enrolment of 4,197 pupils and also seventeen orphanages.
>
> The Methodist Mission Society of Australia has not undergone any substantial changes in the past year. No new stations have been established, as the straitened financial circumstances of the society did not permit any extensions of its mission field. The previous year the Methodist mission had counted a staff of 14 including five Germans. Yet they maintained they had 21,000 adherents at their church services. Their catechists carried out much of their work (Sack, 1978: 299, 312).

In 1890, the German Administration divided New Britain up into spheres of influence. The mission stations already functioning were allowed to continue, but the Methodists had to keep to the area west of Malapau and the Catholics to the East and a few other non-Tolai areas. The two Catholic Missions to the east of the dividing line were Malaguna and Volavolo which were allowed to continue as they were already in existence. Fr Couppé was able to argue that the Volavolo Mission had been going since 1883 (mainly through the efforts of Fr Cramaille). While these stations could continue, they were not allowed to operate outside their stations. All ideas of establishing a subsidiary mission on Matupit Island were thwarted. The only possibility of extending mission influence was to train catechists and send them out to the villages. The catechist sent to Matupit was To Minis, the adopted son of one of the big men of the village. He had trained at Malaguna and stayed on Matupit from about 1893 until 1910. During this time he helped Fr Fromm, Fr Baumann and Fr Boegershausen. He was respected by the people and was a tireless worker for the Church.

Gradually the spheres of influence which had been introduced by the German Administration were being ignored and by the late 1890s were no longer strictly enforced. A bush material church was erected on the island down on the beach near where the first missionaries arrived and Fr Fromm paddled over from Malaguna in a canoe to celebrate Mass each Sunday. In June 1889, Fr Baumann, the first priest to live on the island, built a house, store and a new Church near the present Church. Being resident, he now had more time for his parishioners on Matupit Island.

One of his parishioners was Paulina Ia Dok who brought her uncle, To Mulue, the old *lualua*, along to the church. Although he had been a sorcerer, he began to listen to the new teaching and was baptised by Fr Baumann on the 1 December, l899. According to the Church record, he took the name of Joseph and was number 255 in the Register. However, one wonders just how much To Mulue adapted to the new ideas. He liked his big man, *lualua,* image until he was very old. He was nearly blind and often Ia Dok led him about with a stick - she holding one end and he the other. In this way they walked to their gardens across the small bridge joining Matupit Island to the mainland. Although it would have been faster to go by canoe, To Mulue preferred to walk over the bridge as he was friendly with many of the Germans who invited him into the nearby tavern for a drink. They treated him specially because of his status. He retained his shell money to be divided up after his death. (To this day the breaking of the shell money is common practice). Ia Dok, still a young girl at the time, remembered To Mulue saying, "I had a dream last night. An angel came to tell me I was going to die soon and that he would come to take me to heaven. It wasn't any angel, it was Michael the *lualua* of the angels. You see because I am the *lualua* of my people I must be taken to heaven by the *lualua* of the Angels".

By this time To Mulue was a dignified, wizened old man with a fuzzy white beard. Even though he had been a sorcerer and extorted large sums of *tabu* from his people, they loved and feared him until the end. After his death, Tolais gathered from everywhere to take part in the funeral proceedings. Weeks later, the breaking of the *tabu* was an enormous festival in the presence of many *tubuan*. Squatting down so no one could identify them, they were presented with lengths of *tabu* as payment for their presence. To Mulue's life was a blending of the old and new beliefs. His people believed his spirit would go into the next world, not knowing whether it was a world of *Kaia* and *tabarans* or a world of God and his angels. But To Mulue, himself, was sure it was Michael, the archangel, the *lualua* of all the angels who would come for him.

Fr George Boegershausen buried To Mulue on the 3rd March 1909 and made a note to say he was an old man between 80 or 90 years old which means he would have been born in the 1820s. Before he died, To Mulue gave the church some land which was used as the cemetery. About this time, Fr George noticed the eagerness of one of his young pupils, Stephen To Paivu, who was about 12 years old. He had been baptised by Fr Fromm in 1895 and his name appears number 26 in the Register. Fr George persuaded To Paivu to go to the Catechists' School at Vunapope in about 1906. When he returned in 1910, Fr George had also trained three of his most promising school boys to teach the younger children in the school. In 1905, there was a large confirmation ceremony on Matupit, with

Bishop Couppé coming across from Vunapope to confirm 87 people. Among them were Stephen To Paivu and Michael To Pen, one of Father George's helpers. Fr Werbick took over the Mission in 1911 and was followed by Fr Ischler and Fr Grundel before Fr Baumann returned for another two years from 1922 to 1924. He was followed by Father Madigan who was there for the next sixteen years. Fr Madigan would have been there at the time of the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of the Mission. At that stage, he would have met a young German missionary, Fr Bernard Franke, newly arrived from Germany, who was to be posted to West New Britain. Twenty years later Matupit would be his parish.

After To Mulue died, Paulina Ia Dok received some education at the convent school at Vunapope where she joined the Children of Mary and lovingly kept the medal all her life. She later married Stephen To Paivu, the new catechist. Together they helped the Matupit Mission unceasingly. They are mentioned often in the Register as being godparents at baptisms and sponsors at confirmations. On several occasions, Ia Dok is shown as having administered baptism to newborn babies whose lives were in danger. She was probably a midwife as well. The people have always had a great respect for her and many took Paulina as a confirmation name. She and Stephen had quite a large family, two of whom became catechists and another one, To Keta, became an interpreter for the Japanese in World War ll.

The first Chinese Catholics in New Britain

Governor Hahl early decided that labour would need to be brought in from overseas to help develop the colony. This would include traders and artisans as well as cooks. In Rabaul, the Chinese quarter housed about one-third of the total Chinese populations of the colony, the skilled workers, small traders, cooks and laundrymen of the capital (Ryan, 1972: 497). Madang was also a centre for Chinese workers recruited to work on the plantations. Lawrence writes, "By 1900, 122 Chinese and 184 Javanese were employed at Madang, and 13 Chinese and 54 Javanese in the Bogia area. In the same year another 190 Chinese came to Madang and, in 1901, another 270". Very few present-day Chinese in Papua New Guinea are descended from the coolie labourers who were brought in by the German Neu Guinea Kompagnie. The Chinese who continued to be residents of PNG were probably descended from the artisans, the cooks, fishermen and traders who were also brought out by the German Colonial Government. In the 1908 Annual German Report, Ah Tam, Ah Lok, Lsu Lung and two others were listed as Chinese planters mostly on New Ireland where Governor Hahl encouraged them to work their own plantations.

Ah Lok came to Rabaul in 1899, initially as a cook for the Acting Administrator, Dr Roce. With Governor Hahl's encouragement, he became an independent trader in the Duke of York Islands. He brought his brothers, Akun and Achai out from China. Akun went to the boarding school at Vunapope and was baptised a Catholic in 1902, being the first Chinese Catholic in New Britain. Ah Lok, now a planter on New Ireland, used to visit his brother at Vunapope. Although not a Christian, he asked to go to Mass. While there he had a vision of the Child Jesus on the altar, but his Chinese friends would not believe him. Ah Lok was determined to take instruction at Vunapope and made several trips for this reason.

Fr Bley blessing a feast.

He once stayed several days until Dr Hahl asked him when he would be returning to his plantation. Hearing this, the missionaries examined him again and he was baptised in 1907. After this, Ah Lok began to urge other Chinese on New Ireland to follow his example and also send their children to Vunapope boarding school (Michael, 1957: 23).

Ah Lok converted his own brother Achai, who was baptised by Bishop Couppé during a visit to New Ireland. Later Achai married and had fourteen children many of whom entered the church as priests and nuns in New Guinea and in China. The details of the family in 1957 read: his eldest daughter was the first Chinese of Rabaul to enter religion and five other members of the family followed her; two have been priests in China, one a Jesuit and the other a secular priest; another became a missionary of the Sacred Heart in Australia, the second daughter is a Daughter of the Sacred Heart now teaching in Rabaul; whilst still another is at present a novice in the same congregation (ibid: 22- 24). What of Achai? He was still active in the1960's and a daily communicant as he had been for all the last forty years. I, (the author), remember seeing Mr Achai kneeling at daily Mass on his own little cushion. He had his favourite seat about half way down on the left. He was very reverend bowing his head in prayer as Fr Franke said the Mass in the St Francis Xavier Cathedral. Yes, Mr Achai was an example in the 1960s for his many Chinese friends and family.

Meanwhile back to the outbreak of World War I, which saw the end of the German Colony. The first objective of the Australian forces in 1914 was to destroy the German wireless

stations, particularly the one at Bita Paka, near Rabaul. A telegram was received on 6 August 1914 by the Governor General of Australia from His Majesty's Secretary of State, in Great Britain saying, "If your ministers desire and feel themselves able to seize German wireless stations at New Guinea, — we feel that this was a great and urgent imperial service" (Rowley, 1958: 2). The force left Sydney on 18 August under the command of Colonel Holmes and achieved their objective.

> On 12 August a planter at Putput advised the German Administration that strange ships were entering St George's Channel. That same day, Australian raiding parties landed at Rabaul, Kokopo and Vunapope from the Australian warship and put the telephone system out of order and attempted to obtain information of the whereabouts of the wireless stations. - - The German Authorities had prepared defences with trenches, several land mines and a tree-top observation post. By 7 pm the Australians had occupied the wireless station after the loss of 2 officers and 4 men and also one officer and 3 men wounded. On 14 September, the Australians shelled the Toma Ridge and the German Governor (Hahl) seeing the impossibility of the situation, surrendered (Michael, 1957: 36-37).

As a result, the first Australians to die in World War I died near Bita Paka following the call to arms in that telegram. Then Colonel Holmes, received a message from the Naval Board ordering him to send troops to Madang and particularly to seize the mission boats which were thought could be used for spying.

Bishop Couppé cautioned the sisters and boarders in the school to stay quietly in their houses and not venture out. After the German Governor had surrendered, the fathers and brothers were taken to Kokopo to swear they would not do anything against the Australian Government. They had to take an oath of neutrality. Under the Australian Military Administration, "the German native Development Programme was scrapped and European commerce was once more allowed to dominate policy" (Lawrence, 1964: 36). German planters were allowed to stay on their plantations if they took an oath to remain neutral (Rowley, 1958: 46).

The Australians took over the administration from the Germans. Only the villages along the coastal strip and on the rivers had been pacified and many labourers recruited from these villages deserted when they heard of the Germans defeat. The terms *luluai* and *tultul* were retained and continued in use for many years. According to the Annual Report to the League of Nations *luluai* were supposed to be men of high character and they were "responsible for good order and control in the villages. They are encouraged to assist in the adjustment of village matters and to do everything possible for the welfare of their people". The *tultul* were appointed as their assistants (Mair, 1948: 53).

The new Administration, while appreciating the work of both the Catholic and Wesleyan Missions because they brought a message of peace and helped in the pacification of tribal enemies, was not sure if they could rely on their loyalty. Most of them were German in origin or at least German speakers. The Treaty of Versailles affected both the Wesleyan

and Catholic Missions. Paragraph 122 of the Treaty gave the Australians legal right to expel all German-born missionaries. Paragraph 438 dealt expressly with Missions. It read in part:

> The Allied and Associated Powers agree that where Christian religious missions were being maintained by German Societies or persons in territory belonging to them, or of which the government is entrusted to them in accordance with the present Treaty, the property which these missions or mission societies possessed, including that of trading societies whose profits were devoted to the support of missions, shall continue to be devoted to missionary purposes. In order to ensure the due execution of this undertaking, the Allied and Associated Governments will hand over such property to boards of trustees, appointed by or approved by the Governments and composed of persons holding the faith of the Mission whose property is involved. Germany, taking note of the above undertaking, agrees to accept all arrangements made or to be made by the Allied or Associated Government concerned for carrying on the work of the said missions or trading societies and waives all claims on their behalf.

The German-born Missionaries, both Catholic and Wesleyans alike, were expecting to be expelled and the call had gone out both to America and Australia for missionaries from those countries to take their places. Eventually, the Australian government realised the worth of the German missionaries and the ban was lifted but many Americans and Australians had already resolved to go to New Guinea.

Bishop Couppé retired to Douglas Park in Sydney and died there in 20 July 1926. His last wish was to open up a station at Talasea but the timber for the buildings it did not arrive until 1920 after he had already left the mission. In the following chapters we will study the early history of the West New Britain missions, particularly Talasea, through the eyes of a young priest, Father Bernard Franke MSC who arrived in 1928.

Footnotes:

[1] *This system remained as part of the Australian system until local government councils were introduced in the 1950s. In 1939, there were 3,865 luluai and 66 paramount luluai (Mair, 1970:56).*

[2] Luluai *was after the word* lualua *which denoted a chief in the Tolai language.*

[3] *Her grandmother was Queen Emma's eldest sister, Maria.*

[4] *I interviewed Lulu Miller in 1977.*

[5] *He had extensive plantations in the Western Islands and was very wealthy.*

[6] *The Revolt against the Germans in Madang in 1904 has been attributed to economic motives when the pot trade was interrupted by the introduction of the German currency. Previously the pots were seen as the money (Mennis, 2006:130). The Madang revolt occurred in July 1904, a month before the massacre in the Bainings. The German Government had been forewarned in Madang and took the matter seriously. Part of the motive for the uprising was economic in both areas.*

The house on the right is the Franke home in Warendorf, Germany. Note the attic where Bernard and his brothers slept.

Chapter 4

Call to Mission*:* Bernard Franke, 1903 to 1930

To understand the German missionaries, it is interesting to follow a story of one of them from his childhood. What family did he leave behind; his sacrifices; his religious upbringing; and the first impressions of New Guinea when he finally arrived? Here we have the story of Fr Bernard Franke who was born in Warendorf, Germany on 8 June 1903 and was destined to go to the Catholic Mission in New Guinea in 1928 where he spent the following fifty years. Fortunately, he kept a record of his impressions, which makes fascinating reading.

One morning in about 1911 as Bernard lay sleeping in the attic of his tall narrow house, a shadow fell over him and a hand gently shook him on the shoulder.

"Bernard, Bernard. Time to get up." Bernard rolled over, his hair tousled from sleep, but again his mother called him.

"You'll be late for Mass. You'd better hurry."

Bernard fell out of his bed being careful not to wake his two brothers, Hermann and Theoder. Quickly he pulled on his warm clothes and clutching his boots crept down the steep stairs to the front door. Here he pulled on his boots and coat. He could hear his mother in the kitchen stoking the fire so she could prepare the breakfast for everyone. As he opened the door thick snow flakes fluttered down on him. He crunched his way down the narrow street past a row of houses just like his own all covered in a thick coating of snow. He passed the prison, the court, the presbytery and then came to the Hospital chapel. As he turned into the courtyard he began to hurry.

The old priest turned to greet him:

"Ha! Bernard you have come!"

'Yes Father," Bernard answered breathlessly, "I hope I'm not late".

In the hospital chapel, Bernard struggled to put his altar boy's clothes on. During Mass, he tripped over the Latin responses and was too little to carry the missal from one side of the altar to the other. After Mass, he found Eberhard, the old lay worker, in the yard digging a path though the snow. "Come and give us a hand, Bernard", he called. Bernard cheerfully complied for a while and was rewarded with a hot breakfast in the hospital kitchen. Then he went home to the warm kitchen where the family congregated for meals and prayer. It was this early life that planted in Bernard the seed to be a missionary.

Bernard's parents married in 1901: his mother had been a housemaid for wealthy families and his father worked in a weaving factory and the family lived in a house that had been built in 1674. Just opposite stood the large Court House and a walled in town prison,

Bernard Franke as a young boy, second from right, with three of his friends.

joined by the Presbytery and, about 200 yards away, was the most beautiful Baroque Church of the Franciscan Monastery. The townspeople joked that the buildings symbolised Judgement, Punishment and Hell or Heaven.

The town of Warendorf was 1000 years old and had a population of about 7,000, many of whom were employed in the weaving industry. Most people had garden plots on the outskirts of town for vegetables and fruits and acres of land for potatoes, wheat and corn. Warendorf was a Catholic town where the few hundred non-Catholics lived peacefully and happily together with their Catholic neighbours. The town was most famous for its show-horses, horse racing and fox hunts. In the spring and summer months, the town was colourful with window boxes of bright flowers cascading from the front of the houses. It was famous for its pageants and processions for various feasts and feast days during the year.

At Christmas time, the sun shone on the steep roofs of the village houses and the boys and girls shouted with glee as they threw snowballs at each other. Every now and then, horses pulled sleighs through the town with their bells tinkling. Then the Church bells summoned the people to midnight Mass and they hurried through the flurrying snow dressed in their warm clothes. The people sang carols and visited the little crib. It was a time of great rejoicing.

On 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption, there is a special procession. Preparations begin weeks or even months before when the facades of the houses facing the route are washed and painted. As the day draws near the houses are decked with banners and many visitors arrive. The evening before, thousands of candles and colourful lamps are lit in the windows and along the streets. Above these, ten beautiful decorated and lighted arches span the streets decorated with statues and images of Our Lady. During this time, crowds of people move through the festive streets, praying and singing. Some men are dressed in white for the procession, others wear their traditional costumes and everywhere flutter bright banners and flags. On the morning itself, a huge procession of people move through the festive streets with the Blessed Sacrament and the Miraculous Statue carried on a litter by white robed girls. Warendorf has a special dedication to Our Lady whose miraculous statue is enthroned in the Parish Church. When she saved them from the black plague that killed thousands of people in the vicinity, they made a vow to honour her in a special way if they were saved.

The Franke family consisted of six children three boys, followed by three girls. The eldest was Hermann, then Bernard, Theoder, Anne, Gertrude and Clare. On the ground floor of the house, one side was the lounge-room, a tiny room reserved for visitors. On the other side was the kitchen which was the hub of the family life. Here was the coal stove, which heated the house and here the family gathered for meals, for homework and for prayers. Most of the winter was spent near the warmth of the kitchen stove. Fodder for the animals

Young Bernard Franke, on the right, helping at the Monastery kitchen.

was stored in the attic where the boys slept. Each day some of this was taken to the stable at the rear of the house to feed the two goats and the pig. The pig had a sty near the kitchen so it could be fattened with kitchen scraps. One day near Christmas, when it was really cold, a butcher came to slaughter the fat pig and the women of the neighbourhood came along to take care of preserving every part of it for the coming year. Pieces of meat were salted and put away in the cellar; other parts were smoked or made into all kinds of sausages, liver sausages, black puddings and all kinds of salamis.

Fr Franke remembers his childhood:

> If my Dad was the loving father, ruler and head of our family, my mother was the loving heart, radiating love, kindness and happiness. She came from a nearby country village, Sassenberg, into our Warendorf. They got married in 1901, in our Parish Church, and our happy family started with God's loving blessing. My father stands before me as a very tall man, strong and solid, a hard worker, good, honest and

The Franke Family, 1928. Bernard Franke is seated on the left. His mother is standing and his father is on the right.

reliable. He was a man to be trusted as he would never let you down. As we were poor, hard working people, our Dad taught us, very early, to count the pennies, to save money. We heard often, "Who does not honour the penny will never earn a dollar!" Very soon we had our own Bank account and Passbook. Every penny had to go into a moneybox and we were never allowed to take money out of it. "Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves."

Thanks be to God who let me be born into such a deeply religious family, to grow up in an atmosphere of love and kindness. And, besides my parents, and only a few hundred yards away, was our Franciscan Monastery and Church, another factor contributing to my preparation for His Call and for my Vocation to the Priesthood. In a certain way, I grew up in the Franciscan Monastery, being in and out, doing little jobs for the Franciscans in the old Baroque Church, saying my little prayers in that peaceful atmosphere, often saying, by myself, the Stations of the Cross, 14 huge pictures painted on copper plates. In our free time, such as Saturdays, we tried to earn money doing little jobs for people, like sweeping the street and doing some errands for other people. I remember when I was about 11 or 12 years old I worked in a Printing Office folding papers, but we were happy and took all these things for granted. Of course, we played like other children, and during holidays we went to stay with relatives in the country. Our favourite holiday was in the little village of Sassenberg where my mother came from.

In January 1912, Bernard's father contracted double pneumonia and the family prayed and visited him in the nearby hospital of the Sisters of Mercy. There was happiness again when he recovered but his lungs had been weakened and he was advised not to return to his factory job as a weaver. He was then employed by the Town Council to look after the town's parks and gardens and on top of that he was to be warden at the jail. He also lit the gas lamps along the street in the evening and extinguished them again in the early morning. His sons enjoyed helping him and carried the long poles to light the lamps.

Although he had poor lungs, Mr Franke was still called up for army service during World War l. "When he was called up, it was a hard blow for our family with six children. Every night we said the Rosary, asking God and Our Lady to bring our Dad safely back. Thanks be to God, he did not have to go into the front line, but was appointed to instruct young recruits for the forces." Mrs Franke had to cope alone with all the work of keeping the home going: during the day working in the garden and the fields and working in the house until late at night. Of course, the children helped. She showed fortitude, courage, love and energy during these hard years and faced the hardships with a happy smile.

The Franke family were poor but never hungry. They had an acre or two of land for a vegetable garden and an orchard as well as potatoes and wheat. The three boys spent nearly all their free time working in the garden and in the fields. They had to pull a cart to take things to and from the garden and fields. In the autumn the boys brought cartloads of potatoes to be stored away in the cool cellar where apples were already stored. The family was almost self-sufficient with the vegetables and fruit they grew and the meat from their fattened pig.

At the seminary. Bernard Franke is on the back row right.

Even as a young boy, Bernard Franke dreamed of becoming a priest. In kindergarten he was in a play and was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. He got on a chair and announced to the assembly, "I want to and will become a Priest". It was about the time of his First Communion that he really decided he had a vocation. For several years an old Priest, Father Osmundus Laumann OFM, taught him Latin, which he found difficult to grasp. After years of tuition with the old priest, sometimes while walking through the cloisters of the monastery or through the orchard picking fruit, Latin began to stick.

Towards the end of primary school, his parents were looking for a Franciscan Monastery where Bernard could further his studies as well as prepare for priesthood. There was a monastery in Holland for poor boys and Bernard was accepted there but things changed when his old tutor, Fr Osmundus, died. A visiting missionary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Father Bernard Knubel MSC, got Bernard into the Sacred Heart Apostolic School at Hiltrup with many other boys aspiring to become priests and missionaries.

Fr Franke described the scene:

> For six years, I studied Philosophy and Theology in our beautiful Monastery in the hilly country. Each year we saw some of our co-students ordained as priests. The great day came nearer and nearer as the years of hard study passed. In between study we had picnics; long walks in this beautiful country; lively parties amongst ourselves; smoking long pipes and even sometimes drinking beer sent to us by the brewery in the little village nearby.
>
> Sometimes, after our studies, we rushed down the hill flanked by the river Ruhr to have our swim. Oh so pleasant in Spring, Summer and Autumn and even in the coldest Winter in ice and snow we did not give up. Yes, maybe out of a sort of pride, etc. we undressed in the snow and got into the icy river. How cold it was! But how refreshing.
>
> During my studies, a priest once told me: "Bernard, the only trouble with you is you are too soft; when you were young you were never in fights with other boys, you have never been in the gutter like any normal boy!" To tell the truth, as a youth, I just kept to myself, played hardly any sports but was never a spoil sport I just tried to keep out of trouble. However, trembling and shaking, I got through all the exams and I was considered ready to become a priest.

At last ordination Day, 7 August 1927, the most glorious day arrived. In the old Cathedral of the town of Paderborn, the Bishop called on me and quite a number of other candidates to become priests. Yes, in that moment when in Ordination the Bishop lays his hands upon the Deacon's head to ordain him a priest, this young priest ceases to be himself any more, he is not his own any more, he belongs to everybody during his whole life, just giving himself entirely to all who come his way. He is Their Priest.

Later, Bernard celebrated his first Mass in his own parish Church, St Laurentius, where he had been baptised, and served as an altar boy. It was 10 August 1927, the feast day of St Laurentius. he had spent the previous night in the presbytery just opposite his home listening to the ringing of the five huge bells from the Church tower, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God who had called a son of the town to the Priesthood.

And there I was, in my own room, all by myself, with a heart trembling in awe. So full of love and thanks to God for this wonderful gift of my vocation. The morning came at last. The solemn ringing of our bells filled the air and I was ready, in surplice and stole with my biretta adorned with flowers, to be led in procession through the street following the line of priests, altar boys and white clad little girls to our parish Church, St. Laurentius. Unforgettable, when I went down the steps and gave Our Lord to my Mum and Dad and to my brothers and sisters in Holy Communion. They had helped me with their prayers and sacrifices on my way through my studies and now saw and felt the fruits of their love. After the solemn *Te Deum* and *Deo Gratias*, I followed the procession through decorated streets and along the narrow street to our home where I was born and grew up in a deeply Catholic atmosphere.

Newly ordained priest, Fr Franke MSC, in Germany, 1928.

On the following days, I was invited to celebrate Holy Mass in different places and churches. At the first opportunity, I stood at the altar in our

Bernard Franke (arrowed) at Hiltrup in Germany.

> hospital where I had started as a small altar boy. There in that small Chapel, the desire to become a Priest grew stronger, strengthened by the prayers of the kind Sisters of Mercy, who ran the hospital. I blessed them.

After these ceremonies, Fr Bernard returned to the Hiltrup Monastery for the last year of study, which covered practical priestly functions. On the Feast of the Sacred Heart in June 1928, the newly ordained missionaries were given their appointments. The Mission field in the New Guinea Islands was well known to the young priests through missionaries who had worked there. Five years previously a Mission field in China was commissioned to the German province. These new missionaries had a choice to volunteer for one of these two provinces. Fr Franke applied for New Guinea, which was in desperate need of new missionaries.

> When we got our appointments: Four of us were destined for China and three for the New Guinea Islands (New Britain, New Ireland and Manus). I was one of the three young priests being sent to the other side of the world, the Tropics under the Equator. What a day of excitement! Following the custom, we threw razor blades away and watched day by day the slow growth of our Mission beards. At that time priests, in Germany very seldom had beards and we were now recognised and known as real Missionaries in foreign lands.

Departure date was 6 October 1928, and Bernard and his confreres were given the opportunity to visit their families and to gather things a Missionary might need on lonely Mission stations. Then came the real farewell, Sunday at the end of September in his St. Laurentius Parish Church. He remembered, "The hardest part was in the darkness of the park on the way to the railway station with my whole family, Mum, Dad, Herman, Theoder, Anne, Gertrud and Claire and myself. We were all feeling the goodbye, *auf wiedersehen*. Only in my dear mother's face is there a tiny smile. (I never saw her again). Yes, it was the first shadow of the Mission Cross over my heart".

There were more farewells at Hiltrup. After a moving sermon, the Missionaries received their Mission Crosses, a constant reminder that Mission work would be difficult. An old New Guinea Missionary, Father Joseph Bender, spoke about the Mission in Papua New Guinea. Then the Provincial made a farewell speech. In response, Bernard spoke for all the new Missionaries, Priests, Brothers and Sisters, about 20 in all. Remembering the time when he helped his father light the gas lanterns in in the evening in his hometown, he referred to the work of missionaries as light bearers.

On 6 October 1928, they boarded the *Aller* in Bremerhafen, for their voyage to New Guinea. There was one stop at Antwerp to load some cargo for Australia and a Junkers plane for the goldfields in New Guinea. They then sailed 33 days around the Cape of Good Hope without once going ashore. There were 3 Sisters, 3 Brothers, 5 Priests, all young, full of life, joy and happiness. It became cold as they sailed south and there was enough snow on board to throw snowballs at each other, their last winter for years to come. [On 6 October 1968, 40 years after their original departure, the group met for a reunion].

After some weeks, Australia at last rose out of the wide ocean before them and they stepped ashore in Adelaide, then on to Melbourne where they stayed and enjoyed the parks. They visited St. Francis Church, so popular with the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. One day they went by train to visit some of the MSC Sisters in a Monastery College at Sunbury and it was a great treat for the three Sisters to see their friends whom they had known in the Mother House at Hiltrup.

Sister Jucidias was one of the sisters onboard with Fr Franke and she remembered the bad fog in the middle of the sea. In Melbourne they visited their own Sisters. "We stayed there a long time and the Fathers went off. We had to go to the ship and we were left behind. We heard the captain say for us to be there at such and such a time and we were there, but we had misheard the departure time and missed the boat. We had to go to Sydney by train. The fathers said it was OK." It was a story that remained with the mission tales for a long time and the poor sisters were teased about it. They were very lucky that a train could take them in the right direction to the next port – Sydney. (One of the places where Sister Jucidias worked was St Paul's mission station - the place of the martyrs).

Meanwhile they were given a cordial welcome by priests and brothers from the MSC Monastery, the Mission Procure at Coogee, where they felt at home after the long trip from the other side of the world. This Procure was a transit home for all MSC Missionaries

for New Guinea and the Gilbert Islands. Here they had the opportunity to meet MSC Members from different parts of the Pacific and listen to their experiences. They also visited the Mother House of the Australian Province at Kensington to meet their Australian confreres.

When they viewed the M.V. *Marsina,* which would take them to New Guinea, they were surprised how small the boat was compared to their former ship, *Aller*. They could not imagine that it would carry them the hundreds of miles up to New Guinea. Soon they had boarded her and after several weeks calling into various places they were on their way.

Fr Franke described the voyage:

> At last, after passing some islands, Papua appeared with its dark mountain ranges outlined on the skyline. Later lighter coastlines emerged. Soon we saw houses and stores around the harbour of Port Moresby. Being the entrance to Papua New Guinea, it was, and still is, the most important harbour and centre for administration. Here an elderly Priest, Father McEncroe, MSC, welcomed us. We visited the Mission station at Koki, where we met a French MSC Missionary and some of our Australian Mission Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, who took care of a small hospital, an orphanage and school. We were very interested because it was our first taste of Mission life. Then we sailed for Samarai which is only a small island set amongst hundreds of other islands. Leaving Samarai we began our last stretch, more excited than ever. The last Sunday of Advent passed and our Sisters got busy making and creating an atmosphere of Christmas on board. We arrived in Rabaul on Boxing Day, 1928.
>
> On Christmas morning, we new missionaries had our first view of New Britain. At first we saw dark green mountains up to 3,000 or 4,000 feet high and, later, as we came nearer and steamed along the south coast, we saw a few villages. During the hot hours, the coastline slowly became clearer. Small islands, some with coconuts, appeared along the coast. Evening came and very soon the darkness of the night covered the island of our dreams. In the early morning we said our last Holy Masses on board, after which we clung to the ship's railings taking in the beauties of the Tropics. Then after passing Birara Point, where villages came into view, we saw the first houses and buildings of our Headquarters at Vunapope and the twin towers of the Cathedral. From all parts, mirrors flashed messages of welcome and joy, which we answered with our mirrors. Of course the *Marsina* could not turn and land us at Vunapope but continued into Rabaul. It took us about 2 hours to enter Blanche Bay and Simpson Harbour, which is known as one of the most beautiful harbours in the Pacific. Cones of volcanoes are all around, coconut palms everywhere, villages and even a few churches. At last we new missionaries were in the harbour of Rabaul, flanked on our right by a flat island with a still active volcano at the back, Matupit Island where, before Rabaul existed, our first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart landed on 29 September 1882. (Matupit was to become in later years my little parish).

> Now we were at the wharf being screened by the Customs' officers; after which we were on our way to the nearby parish church, a beautiful building just nearing completion, which was the work of our Brother Overkamping. Here the Australian Parish Priest, Reverend Father Joseph Madigan, gave us a warm welcome, as did the Sisters of the Sacred Heart who were taking care of the Parish school.

Soon the new missionaries were heading to the mission headquarters at Vunapope, 30 kilometres away on board the mission boat, the *St. Teresa*. Here bearded Fathers and Brothers greeted them as well as Sisters and children. In the middle was the smiling face of Bishop Vesters who had taken over from Bishop Couppé. He had been in Vunapope since 1924, was a Dutch national and spoke fluent French, German and English. Because of his nationality, he had been well placed to take over the mission during the time of the anti-German feeling then prevalent in Rabaul. He was a friendly, scholarly man and had a vision for the future of the church in New Britain. He was upset that the numbers of missionaries had decreased considerably since 1914 when there had been 45 priests and 34 brothers. Ten years later there were only 34 priests and 33 brothers. Then came the welcome news from Canberra in 1925 that the Federal Parliament "had repealed the old law of 1921 restricting the return of Germans to the mission and high hopes were held that there would soon be new missionaries on the way from Germany" (Waldersee, 1995: 556).

Bishop Vesters was now anxious for many more priests to come from Europe to New Britain. The arrival of Fr Franke and his friends in 1928 was a very great occasion and he was there to greet them. The Cathedral bells rang their welcome. The new arrivals were taken in procession up the little hill to the Cathedral where in a solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament they all expressed their joy and gratitude for their call to be missionaries by singing the *Te Deum*. This Latin hymn was still the favoured one by the clergy and the locals alike.

In 1928, Vunapope was a very important centre for the vast Mission in the islands. Keen to see everything, the new missionaries visited the different Convents: MSC Sisters, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Indigenous Sisters, Daughters of Mary Immaculate; also schools, orphanage and hospital. They were quite astonished about everything. There was a dry dock where brothers and labourers were building a big new boat; nearby they saw carpenters, shoemakers, the bookbinders and then the printing office and the tailor's shop. It was the centre from which the many Mission stations received everything that was needed as regards provisions, houses, schools, churches and hospitals. The mission station was nearly self-sufficient. Things needed on outstations were made there as well. The new missionaries were given instructions about health, especially malaria, the feared killer of so many young missionaries. Then, at the tailor shop, they were fitted with white outfits complete with tropical helmets to protect their heads from the fiery heat of the sun. Later they visited nearby mission stations on foot, horseback or in horse drawn carts. The priests on these mission stations happily introduced them to their people and parishioners.

On one of his first days, Fr Franke visited Tapo Mission 15 kilometres away, travelling in a little horse drawn cart. As he rode through the jungle and a huge coconut plantation, he was greeted left and right by the friendly local people. The Mission station had a big Church, schools, and Sisters' convent set amongst flowers and coconuts. His greatest surprise was to see a young Tolai boy, about 16 years old, sitting at a desk under the priest's house, reading a book in Latin. This young man was none other than Herman To Paivu and, when he glanced over his shoulder, Fr Franke saw he was reading Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, a book he had to read and study at High School in Germany on the other side of the world. That image stayed with Fr Franke a long time.

The new missionaries then embarked on their mission honeymoon without the responsibility of their own parish or mission district. Remembering that this state would not last they developed techniques that enabled them to face trials and difficulties that would come along in the future. How else would they cope with going into a district with completely foreign customs and language? In this New Britain Mission of the Sacred Heart about 50 different languages and dialects were spoken. The Vunapope Mission had used the Tolai language, *Kuanua*, for 46 years and there was a grammar and a dictionary containing about 30,000 words. The Gospels, Catechism, etc., were already printed in it; so knowing the rudiment of an indigenous language would be a terrific help to learn other languages.

Missionaries often found themselves with a heavy workload: learning new languages; preparing translations of hymns and gospels; establishing schools for the children; constructing buildings; teaching local builders skills; preparing church services; and training catechists. The catechists were often the backbone of the missions as they could live on distant stations and provide instruction for newly visited villagers. They often held positions of authority and, if they had not been instructed properly, sometimes preached quite unorthodox teachings, which complicated many issues.

Fr Franke was to learn all of these pitfalls before being sent out to his new mission station. He was sent to Tavuiliu to study under Father Joseph Bender, a linguist, with many years experience. He stayed three months to learn the Tolai language from the long bearded priest. As soon as he was able to make himself understood, he got on his horse and rode to outstations to practise hearing confessions, celebrating Holy Mass and trying out sermons, written out with the help of Father Bender. From the mission there was a breath taking view over Rabaul and Blanche Bay, a beautiful harbour. Each morning was given over to the theoretical study of the language and in the afternoon, Fr Franke strolled around with the children, hearing them explain the names of things. In some ways, he learnt more by hearing the language spoken than by studying it. Everything was new to him in a strange country with a different way of life, a different mentality, different religions, ideas and beliefs.

At Tavuiliu, (near Taulil)

Laetare Sunday was a day of joy. The sun in its splendour was shining upon the tropical scenery and on the corrugated iron roof of the mission house. A refreshing breeze helped

to make the heat bearable. There was peace and quiet all around. Father Bender was away and Fr Franke had been left in charge of the station for several weeks. This was his first attempt at being a missionary. He received a letter from To Daka, the catechist at Taulil that a Sulka woman living at Taulil was sick but not dangerously so and he decided to call on her the following day.

Fr Franke described the scene:

> Taulil is the outstation furthest from Tavuiliu and the people there speak a different language, which I cannot understand. Early Monday morning I said Mass and then packed everything from the candleholders to my blankets in two rucksacks. Then I got on the horse. Oh, Balu, if only you were not so old! The boys follow carrying the rucksacks. A tropical morning that could not be more beautiful unfolds around us. It is still cool. Along the way we meet a lot of people working noisily. The *kiap*, a Government official, is expected. "Hey, Father, where are you going to?"
>
> I answer, "I am going to Taulil!" We are on the descent. Balu walks very carefully. I pull out my breviary to say my prayers. Riding a horse like Balu I can afford to do that. Already at the first verse I hesitate: "The fool in his heart says there is no God!" Every flower shouts at me and the sunshine burns me: "There is a God!" I close my breviary. Things around me are too glorious and I cannot concentrate on praying from a book. I think back to happy hiking days along the Rhine, in the valleys and the mountains of the Sauerland. How we sang then, loud and strong, to rid our lungs of the dust of books.
>
> And then when we chance upon some women carrying children on their backs, I stop to talk and joke. I do not pass by anyone without stopping and talking. There was only one thing to spoil my enjoyment; most of the people I met were not Catholics. No, most of them are *Kutkuts,* Wesleyans. The sun continues to climb and is beginning to burn. However, the jungle is cool.
>
> After 2½ hours we reach the woman's hut. The woman is better, but is still plagued by a dreadful cough. As I wish to talk to the catechist first, I ride on. More and more people along the road are cleaning up in anticipation of the *kiap's* visit. How clean the path is! After riding a steady three hours I reach my destination; a large square with a new church made of bush materials on the left, as well as the Father's house and the house of the catechist, who has a difficult task. I receive a cordial welcome. I go inside the little Church, which could not be smaller: a beaten earth floor, a table and a bench to serve as confessional and communion rail. Stretching above was the grass roof.
>
> The Father's house is no more elaborate than his little church; a table and a bed made of bamboo. The house, about 3 squares, is set on posts one meter above the ground for health reasons. In the space underneath, the pigs find shelter and grunt. One can see and hear them through the split bamboo floor. This will be my first night in this

bush hut. To me everything as yet has the appeal of the new. After a ride like this, a drink of coconut milk tastes great. We all make a cigarette and laugh and joke. I particularly single out an old heathen to talk to. I also seek the catechist's opinion on the condition of the sick woman.

Soon I'm in the saddle once again and on my way to hear the confession of the sick woman. At the end she asks me for oranges which she likes. It is just as well that I have some in my rucksack and I promise to bring them along in the morning. Then I return to the "vicarage" where the cook has prepared a meal with a tin of sardines. So I settle down and thoroughly enjoy my lunch. Afterwards I read my breviary and hear confessions.

At last, the beautiful tropical evening is upon us with its pleasant coolness even though the temperature is more than 20 degrees. The people are gathered outside sitting on mats around a candle. It is a beautiful scene: the brown bodies in the flickering light of the candle. We smoke and betelnut is handed around, I decline the betelnut, as it was only last week that I burnt my mouth with the lime that is taken with it. There is laughter and joking. The laughter is particularly at the expense of To Gugune, a placid old gentleman who had been a *tultul* during the Gerrnan administration. A straggly beard does nothing to enhance his looks. I tease him because he has such a jolly laugh. I talk about my homeland, about the winter and the snow, about my relatives and how much they would enjoy seeing me here.

In the sky above there are countless stars. The trees around us glitter and twinkle with fireflies as if some of the stars had dropped to earth. After the candle has burnt down, I pace up and down saying my rosary. I listen to the catechist's family singing hymns. I return to my hut and lay anything soft on the hard bamboo planks. I push the rucksack under my pillow, then try to go to sleep but without success. I am just not yet used to anything as hard as this.

Early next morning, I hear confessions in the church. The catechist gets the altar ready and decorates it with flowers. We have morning prayers and then Mass. The people sing and pray. They do not know many prayers as yet, but they know the Our Father and the Hail Mary well. The little ones play and scream and make it hard for their mothers to concentrate. Consecration, Holy Communion, Mass is ended. The catechist gives a sermon. Although I can understand it, I would not be able to give one myself. After that I baptise three children. I suggest the names: Hermann, Gertrud and Klara the names of my brother and two sisters. They struggle, scream and kick.

Then I have breakfast. The boy has even boiled an egg to eat with some bread. A local man presents me with some bananas called *kalapua*, declared "old women" because they are soft enough for toothless gums. The horse is being saddled and I say farewell to my people in the bush and give them my blessing. I ride away with a crowd of children following. As I am in no hurry, I do not urge the horse on. We come to the house of the Sulka woman where a pretty altar has been set up. I give the woman Communion and administer the Sacrament of the Sick.

> My job is done. How pleased she is with the oranges. I jump on my horse and move homeward with more speed. Balu manages a veritable trot. Once I have to dismount as a tree and some bushes are obstructing the road. My helper clears a path with his bush knife, and then we move on. We can hear the sound of running water below. The Tolais with me break off some large leaves and off they run. They bring a cool drink for me as well. How good water can taste!
>
> We continue on, the sun climbing higher. Now there is no bush, just a track in the open. The sun is beating down. To make it worse the track goes uphill and down dale. Balu barely drags himself along. I am hungry and thirsty. I can't help thinking about beautiful bananas. What a good feast they would make! There are no houses anywhere. Up in the distant hills I can just make out the Mission station. Balu creeps along in the burning noon sun. We come across a house and laugh and joke with the children, forgetting about refreshments and bananas. Suddenly their mother has a brilliant idea: "Father, would you like a banana?". Oh, yes please", this comes from the bottom of my heart. My helpers get some bananas and give the skins to Balu. Refreshed we complete the last part of our journey meeting some school children. "Father!" they call and tumble along. We are home.

From Fr Franke's description we have a wonderful study of the missions and missionaries. Yet in the years to come he would suffer deprivations and loneliness on distant mission stations where his new converts did not always toe the line. He was optimistic that the people would give up their old beliefs wholeheartedly and sometimes he could get impatient if this did not happen. Over the years he learnt to appreciate the local way of life in the tropics; the food, the scenery and the little customs of the people. After this time of the so-called honeymoon, Fr Franke was about to learn what the life of a real missionary was like. He lived it with a sense of adventure and achievement as a missionary. One thorn in his side was the number of people who belonged to the Wesleyan Church. Yet Fr Franke was to overcome this negative attitude and became firm friends with the Ministers of many other Churches when he was based in Rabaul, particularly the United Church which the Wesleyan Church became known as.

A Priest is Not his Own.

Fr Franke outside his family home on the day of his first Mass.

Chapter 5

Diary of Fr Franke: Appointment To Valoka, 1929

After spending three months with Father Bender at Tavuiliu Fr Franke was appointed to the Nakanai area of West New Britain. Now he was to find out what it was like to be a real missionary and face difficulties and trials, but also joys and successes. He was transported there on the Mission boat, the Kurindal *along 300 miles along the New Britain Coast. On the way they called into the Mission Station of St Paul's with its memorial for the Bainings Martyrs. This had a sobering effect on Fr Franke who said, "I took the memory of their martyrdom along with me into my Mission life that brought me so often near to death". He had tremendous courage in the face of danger and this stood him in good stead during his mission years.*

Fr Franke gives a first hand description of his life as a missionary in articles and photographs he sent home to his family and to the MSC magazine, The Annals *and the Hiltrup Monastry Magazine*.[1]

Fr Franke:

On the last day of our trip, after travelling four hours I saw the white figure of Father Stamm on the beach at Valoka in Nakanai. I climbed as high as I could on the *Kurindal* and waved a joyful greeting. It was 16 April 1929 and he had been on the station for nearly five years. The *Kurindal* left the following day. Father Stamm and I, his chaplain (with the right and duty of succession), were left by ourselves.

Father Stamm, who had begun the Valoka Mission in 1924, was very pleased to have another priest with him. He was now quite ill but he revived visibly. Only a few weeks previously, he had received the sad news of his mother's death. We sat on his verandah till

Modern Photo of Valoka Church, 2007. When Fr Franke was there, it would not have been so ornate.

late, chatting away. Had I not just arrived from Europe and had I not spent four years in Father Stamm's hometown, Oventrop? A lot of questions were asked and stories told. In Valoka there was a big church but many outstations did not have a church.

Everything was so new to me in Valoka: the people, the language and customs. With great enthusiasm I started to study their language. Father Stamm had written a small grammar and had compiled a dictionary of more than 3,000 words which made everything so much easier. As usual when learning a new language, I started with: "I am going, you are going." As in Tavuiliu, my school desk was everywhere and my teachers were the young and the old people and I was constantly trying to get new words and expressions from them. I was accepted and made very welcome. It was the work of Grace. Sometimes workers from plantations had returned home to their distant villages and knew about the mission.

Father Stamm introduced me to all the villages and stations. Those nearby were visited by bicycle. Our boat, the little *Josef* that was 7 meters long, took us to the more distant villages. I had great respect for this boat. I had brought two pairs of blue working trousers for greasy work but I had no idea how to handle an engine. Our theological and philosophical books contained no instructions about these things. During my first lesson on board I became quite ill with fear. Once we went as far as Bitokara where Father Schumm, our nearest neighbour, was working. When I felt low I used to go to him for help and I always returned relieved. Across the bay there was another station about 40 kilometres away but for three or four months, the bad weather really hit the coast and you did not dare venture out.

Father Stamm's last few days in Valoka passed very quickly. He wanted to leave me not only a good parish, but also a well-run poultry yard. In the midst of our labours our Mission boat, the *Julius,* arrived and around 8 o'clock it departed with Father Stamm on board. I was alone. Alone with my Catholics and many more heathens, alone with my worries, far away from any other priest, barely speaking a few words in the new language and completely ignorant of the local customs and traditions. Suddenly I felt very small and helpless, but at the same time very close to our dear Lord. It was a year to the day since my Superior had told me I was going to New Guinea. The following day I turned 26, it was 8 June 1929.

Missionary giving medical attention to two children.

I plunged into the work with great enthusiasm, both in Valoka or Porapora, which is one hour away. During the day I had a lot of visitors wanting this and that and often taking advantage of my inexperience. I had to dress sores and give lessons. All my work was accompanied by tunes played on the gramophone, the

wish of the people. My second night was very unpleasant. The whole of Valoka Village was in an uproar over a marriage scandal and I had the first taste of just how wild my people could be. To make matters worse it was one of my workers who was the reason for the scandal. It seemed that he had just waited for Father Stamm's departure!

It was just as well I was very busy those first few weeks; otherwise it would have been hard to bear the loneliness. After several months on my own, I was looking forward to the arrival of the Mission ship. The hardest thing for me was to be alone, alone and have no one to talk to. How wonderful it would be to watch the boat approaching and to recognise the priest on board. How I would welcome him! We would sit up till late and talk and talk. But things turned out very differently. When the boat finally arrived, I wasn't even in Valoka but in Kwalekese, which is three hours away. While examining some candidates for baptism, I received news of the arrival of the boat. Instead of postponing the baptisms, I stayed in Kwalekese, baptised the candidates and stayed in my bush house furious with myself. However, at the crack of dawn the following morning, I went to Valoka in my little *Josef*. I just managed to get there before the *Julius* departed. I saw Father Ischler, our Mission visitor, standing on the shore. My happiness on seeing him knew no limits. I was in such a hurry to get ashore that I fell out of the *Josef* into the sea! Father Ischler shook his head. Oh, the impetuousness of Youth! I was so glad to see my first mission visitor and what a reunion!

We tied the *Josef* onto the *Julius* and in happy convoy visited Father Schumm at Bitokara, where I spent several relaxing days. Then Father Ischler continued his journey and I returned to my own parish. On the way back I stopped to say Mass at three outstations. In future years, I often had the pleasure of a Father visiting and staying for the night and I enjoyed every visit immensely. How often did I listen with feverish intensity for any noise resembling the beat of an engine. Often in vain, but when it really was a Mission boat, then the engine sounded like beautiful music to me.

At the time of my arrival in Valoka, the last entry in the Baptismal Register showed No. 801. Two years later the number was 1,836. Father Stamm sowed the seeds of Christianity and I was allowed to harvest. Of course, many are Catholics in name only and I worry about them. With special joy I remember a few great christening days. The eagerness of the Catechumens grew more every day. School children often helped me with the baptismal preparations if their own parents were to be baptised. At night the children taught the prayers to parents, relatives and neighbours. And the baptism day itself! The bush church was beautifully decorated and everyone was in a holiday mood. Unfortunately it wasn't always possible to give the women, who in this area wear only a few leaves, a baptism dress. How hard it was for me on days like this to be by myself, without another priest to help me celebrate and cope with the long queues of people awaiting baptism.

I was faced with solving everyday problems for which I had no training. How fervently I wished that my dear parents, brothers and sisters, friends and benefactors of the Mission could have been present to help me cope. When I was young I preferred to study and was very clumsy when it came to doing manual work. At times like this my father used to exclaim angrily, "Bernard! You're no use for anything!" I am reminded of this as I see five

soccer balls requiring mending. Of course I don't play soccer here in the tropics, but the men, young and old, all play. Prancing around, full of enthusiasm and passion, they drip with perspiration in the boiling heat. And if there is no proper ball, then Father's lemons have to do. Smilingly I watch them from my verandah and shake my head. The men asked me to put some "medicine" on the balls. This is the reason I now have five soccer balls lying here needing repair.

If only that was all! Oh, no! Out here on one of the most isolated Mission stations one has to be able to do everything. Someone might bring in a leaking pressure lamp. That means getting out the soldering iron - solder, ammonia and soldering fluid, it means lighting the soldering iron and soldering. There is hardly any profession or trade that is not called upon. Yesterday I mended a small suitcase. Sometime ago my washtub came apart. Again this meant a bit of self help. Buttons come off shirts; so you sit down and sew them on! If you want fresh vegetables, you have to get busy and plant them. And none of this is explained in any of the books that I have studied. And should little *Josef*, my boat, play up, perhaps even while at sea, then that means setting to and repairing or perishing. My kitchen is on the verandah. If I were to leave my cook completely in charge, I would soon feel the consequences. This is why I check the cooking pots every now and then.

I work with timber, saw, hammer, chisel, plumb bob and nails. How much carpentry work and building I have had to do! It is a special joy to improve my small bush church. I am fortunate to have a choir loft made of planks and palings. There is a lot of carpentry I can do on the choir loft to improve it. And when that is done I prepare putty and paint, fetch the paintbrush, climb the ladder (which had to be made) and start painting. Soon I will have a beautiful church that the people will love to visit. Just before Vespers I tackle the medicine chest. Often I have to attend to big, ugly sores. As a boy I served for 4 years as an acolyte in a hospital in Warendorf. If only I had watched the good Sister Maximiliana more closely then, I would know more about dressing sores now. But I just have to manage.

I must introduce our wonderful catechists who ran the small school teaching the children to read and count as well as teaching the adults about the Catholic religion. During the years at Valoka, I sent some Nakanai boys to be trained as catechists and in the end we had catechists working in 25 villages. Their work was remarkable. Catechists were devout people who gave a good message. Their wages were low but they made their own gardens in the villages. The catechists did a marvellous job and made great sacrifices. Often they did not know the languages of their new villages but they were quick at learning them. Along the West New Britain Coast, it was often the catechists who began the mission stations as priests were confined to the Tolai and New Ireland areas. When Fr Stamm came to Valoka the catechists had worked there already and this made it easier for him. When I got there it was even a little bit easier again. There were still some places that had not been contacted and that was my job. We were recognised and welcomed in many places because of the catechists. The good news went around and the people wanted get in touch with the Catholic priests.

Vaisisi, An Outstation Of Valoka, 1929

I had been planning to pay a visit to Vaisisi, a mountain village for quite some time. I packed a few things that would bring joy to the hearts of these children of nature. I went into my tiny bush church to pray then hopped on my bike. All the time I could hear the bright voices of the school children practising a, e, i, o, u.

School is out for the day.

In the cool of the morning I cycled to the village from where I would begin my trek into the mountains. I left my bicycle at this village and the chief there acted as my guide. We were soon on our way with a crowd of men and women trailing behind on the way to their gardens. I sang a song in their language while the chief removed obstacles along the track with his large bush knife. On reaching a fallen tree we called a halt. My houseboy, Leo, passed me my smoko box. How good black coffee is for your thirst! We rolled some cigarettes. Then full steam ahead! One hour went by. Two hours gone. We only had to cross a dried up stream now, which had carved a steep bed in the rocks, and we reached Vaisisi.

Just then a conch shell called the people from work to come to dinner. In no time at all the men gathered around me and shook hands as if we were old friends. I sat on a rock next to a very old man, laughing and joking with him as much as my limited knowledge of their language permitted. Then I pulled out paper and a small piece of tobacco for each of them. It took so little to make them all happy.

I enquired after the sick. Two old men were sick, but not sick enough to justify emergency baptism. In my knapsack I had some bread and some cake, which I gave to the two men. Soon everyone tasted it, if the Father ate it, it has to be good. I was given a refreshing *kulau* and some hot *kaukau* (sweet potato). Then I produced white armlets made of porcelain: a welcome ornament. Smiling and joking I walked through the village. The chief there wore his official cap – [a *luluai* cap introduced by the German Government]. The children, whom I am in the habit of approaching before anyone else, were no longer afraid of me. The people asked for a catechist and I promised them one later. Then it was time for me to leave. A cheery farewell and we headed for home downhill. In front of us walked women and girls from coastal village, effortlessly carrying big flat baskets laden with heavy stones. I tried to lift one of these baskets. With a lot of effort I manage to move one slightly. These women carry loads like that for hours laughing and joking all the while. Two hours later I was back on my bike again heading for my small wooden house.

My first visit to Vaisisi was to establish contact and introduce myself as a missionary. They had asked for a catechist and promised to build a small bush church. A catechist was soon living there and some months later they sent word that a church had been built so I was only too happy to go up again to bless the Church and to say Mass in the mountains. When I asked the children in Valoka if they would like to come too, the boys were eager, but some of the girls refused. They told me the following story as a reason for this:

Up there in the riverbed at Vaisisi there are a lot of stones, which are collected by the village and taken home to cook with. These stones are so important to the people that the place is considered sacred. Among the small stones rise two huge boulders called *E Kukuku*. One of the boulders represents a woman and the other a man. It is customary to kill a pig after the first born of a family, a boy or girl, has gone up there for the first time and seen the boulders. It is a sort of thanksgiving for the great blessing by the spirits of the cooking stones. Amongst the schoolgirls were several first born who had never seen *E Kukuku*. As there were no pigs available to be killed, it meant that those girls could not come along. Finally I said, "Never mind, we'll just leave all the girls at home." So I started packing my things. At first I carefully checked over my Mass Kit. For that is the most important item for, if you leave things behind, there is extra legwork.

I sent the Mass Kit a day ahead of me so that the people would be forewarned of our coming and could get the food ready. Then there were other things to be considered. The big blanket I use for a bed was wrapped around my pillow and blanket. Food and a change of clothes were stuffed into the rucksack and also a few toys for the children's amusement. At about 8 o'clock in the morning, we were ready to start. The boys, about fifteen of them, started off carrying all the gear. A bit later I hopped onto my bike and followed them.

I caught up with them at the next village where I had to check a nasty leg injury on one of the villagers. Then on we went, a cheerful, singing group. In the village of Vovosi we found the catechist giving lessons. We looked in on him briefly and then continued on to Kapepei. This is where the joy of riding my bicycle had to end, as it just isn't made to go over bush tracks. The chief promised to look after it in his hut. With the aid of a walking stick, I continued on foot further into the bush. We were singing Nakanai words to tunes. At first we passed through low scrub, areas that had recently been used for gardens by the villagers, then through gardens and finally through jungle. We did not sing a lot as we were walking too fast. But for all that my boys were shouting loud enough to make the trees tremble. It sounded like the war cries and banshee howls that can be heard when a wild pig has been shot and is taken to the village. Of course I have learnt to shout a bit, too and often joined most heartily in their shouting to the delight of the boys. But every so often I could not help myself and I had to break out in a German marching tune. After tramping along for about one and a half hours we sat down on a fallen tree and rested. As a reward I pulled a stick of black tobacco from my pocket. Quickly everyone made cigarettes from newspaper and had a few refreshing puffs.

Then we continued along the track, joking and shouting as before. Gradually the path became steeper and after an hour or so we reached the plantations of Vaisisi, the coconut

palms waving to us from the mountain. Up we went, along steep and worn rock steps into the familiar dried-out riverbed and there in front of us were the well-known *E Kukuku* boulders. Here we found the catechist who greeted us enthusiastically. A few steps further and there was the Gavuvu Creek rushing along it steep and rocky course. How enjoyable it was to throw handfuls of the fresh cool water into one's face and mouth!

People came to meet us. Being an old acquaintance I had no need to introduce myself. The only one who acted strangely was my old friend the chief who, on the occasion of my first and second visits, could not do enough for me. This time he greeted me quite coldly and could barely force a smile. Clearly something had recently upset him, but that can happen to anyone. Apparently one of his *galip* trees near the Church had been cut down, as it was feared it might crash down on to the church at some later date. Since then he had not been to Church. After a good heart to heart talk I soon had him right again. When I looked over the Church I was amazed. The people had really built a very nice little Church, and what's more without nails. I praised the catechist and he was very happy about that.

Soon after my arrival, I went for a dip in the cool tumbling waters of the creek which had carved a deep bed for itself among the rocks between the two villages. One does not have this pleasure every day; the waters of the Pacific Ocean at my doorstep are hot compared to this. And then? Well, then I fetched my toy box. You should have seen the amazement among young and old. They had never seen a doll. And a doll that can open and shut its eyes was just too much. Of course the jumping jack caused a lot of glee. However, my little monkey was definitely the favourite. By means of a small lever I could manipulate its head to bob up and down or sideways. If the monkey was asked "Are you hungry?" It would nod its head in confirmation. "Do you like *taro* or *kaukau*, etc." For a change the monkey would vigorously shake its head, "No". Always the delight was great.

In the meantime, a bed had been put up for me in the catechist's house and after lunch I had a rest. So the boys who were having great fun kicking some fruit around, had to leave the Church yard for the time being. Since a long hike in the tropics takes it out of you, I was soon fast asleep. Later in the afternoon, I said my breviary and then we decorated the church with little flags and got the altar ready. My boys came for choir practice, as we people from the coast did not want to be shown up the next morning at Mass. When I consecrated the little church, I was amazed how well the people knew their prayers and even sang some hymns. After that I gave my first instruction. I could tell by their shining eyes that the people understood a little bit, and when I asked them some questions about the catechism I realised that a lot of good work had been done in such short time by the catechist. I ate *galip taro* cake that had been prepared for my supper by an old local woman. And after that my pipe tasted really good. Slowly the people and my boys drifted back to the village. The catechist and one of my boys made up their beds near me in the catechist's house. That seemed to me to be the sign to retire. I did not fall asleep for a while and could hear the people conversing in the village. What were they talking about? Probably about all the new things I had told them about in Church this very evening.

But when I finally dropped off to sleep, the bliss did not last long. At about 11pm, fairly heavy rain started and neither I nor the roof above me had expected that. During weeks of

blazing sun the grass on the roof had dried with several holes appearing. A raindrop splashed on my head, then on my nose and hand. I woke up. So there was nothing else to do but to get up and light my lantern. I went to the Church to make sure everything was all right as I did not have much faith in the roof of the church either. And I was right! There was a leak right above the altar. I hastily put the things away. Next we tried to divert the rain above my bed. Two umbrellas or mats the wife of the catechist had made out of pandanus leaves were put on top of the mosquito net. Even if the rain should still leak through, at least the danger of drowning had been removed. Then I went back to bed once more.

The next morning at about 7am, I celebrated Mass. How amazed the good people must have been when they saw me put on the chasuble. Then I took a big Host and a small one and tried to explain to them a little bit about Holy Mass and Holy Communion. How closely they followed Holy Mass, or rather the movements of the priest. At the end of the lesson I kept the mothers and their babies back. Today I wanted to baptise the smallest ones, up to about one year of age. When I said: "All the boys over to the male side and all the girls over to the female side", I was surprised to see most of the mothers move over to the male side. There were eight boys, but only two girls amongst the babies. Quite often I am at a loss because I cannot think of any names. Another thing is that the people cannot pronounce some of the names properly. Luckily today I was helped out by the Apostles and the angels: Petrus, Paulus, Andrew, Luke, Michael, Gabriel, Rafael,

At long last I was able to give a thought to breakfast and the obligatory pipe afterwards. The boys then packed everything away and I packed the bag with the Mass Kit. Having everything ready, we shook hands with the people and moved through the village singing, "*Muga tou ge golau la mago*", (let us hurry to shore) to the tune of a German sea shanty. Followed by the people's farewell wishes we briskly started our trip home. My boys were of the opinion that if they walked quickly their legs would not tire so easily.

Although the boys sped along, they still had enough energy to shout. Their shouts repeatedly echoed through the jungle and even the parrots and cockatoos, the noisiest amongst the birds, kept silent and hurriedly took flight probably convinced that they could not compete against the father's boys. At Kapepei village on the coast, we refreshed ourselves with a drink of crystal clear water. The *luluai* fetched my bike out of the shed. We pumped the tyres and I hopped on. We reached home around noon. After a refreshing bath, a good lunch and a rest my energy was restored to tackle further work.

Emergency Baptism of a Dying Man

It is evening now and I am once again sitting in a bush hut on one of the substations with a kerosene lantern flickering in front of me. The ocean is pounding away next to me. I am surrounded by countless noisy cicadas, but am not bothered by mosquitoes. Thanks be to God! This morning I said Mass and delivered a sermon in a miserable bush church at the substation of Kwalekese. The church was packed with good-natured heathens and Catholics. After breakfast, my cook made a good cup of coffee, we went on board the *Josef* and moved out to sea accompanied by a lot of noise and smoke. I waved a cheery

farewell to the people on the beach. After travelling for half an hour through the azure and turquoise waters of the Pacific this beautiful morning, *Josef* touched land again. I had just sent the catechist ahead to the village and was having a rest when several women arrived with the message that one man was at death's door. Quickly I snatched up my bag and rushed off to the village. When I arrived the catechist had already baptised him. The dying man, a man in his prime was fighting for breath. He recognised me and showed signs of delight. Although he had been gravely ill for a week, that very morning he had felt much better and had even got up and walked around; that is why the other men had gone off to hunt pigs without worrying. But then suddenly he took a turn for the worse.

They wanted to baptise him, but he said, "No, not yet. I will wait for the catechist and the Father". And he had not known that the Father was nearby. I administer the Sacrament of the Sick and do all I can for a dying person. A few more minutes and his eyes fade. Suddenly wild, piercing howling and screaming, wailing and shouting by about 40 or 50 men and women begins, the like of which I have never heard before. They throw themselves on the dead man, they roll around on the ground, and they dance and jump about howling and screaming. It is so dreadful and horrifying that you just cannot imagine it. Probably they are trying to frighten away any evil spirits. While the men desperately attend to the dead man as if they wanted to bring him back to life, the proper dance of death with the beautiful chanting by the women begins. Huddled together in their midst lay the dead man, next to him are his parents and his widow. One minute they move about quietly, the next minute they rush about as if possessed. The widow is rolling around on the floor; others beat each other with bunches of leaves.

They were engulfed by wild grief. Yet amidst the grief there are some humorous scenes. An infant is quietly sucking away on his mother's breast and another one is fast asleep tied to the back or the hip of his dancing mother. Suddenly the howling widow, dripping with perspiration, holds a mirror in front of herself running a big knife over her chin and cheeks. She doesn't have a beard! She only wants to imitate the everyday actions of her husband shaving. Then she does the same thing to another woman, dancing and howling all the while. She goes to her dead husband and does the same. I wind a rosary around his hand, a cooked *taro* is put in his other hand his usual food. When I check again later, the face of the dead man has been painted and his hair decorated with coloured feathers. The people have quietened down and surround the dead man.

Sakelarama Village

On a visit to Sakelarama Village, I found that the village had been shifted to another site. It is not difficult to build new houses as they are built of light materials. Creepers and bush materials are used instead of nails and timber. Behind the village there is a steep, almost vertical drop that offered an excellent protection against raids. A fence about three or four metres high had been erected on each side of the village. Why had the village been shifted to this protected site? Several months before, wild rumours had started to circulate along the coast. It was said that a big fight had taken place up in the mountains. People from Bau village, 10 hours' walk further inland, had allegedly made a raid on another village and killed people. It was rumoured that they were heading for the coast to raid and

loot. In fact there had never been any fight, there was only the threat of one, which mobilised all of Sakelarama. Spears and shields were kept at the ready. The village was fortified and women and children taken to safety. Before a fight could develop, a government official arrived to sort things out. And what had been the cause of the planned attack on Sakelarama? The chief of one of the Bau villages had died. The men insisted that the people of Sakelarama had caused his death by means of sorcery. That was reason enough to avenge the death of their chief.

Later that same day, I was busy with some of the people setting up a large crucifix in the village. Soon everyone was amazed to see it towering over everything and surveying the mountains, the forests and the vast Pacific Ocean. In front of the crucifix, we erected an altar by driving four forked sticks into the ground and laying several poles across them. Evening was falling. Veils of mist were rising out of the forest. The sun went down in a pool of blood. We were talking about all sorts of things including the past threat of attack on the village. Suddenly a young lad rushed into the men's long house returning with number of long war spears. Others brought two beautifully worked carved shields, decorated in red and white. This raised great enthusiasm: drumming on the shields with their spears making a loud booming sound; hitting shields against their thighs they made a slapping noise and holding their spears in their right hands they were demonstrating a mock attack. One could see that they were in their element. They were delighted to see me take hold of spear and shield and take up a fighting stance. I pretended to go for the chief who in turn feigned terror. However, their joy knew no bounds when a little boy called Leda armed himself with a small shield not much bigger than himself, and a spear and pretended to attack me. The little fellow would really have thrown the spear at me if his father had not restrained him. This little Leda had attached himself to me as soon as I had arrived in the village. (See Franke, 1934a).

It was already getting dark when I made my way to my bush hut further down the hill. I took a simple evening meal and read my breviary by the light of a kerosene lamp. Then I made some notes regarding tomorrow's sermon and went over them with one of my boys,

Sakelarama Village. Little Leda, one of the children in the front row, became a good friend to Fr Franke.

who knew these people's language well and who was to act as interpreter for me in the morning. It was a magnificent tropical night. The moon lit her lantern and threw her light over forests and mountains. From this beautiful scene one song after the other drifted towards my ears, songs sung by my boys who were sitting down with the people. Happy folk tunes and pious church songs sung in the language of the coastal people.

The following morning, the sun pierced the mist and the clouds in a blaze of victory, gilding mountains and forests. While the people crept out of their houses, I prepared everything for Holy Mass. Men, women and children grouped themselves together in the village square. I put on the chasuble, took up a Host and tried to explain a little bit about the meaning behind what they were about to see. Which of them could grasp it? I began to say Mass, it was like my ordination, the very first Holy Mass to be said up there in the mountains, the first time that I said Mass in the open. I have said Holy Mass in beautiful churches in Germany, but never before in a cathedral as beautiful as the one of that morning. Above me was the tremendous dome of the sky gilded by the rays of the rising sun. In front of me was the simple unadorned crucifix; in the distance the Pacific Ocean; below me mountains, valleys and forests dipped in the light of the morning sun; and behind me were the amazed heathens who wanted to become children of God. Believe me, in moments like these all the grey and dreary moments in life are forgotten, there is nothing for it but to love and adore the Big Chief Above.

The people had followed Mass in complete silence. I now turned to them and addressed them in the language of the coastal people: At first I told them how pleased I was to be with them at last. But what was the reason of my visit to them? Was it to obtain something? No. I had not come to bring loincloths, tobacco, knives, etc., either. I had come to bring something totally different. Take a look over there where your pigs are. What are they doing? They eat, they sleep, etc. and when you have eaten them, that's the end of them. Not so with us when we die. We have something inside us, which does not die. Only our bodies die and decay. You yourselves believe that your spirits do not die, that they live on in some other place. I came, leaving mother, father, brothers, sisters and friends behind, in order to demonstrate to you in what way these souls (spirits) of yours can remain forever happy in a beautiful place and to show you the way there. Those who were unable to understand the dialect of the coastal people listened to the translation by my mission boy, who had never been to school.

Following a shower of rain, we planted a few colourful bushes at the base of the crucifix, which towers over the land. After that we quickly packed our things, gulped down some coffee, ate a piece of *taro*, shook hands all round and briskly moved off down the hill accompanied by the farewell cries, *"ioko"*. One last glance back and a quick blessing from the clearing where we had first set eyes on Sakelarama, and we continued on down to the coast. At one stage I asked my old friend, Otto Timo, who had accompanied me from Mai, what he was doing when I noticed him scattering some leaves over a log. He told me that this was the spot where his friend had sat down and he was now dead. A wonderful way of showing love and affection, don't you think?

At Gaongo, from where we had started out, my bicycle awaited me. After a brief rest and after having satisfied the curiosity of the people I got on the bike. At Mai, the next village, I discovered that the catechist and his wife had again been so good as to prepare lunch for me. I was famished and ate everything. By about 4pm, I was two villages further on at Banaule, where I was going to spend the night in order to say Mass again as I had done several days ago and to give two lessons to about 20 catechumens. All went well, they knew their catechism very well and I was able to mark Easter as their day for baptism at Valoka. The following morning, Wednesday, I passed through many villages and everyone was amazed that I had ventured so far into the bush.

Easter is past now. I am looking forward to the arrival of the Mission boat. I have been on my own for another four long months, without a companion or another Father to talk to. Soon the long awaited ship will come and bring visitors. Every afternoon I listen for my schoolboys' cries from he shore, "*Selo! Selo!"* but it does not happen. At last the ship arrived and I sat up all night talking to the visiting Father who continued on his way, while I remained at my mission post. On 11 April 1930, I prepared the *Josef* and set out on a journey along a big river, the Kapiru, which I had been planning for quite some time. This will enable me to seek out some villages that I have never visited before, as the government has only just granted me permission to go there. Twelve kilometers upstream, I contacted a large but secluded village (pop. 200). Recently I received a letter from the old catechist, To Kopia telling me that he had visited some villages far inland and had carried out a headcount. I am dying to go there.

I visited my outermost substation, Tarobi, and from there went bush to a place where only a few years ago four Europeans, who were searching for gold, were murdered by the local people. J.K. McCarthy had been appointed as District Officer at Talasea and I got special permission from him to go into the murder scene. [See end note]. I was in danger sometimes but if the people trusted you, it would be all right. In June I left Tarobi, for a trek lasting 2 or 3 days to Sisimi and Kukula where I hoped to be able to send catechists. On such tours of conquest, one must not be deterred by the women who run and hide and by the men who are reticent. However, their trust is quickly won, as they notice very soon that it is not a government official who is standing in front of them. And then comes the morning of the first Mass in the village, out in the open air, one's heart full to overflowing.

E Pago, the volcano, 1930 or The Time the Ground burnt under my Feet

A large part of my parish lies at the bottom of the active volcano, *E Pago*. Yesterday I went by bicycle to a village that is very close to the dreaded monster. For years and years, the volcano has been lying dormant. Lately, however, it has shown a lot of activity, so much so that the people are afraid of another eruption that would destroy their *taro* crops and cause a serious food shortage. When they asked me to climb the volcano and "kill" it with Holy Water, I could not refuse.

The people remembered the last time it had last erupted in 1918. They had asked Fr Ischler to bless the volcano because the ash was devastating their crops. One nearby village had been Catholic and then converted to the Methodist Mission. These new

Methodists were blamed for causing the eruption. Of course, when Fr Ischler blessed the volcano and it stopped erupting, they quickly became Catholic again.

This time the eruption was very big. The villagers had planted coconuts at the insistence of the government officials and these were all destroyed. I don't know how many people were killed during the eruption. The volcano was rumbling and ash and steam were billowing out. There was steam and dust but no stones came out. During the night, however, I had my doubts about the mountain and I lay there tossing and turning. Of course the uncomfortable camp bed might have been responsible. I rose at 5am, hopped on my bike and rode to Kerapi, which is one hour's walk from Vavua. I was due to say Mass there. Then I returned to Vavua. After some breakfast I went on to Lalakuba, where I was to begin the ascent. Two natives offered to be my guides. My personal servant, Luo, the catechist and a few others followed.

What a climb! Of course there were no paths. We were constantly clambering through dried out riverbeds, over rocks and through dense scrub. As we had failed to recognise the real course of the river, we had to make a difficult detour and paid for it with our sweat. How good the cold coffee from the thermos flask tasted then! In a little more than 3 hours we arrived at the foot of the mountain. The thundering noises coming from the volcano sounded very close. The last part of our ascent was very steep and dangerous because of the loose stones and then we had his Majesty *E Pago* in front of us, thundering dreadfully and blowing steam. Smoke and steam were rising all around us. But all this was insignificant compared to the thundering outlet on top!

We watched overawed. But then we lined up and prayed while I attacked the monster with Holy Water. When the blessing was over, we left the gentleman to his smoking and growling. We sat down and picnicked on the food we had brought along. I gave a tin of meat to the people and refreshed myself with a tin of fruit. Amongst the people was one who had accompanied Father Ischler to the volcano. He told me lots of interesting things about this. At the time the fact that the volcano had suddenly ceased its activity had made a big impression on the people and had warmed them to the Catholic Faith. Now Vavua Village is one of the most flourishing substations of Valoka.

During the dangerous descent, I overheard my companions as they were ridiculing the belief of the old people that evil spirits were playing up inside the volcano. This gave me an opportunity to have a say on the matter. I tried to explain the reason behind the activity of volcanoes. We chose a different way home, or rather a different riverbed and trudged along saturated by perspiration and dying for a drink of water. When we came across fresh water we gratefully slurped it up. The descent only took a little over two hours. But what a picture I looked! I was wet through and dirty from head to toe. But that was nothing. The main thing was that we made it back safe and sound and we reached the bottom at about 4pm. A quick refreshing drink from a *kulau* and I was on my bike again, as I wanted to make it to Valoka that night, which is about six hours walk away. The people along the way asked, "Father, did you go up? Did you bless the mountain?" My visit to *E Pago* was a great consolation to the people.

Valoka Mission house.

I headed home although it was getting dark. When I finally lifted my beloved bike over the last pig fence, I whispered, "Thank God!" I arrived home just after six o'clock. A cold shower soon revived me. I gave the cook boy a special tin to be heated for my dinner. And now I am feeling quite well again, only the ache in my legs reminds me that I did not spend the day in bed. (See Franke, 1930).

Christmas, 1930

Here Christmas coincides with the great wet and is therefore easily spoilt by the deluge. However, if it does not rain, Christmas in the tropics has a charm of its very own. I made a habit of inviting the Catholics from most outstations to Valoka, some of them five, six, seven hours' walk away. Two days before Christmas sees the setting up of the nativity scene completed and the church and station decorated; the Catholics who live close by have been to confession. That meant that on the day before Christmas I can to devote all my attention to the Catholics pouring in from the many outstations. What a hustle and bustle! All the houses are packed. Boys and men are jammed tight on my veranda, over 40 of them, sleeping away the remaining hours until the start of midnight Mass.

At about 11 p.m, the conch shells sounded; the resin torches flickered and danced, the bell (from Rome) is tolling; the red lanterns are glowing; in church the candles are being lit and the people from the neighbouring villages are starting to arrive. The small church cannot hold all of them. The altar is ablaze; it is crowded with altar boys. The record player is playing, *Silent Night, Holy Night*, and soon everyone joins in their own language. A festive sermon, Holy Communion, happy Christmas carols: this holy night must leave a lasting impression on the people! After the celebration things slowly settle down again and everyone stretches out where he can find space. In the morning the small church overflows again with people wishing to attend the last Mass. In the beginning I had a few things on hand and was able to distribute small presents amongst the school children on Christmas Day. [Fr Franke is here remembering the festive season back home in Germany when presents are given. The people of New Britain would find this an alien concept, as it does not have a parallel in their society unless it was associated with giving and receiving trade items. It was a case of the expatriate priest wanting to introduce his own customs to the people].

How nice it would be to have on hand a few trifles, such as small knives, loin cloths, mirrors or even small toys, jumping jacks, etc., even if only for demonstration and to delight the children. Why indeed should these children or even their elders not take delight in things that used to delight us in our youth? In the course of the day the station becomes deserted. The people return to their villages. However their missionary stays behind, collapsing tiredly or even ill, into his chair, seeking peace and quiet. Where is the fellow priest to talk to?

One year, local children enjoyed a gift of dolls from Fr Franke.

Looking back after twelve months: Soon there will be 2,000 names in the baptism register of Valoka; this is very good considering the remoteness. By the end of the year our outstations will number 25. However, I hate figures, particularly if they serve as a gauge for the growth and blossoming of a station. At times I am very depressed to see how slowly Christianity takes root in the souls, how often bad habits triumph over goodness.

At first, I would say Mass in a primitive altar in the open and just say a few words to the people. I felt elated; the Heaven above was one large church. Later we made churches out of bush materials but my successor had a better church. This was at Valoka where the church served me for four years. The natives had planted their own coconuts beside their villages. Before that there were few coconuts. They had only *taro* so if they needed a change, sweet potato and tapioca was available from other areas by trade. Bananas were only a sideline but I got hundreds of bananas and got the people to grow them. This work was a kind of bridge to get to the people. When we got the fever we took quinine and took hot tea and went to bed. After a few weeks, got better.

End Note:

The murder of the four white gold miners Fr Franke is referring to took place in October 1926. The names of those killed were Marley, Collins, Fisher and Page. The murders had happened in Silanga Village inland from the coast. The killers were redressing a wrong that had been committed against their people by a policeman on an earlier patrol. He had raped some of the women. Patrol Office Nicholls was also the object of their ire as he had not paid suitable restitution when some of their pigs had been killed as well. Nicholls had seen what he described as a mountain of gold. It may have been iron pyrites glistening in the granite. The people were angry with white men: any white men. When a group of six gold prospectors

following up on Nicholls find approached the area, four of them were killed by the local people as retribution. The anger of the Nakanai thus appeased; the rest of the party was allowed to escape to the coast. The punitive expedition killed 23 Nakanai men. Others were tried and sixteen sentenced to long imprisonments. (McCarthy, 1963: 20-25). The Bishop was against the death sentence for them, arguing they had not been under government control and did not know the seriousness of their action. Fr Franke had now been given permission to enter this area and was the first missionary in those places in Bangula Bay.

Footnotes

[1] Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are taken directly from these sources, translated from the German by a friend of Fr Franke's in Kokopo in 1970 for this story. They are used with Fr Franke's permission.

Chapter 6

Diary of Fr Franke: Alone No Longer, 1931

Loneliness was a fact of life in the mission stations, especially for a priest like Fr Franke who came from a large and loving family and a busy town in Germany. He was not alone in this experience. One has just to recall the loneliness felt by Fr William Ross SVD in Mt Hagen in the 1930s. He was months alone surrounded by thousands of tribesmen whose culture and language he was only just getting to know. Fr Ross was 40 days walk away from the Alexishafen the mission headquarters in Madang, although the coming of the aeroplane was a great asset (see Mennis, 1982). In Valoka, Fr Franke's mission looked over the bay and an occasional Japanese fisherman called in to visit him.

Fr Franke:

I had been in Valoka for more than two years and the great loneliness experienced there had been interrupted by only a few brief visits by the ship. All of a sudden, I received an invitation from Bishop Vesters to spend several weeks' vacation at Vunapope. I accepted with pleasure, more so as my predecessor, Father Stamm, was to relieve me in Valoka during my absence. It could not have been better! How much I looked forward to seeing the ship bringing Father Stamm and then to take me to Vunapope. I had taught the school children a German song as a welcome and this is what Father Stamm heard when he approached the shore together with the Father Superior.

The following morning, the Father Superior continued on his way to visit the other priests at their lonely outposts. Father Stamm and I spent wonderful days together and in the evenings I told him of the joys and heartbreaks, the progress and failures of his former parishioners. On the Father Superior's return, he held a Retreat for the catechists who had gathered. On 7 July 1931, I boarded the ship and went on holidays. That afternoon we reached my next-door neighbour's station at the Ulamona sawmill. There I met a former fellow student whom I had said good bye to in Oventrop two years ago. We talked and talked! The following evening, after a journey lasting 12 hours, I decided to risk the long climb up to St. Paul's, the martyr station, to surprise Father P. Munzlinger, our priest from Berlin. That turned out to be a very short night. Early in the morning, I said Mass and rode a horse down to the shore. At about 7 o'clock we left for Vunapope. The Bishop was there to meet me and I greeted a lot of acquaintances whom I had not seen for a long time. I felt peculiar in those civilised surroundings; I was no longer used to them and felt as ill at ease as a *bush kanaka* in a drawing room. The difference was just too much.

In the evening, we were told that someone would have to administer the Sacrament of the Sick to a dying person. As all the Fathers were ill with the flu, I volunteered and got ready, however, this time I did not mount a horse or hop on a bicycle, no indeed, I got into a car, to be whisked through the night at great speed to a sick woman. I, the bush priest, who had gone to administer extreme unction many times by bike or on foot, felt most peculiar.

Fr Franke in his vestments.

On leaving the woman's hut, I was soaked through with perspiration, caught a chill in the car and was really sick the next day. The change over to civilisation had been too sudden for the bush priest. One could draw any number of conclusions from that. At any rate I was sick.

Having been nursed back to health, I was at long last able to start my vacation. I was keen to say hello to all the fellow priests who had joined the Mission during my absence and to those whom I had not seen for 2 years. I went visiting from one station to the next, usually on horseback, and spent many a happy hour. Of course I visited my first station Tavuiliu, where I had spent my first three months, my "mission honeymoon". In Taliligap, which is high up with a magnificent view, there is a school for catechists and I went into Retreat there. I was even able to attend a conference for the Fathers at the main station. These conferences are bimonthly and are attended by all priests who are able to get there, usually about 30 of them. On occasions like that, it was brought home to me just how much a missionary in the bush misses out on, which is certainly not to his advantage.

With a light heart I boarded our ship, *Teresa*, on 23 October reaching Valoka on 26 October 1931 where I found Father Stamm had been quite ill during my absence and had lost most of the weight that he had put on in Germany. He joined the *Teresa* to visit the other stations and, from 10 November, I was by myself again.

By 9 April 1932, I had been alone again for five months and I was becoming noticeably impatient. On the one hand, after so many months alone, I did not want to miss any visitors that might arrive on the Mission boat, on the other hand the constant waiting prevented me from fulfilling so many of my plans, especially my favourite one which was to travel into the bush. Finally, having had enough of waiting, I loaded little *Josef* and set out but had to turn around again because of a heavy rainstorm. On the following morning, I had better luck and within 2½ hours *Josef* had taken me to one of my larger substations at Vavua. It was a Saturday and therefore Saturday's chores were awaiting me. Then followed a quiet Sunday. In the afternoon, I had a canoe take me to Lalakuba which is an hour away and there I gave some instruction to the people and said Mass the following morning.

While I was saying Mass at Lalakuba on Monday, my boys were busy getting *Josef* ready for the trip, they filled up with fuel and loaded up with goods. When I returned on the

canoe everything was ready. We turned into a large river, the Mapiuru, which was to take us far inland to a big village called Ubai. It was still high tide so we had no trouble finding the entrance. For me, too, sailing up a big river was a wonderful change. It is so very different. Instead of the vastness of the ocean there are varying scenes along the banks. High kunai grass alternated with gardens of *saksak* palms. But most impressive of all was the mighty rainforest bordering both banks of the river with tangles of beautiful creepers trailing down.

Every so often we came across a fearsome crocodile. The strong current slowed down the *Josef* somewhat but we moved along the winding river, the helmsman skilfully avoiding shallows and dangerous submerged logs. The old chief from Lalakuba was our guide and he told me about the frequent hostilities that used to occur between the people from Ubai, where we were going today, and the coastal people. After a good two hours' travelling we were able to tie up at a landing jetty made of logs bound together and used for the Ubai people's canoes. From there, a path led to the village.

We tied *Josef* securely and the chief and I walked along a bush track. After half an hour we reached Ubai. On the way, the silence of the forest was broken every so often by the hoarse shrieks of birds and the mysterious coo coo of pigeons. I noticed the chief became uneasy. Some years ago, the chief would not have dared walk there. He began to whisper in a suppressed voice. I feel quite solemn. New territory! In front of the village there was a large *taro* plantation surrounded by a stout fence to keep out wild pigs. Here we met the first people. Ten years ago they would have received me with spears but now, those who knew the custom, came forward and shook hands in a friendly fashion. Before Easter, one of my catechists told the people I was coming so that they would not take me for just another white man, but a Father. However, the women, girls and children were very shy.

Ubai village, which was only about a year old, consisted of a large number of houses jammed together in a small area. The people no longer wished to remain in the old village because of the large number of deaths that had occurred there. When we entered the new village, only a few of the villagers were at home. The conch shell was sounded to call the people who came in from the gardens to greet me. The older people felt that even the children should shake hands with me and soon there was great merriment and laughter. My workers arrived soon with food and clothes from the *Josef.* While one of them cooked a meal for me, I opened my box of tricks, i.e., my gramophone, and lo and behold music and songs issued forth, much to the amazement and horror of the people. When I played my laughing record and produced the sleeping dolls they were screaming with laughter. The spell was broken. I had thrown the sausage after the bacon and had won the bacon. From then on till nightfall all the young people surrounded me. Later I sat with the older people talking and joking with them. They were sitting together till late into the night discussing the great happening of the day. The Father was white yet friendly. They had never experienced anything like it.

The following morning while the people were stretching and slowly coming awake and the women were peeling *taro* for breakfast, I prepared the altar. When everyone had gathered

and sat down I explained a bit about what they were going to see. Then Holy Mass began and the sun rose behind the mountains. My Catholic boys received Holy Communion. The people watched intently all the mysterious things that were going on. How happy I was to have won an entry to the inland, through this village. When saying goodbye, the people all crowded around me, no longer shy, not even the women. Together with new bearers I departed for the next village, Kukula, with calls of farewell.

Kukula Village had given our old catechist, To Kapia, a hostile reception on his first visit. They had dug traps for him and hunted him with spears and it was only the chief's special patronage that had saved his life. However, his visit had a happy ending when a big fire was lit and all the spears and arrows were burnt and a pig was killed as conciliation. The rain, which usually falls during the night, had turned the bush track into a quagmire, but by jumping from one side to the other it was possible to get through, even though one ended up terribly dirty. After a good one and a half hours we reached Kukula village. The men and the boys were very friendly but it was almost impossible to overcome the shyness of the women, the girls and the children. As usual I sat in the men's house smoking and talking to them. It was very interesting to see their reaction when I attempted to make notes with pencil and paper of some words of their language which is totally different from that of Sesele village. As they had no idea of the secret of writing their amazement knew no limits when I still knew all the words they had told me before.

It poured with rain during the night and I slept very little. Because of the rain, I set up the altar in the men's house the following morning, but first of all we had to patch it up and finally I was able to say Mass, although somewhat hunched up. Everywhere the men, women and children were crouching quietly. It was amusing how the old chief occasionally made remarks of approval during my lesson. When I was giving out medallions, I met most of the women for the first time as they did not want to miss out.

I left quickly. I was aiming to reach Valoka that day and that was a fair distance. I had arranged to meet *Josef* on the beach. I was wearing white trousers as all the other ones were wet through , and for nearly one and a half hours I trudged through mud and puddles towards the shore, accompanied by my boys from Kukula, who were carrying the Mass Kit and my other gear. You should have seen my good white trousers! Now they were anything but white. I was splattered with mud and dirty from head to toe, I had waded calf high through swampland and I really I looked a picture I had become a veritable "vagabond for God". However, we pushed on relentlessly. As we came closer to the beach I could hear the sea pounding away. I was shocked to see *Josef* dancing crazily on the waves. A northwest breeze had sprung up overnight and whipped up the Pacific Ocean but at Kukula village we had only felt the rain. Quickly we transferred our things to the boat. I emptied my pockets, loosened my belt, but forgot to remove my watch that had only just arrived on the *Teresa* after I had managed for two years without it, that watch is now ruined, spoilt by the sea water. A little forgetfulness can cause so much inconvenience! I had brought worthless things to safety but forgotten the most important one. However, for the moment I was too busy to dwell on the loss. As soon as *Josef* was warm, it started up and we moved away from the dangerous coast. The further we moved away from the shore the

calmer became the sea. The Pacific Ocean had only tried to frighten me. After a wonderful trip lasting four hours we threw anchor at Valoka. Thanks be to God!

Last days at Valoka

By March 1933, the northwest season was almost over and the rains and winds had ceased their battering. I was preparing to take *Josef* to Bitokara to pick up Brother Langkamp who was to move to Valoka for a short time to paint my little house, to build a school and to assist me in any other jobs on the plantation.

After a trip of seven hours, I arrived at Bitokara, where my neighbour, Father Schumm, lived. Although only three months had passed since I had last been his guest, many changes had taken place at his station: a big new Church, built by Brother Langkamp; an extension of his house; new kitchen; and a new school. When he greeted me, he was, like myself, unaware of the fact that it had been decided at Vunapope that within a few months we should be working together at Bitokara.

I rested up for a few days. We also had much to tell each other and naturally we discussed who might be chosen as the badly needed helper for Bitokara. Meanwhile I looked around for anything useful that might have been left over from all the building activity. *Josef* was almost overloaded when Brother Langkamp boarded it on Thursday, 23 March 1933. It was fortunate that we did not run into any heavy seas. We reached Valoka in eight hours. I had spent four years in an unpainted house, between unpleasant plain boards. Now with Brother Langkamp it was to become nice and cosy. Bright paint did wonders for the two rooms. Work was also done outside in the yard, shrubs were planted and the cookhouse was whitewashed. A large plantation was established and fenced off. How good I would have it in the future!

In the middle of all this activity a message from the Bishop reached me after a lengthy detour, to the effect that I was to become the travelling missionary for the Bitokara district in order to assist the aging Father Schumm and to found a new station half way between Valoka and Bitokara. My successor, Fr Sebastian Schweiger, who had arrived at Vunapope from Germany at Christmas, was due to arrive on the next boat. During the following months I was to introduce him to his duties. To me, this was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. I was to leave my beloved Valoka and my work there, to which I had given myself so completely!

However, in front of the tabernacle, where I went in times of trouble, I soon came to terms with myself. In a community, the subordination of the individual is the best guarantee for success. Personally the decision was a difficult one. For the present everything remained the same. I now worked with added zeal to improve and beautify Valoka, outside as well as inside. My successor was to have it better than I. When I received word from the Reverend Father at Warendorf that, despite the difficult times, my countrymen had donated a tidy sum for a new church at Valoka, I was again reminded how difficult it would be for me to leave. This money helped me later when I want to build a small church on my new station.

Passion Week with its impressive ceremonies, adapted to suit local conditions, was drawing near. My last Easter came and went with usual solemnity. Br Langkamp had contracted a dangerous infection on his knee and, when a European called in on his way through, Brother took the opportunity to go along to seek medical treatment at the government station. Because of the north west season, it usually takes six months before a mission boat comes to Valoka and this time the confrere, my successor, was really coming to me from the outside world, from Europe, from Germany. On 24 May, Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, the shouts, "*Selo! Selo*!" coming from the beach did not turn out to be a false alarm. Our big mission ship, *Julius*, brilliant white, proudly hove into sight and my successor, Fr Schweiger, was on board. *May he live long!* that was the song of welcome my school children sang for him; a song of farewell for me.

As there was no other priest on board, Fr Schweiger had to continue his trip to Bitokara and Kombe before finally settling down at Valoka. This was done to give the Fathers at these stations a visitor after the long months of the north west season. On Saturday, I said Mass at Banaule (which has a difficult language of its own) and on Sunday for the villages around Mai (with another language again.) Counting the Bola villages of Ruango and Kulungi there are three different dialects spoken in the area.

On 8 June 1933, four years had passed since I took over from Father Stamm when he left to go on vacation and now I was introducing my successor and I was careful to save him unpleasantness by passing on my experience. Apart from the language, it was necessary to introduce him to the many stations and to familiarise him with everything. This is the reason why we were constantly on tour during the ensuing weeks, either by boat or by bicycle. To me it was a relief to be able to discuss things with a companion.

Heading east

One week after Fr Schweiger's arrival, we made preparations for a more extensive visit to the eastern part of my parish. First we intended visiting Ubai Village which had only been founded one year ago and was situated on the Kapiuru River. In three or four hours *Josef,* noisily making good time, took us as far as the mouth of the Kapiuru River. However the tide was still too low. We pulled, heaved and pushed, all in vain. So we headed for Tarobi. Saturday morning we said Mass there but did not give out communion to the people. Because of the north west monsoon, I had been unable to call there and I wanted the people to prepare themselves thoroughly for confession and Holy Communion. On Sunday, we baptised a small number of adults before Mass, this was to be one of the last baptisms for me in the Valoka district.

That year, I had planned to visit the inland area of Tarobi, which had previously been closed to outsiders. Now, as we were already in Tarobi, we wanted to make a start with a brief visit. At the same time, Fr Schweiger received an introduction to that part of his parish. We left at about 10 o'clock Sunday morning accompanied by several bearers. Today's destination was Kokiso, a good three hours walk, where people had been asking for a catechist for a long time. Pius Kiapen from Tarobi was acting as our guide. He had

formerly been a policeman and had spent a lot of his time inland, always advertising our cause. He had very long legs and as I followed right on his heels the two of us made speedy progress, soon leaving the others behind. Over the past years, I had walked along many a muddy road and had been carried across many a swamp. But this was something else again! When we reached the first quagmire I wanted to wait for Fr Schweiger and have them carry me across. But Kiapen said, "I don't think that will work, Father. We will all sink in". Fair enough.

When Fr Schweiger caught up we pulled our bathers out of the rucksack and prepared ourselves for the mud bath. Because of the sharp needles of the nipa palm we had to keep our shoes on. And then we plunged in. Walking in swamp up to your knees is really no joke. But we felt so ridiculous in this mud bath that we burst out laughing and sang *And then he got stuck in the mud*. It is a pity that there was no cameraman following us, it would have made a true to life mission movie.

Fortunately, things improved, but we kept our bathers in expectation of similar situations. We moved on with Kiapen and myself in the lead. We followed the same track that had been taken by six European gold diggers several years ago and four of them had been murdered in the vicinity.[1] My guide told me all about the incident. As a Tarobi, he had been called upon to act as bearer during the punitive expedition following the murder. It was a peculiar feeling, hearing all the details about it on the actual scene of the crime. How different was our relationship to the people. They were longing for us to come to them as their missionaries. We were also in search of gold, the gold of immortal souls. After about three hours, Kiapen and I reached the plantation area of the Kokisu people and there we came across several men some of them naked. At first, they showed great fear of the white man but they soon got over that when they realised that I was a missionary. When the others caught up with us we went into the village as a group, after cleaning ourselves up in a small creek.

When one of the Brothers at the Vunapope store packed a packet of Kraft cheese for Valoka, he had little idea how welcome it would be!!!!! A piece of bread and cheese and a nip of wine soon helped to restore us. As the dialect in that area is the same as that of the Muku people, we were able to converse with them. They were amazed about this as they had never heard a white man speak their language before. Our conversation was mainly about the differences between the true Catholic faith and the Wesleyan sect, which unfortunately had taken root in the Nakanai area ahead of us. How glad the people were to have fallen into our hands first. Should the Wesleyan missionary, *talatala*, arrive there they would definitely turn him away. In that way, we had come to the main purpose of our visit.

Because of the difficult terrain we had not brought the Mass Kit with us. The following morning we gathered the people around us in the centre of the village and I gave them a brief lesson explaining the purpose of our visit. I also wrote down their names, which is always important in the eyes of the people, gave them a medal each and told them that as soon as practicable they would get a catechist to give them further instruction.

We did another important thing. We had heard that a Methodist missionary was planning to visit several villages further inland within the next few days. As we were not prepared for a prolonged trip into the bush, we did not go but sent off three catechists instead. Kiapen, our trusted guide from Tarobi Village and who helped the former punitive expedition, was put in charge of this expedition to these villages to canvas for us and to announce our visit at some later date. This was asking a great deal as they were coastal people who have tremendous respect for the people of the bush. There was also a lot of ill feeling about the fact that people from Tarobi had acted as bearers during the punitive expedition. Apart from that, climbing along dangerous tracks, high into the mountains was no picnic.

It was no easy thing for them, but still they went. Later on, when they reported back to us at Valoka we learned that in some places they had beaten the *talatala* by as little as two days to win the people for us. It had been a veritable race between the Wesleyan sect and the Catholic *Lotu. A*ctually it is sad that it had to come to that and we had won almost all along the line, all this for immortal souls! When our three emissaries returned to Valoka one evening and told us all about their successful mission tour, their faces aglow with pleasure, I was reminded of the apostles who had been sent out by Jesus and had returned full of happiness to relate their successes.

While the catechists went off on their bush tour, we took another route. After following a good path for about two hours we had a swim in the Gavuvu River before approaching Sisimi Village which I had visited before. The people of Sisimi showed us the site where the long awaited catechist was to have his house and where the church was to be built. Everything was fine. Up till then, Fr Schweiger and I had been together. Now we went separate ways. He returned to Tarobi to collect the *Josef* and meet me on the coast. I wanted to stay over-night at Kukula Village and then the following morning walk down to the beach to wait for Fr Schweiger. It all worked out very well. I reached Kukula in one and a half hours. and found three children with very bad sores. I assumed they would die

People of Kukula Village. Photograph taken in 1931. The people there were a little more trusting on Fr Franke's second visit.

soon and so baptised them. They were the first to be baptised in that bush area. The following morning, I left for the beach and soon caught *Josef*. Once again we said Mass at Vavua and then we were headed for Valoka, our home.

Heading west

We had visited the eastern part of our parish so, on 7 June, we set out on our bikes to visit the western section. It was good that Fr Schweiger had the opportunity to undertake a mission trip by bicycle since the *Josef* had a cracked valve cover. As there were two of us, we could help one another across the creeks. We passed the villages of Porapora, Kasia, Kwalekese and Banaule, stopping to rest a little and to introduce Fr Schweiger as the new priest at each one of them. That day we made it as far as Buluma Village. We made ourselves comfortable there in the good guest house. Towards evening, when the people returned from work, we heard confessions. There was a down pour of rain, which changed the track down to the beach into a small river.

The following morning, a Saturday, we set off for Mai, which is quite close and which, hopefully, will be my sphere of activity in the future. There we have a large piece of land and a small wooden house. It is an absolute necessity to have a Father stationed there to look after the people in this area more effectively. Together with Ruango and Banaule there are three languages, not just dialects, different from the Muku language. Over the last few years I had frequently arranged to spend Sundays at Mai. Every now and then Catholics would arrive from Ruango and Kulungi in little more than two hours. In times like that, I had to take confession in five different languages counting *Kuanua* and *Pidgin*. The large village of Buluma, approximately 250 inhabitants, is only a distance of 20 minutes away and as there are many children there I will later on have approximately 100 school children in Mai. Let us hope that the financial situation will improve so that the superiors can authorise the necessary founding of a station.

After Sunday Mass, Fr Schweiger was not feeling well, possibly due to the strenuous bicycle ride so we decided that he should return to Valoka by canoe on Monday morning, while I would continue on my own. I gathered my bedding, put the mass things in my rucksack, packed some clothes and food into another one and said goodbye to my confrere, wishing him all the best. Then I climbed into a canoe and arrived at Rada about an hour later. I did not stay there for long but left for Gaongo, which is half an hour inland. I wanted to say Mass there early Monday morning and then continue on to Sakelarama Village four hours away. The next morning I was horrified to discover that I had forgotten to bring the chalice, a thing that I had never done before. A boy hurriedly went off to Mai to fetch the chalice for tomorrow's service and, in the meantime, we had morning prayers and I gave a brief lesson as the Catholics from Rada had come as well. I soon departed accompanied by some local youths. At about 12 o'clock, we arrived at Sakelarama, which is beautifully situated with a magnificent view over the Pacific Ocean, the mountains and valleys.

I found the people had built a pretty little church. For some months, the village had had a catechist who spoke the Banaule language. Unfortunately, the people had to struggle with

a catechism written in the Muku language which is understood by only a few. Meanwhile, I had sent them the first part of catechism in the Mai language, which is better understood. It was a good thing that the catechist could explain the catechism in their own language. At the moment they are saying their morning and evening prayers in three different languages. Unfortunately, there are only about 400 people who speak the Banaule language.

I met up with my little friend Leda again. We had got on well on of my first visit when we had played with shield and spear. And now I find him to be almost completely blind due to an eye infection. I felt the deepest compassion. Not realising the implications of his affliction, he was still ready to play and joke. I was told he could make his way unaided to the little bush church. It was touching to observe his relationship to his younger brother who is acting as his guide. Both of them are very attached to me. I was fascinated by the view of *E Pago* volcano, which had been quite active for a few weeks. From here I could see its back. It was sending up tremendous amounts of smoke. In the evenings we would sit together companionably and I would sing for the people many of their favourite folk songs in the Muku language. And my little blind friend was snuggled up close to me.

Fr Franke and his poultry.

How I would have liked to give young Leda his eyesight! But I was powerless. However, I could do one thing for him: open the eyes of his soul by means of the holy sacrament of baptism. Here in the mission we have often observed that those who are physically blind have the better inner sight; they have a deeper understanding of religious truths and they also practise them. I am reminded of Pandi of Bola who is blind and has been a catechist for years, he knows his catechism off by heart and explains it to his people. I baptised my little blind friend, Leda, after Mass and as a sign of my special affection I gave him the name Bernard.

That day I walked, went by canoe and on my bike back to Banaule where a number of catechumens were preparing themselves for baptism. I prefer this village to all others despite its different and difficult language. It is a different tribe, noticeably good and, for some time now possibly due to the good offices of the catechist, has been more receptive towards the Catholic faith than other villages. Towards noon I was back in Valoka where I found Fr Schweiger well and fit.

How I climbed Pago Volcano again

One Sunday in June 1933, Pago Volcano was again the terror of the surrounding area. The volcano was spewing out tremendous clouds of white ash, sometimes blocking the sunlight and obscuring Vulai Island, five miles from Valoka. The ash had settled down in the taro gardens of the Nakanai people, fearing another famine and lived in fear of the monster. I

was very keen to see my "friend" again in its present state after having visited him three years before.

I set out, accompanied by three catechists and several youths, the older men were really afraid of the evil spirits up there. At first we passed through the gardens of the people, then through dry creek beds and after about two hours we reached the old fallen-in crater, which gave an indication of the tremendous height of the former volcano. Now the steep ascent began. It was dangerous because of the large, loose rocks half covered with growth. Almost every step had to be tried first because the rocks frequently gave way and crashed down, endangering the person following behind. Totally exhausted we made it to the edge of the old crater where we beheld a terrible spectacle.

The extinct peak on the left was already covered with vegetation but the blunt main cone lay completely bare and whitened by the tremendous quantity of sulphur which had been thrown up. Some time ago a large company intended to recover the sulphur. I don't know why the plan was abandoned. Of course in the interests of the natives, I was wishing the company to Timbuctoo. The blow hole, situated almost on top of the cone, was about 10 metres in diameter. From it huge clouds of steam and sulphur were being blown out: like a picture of the huge smoke stack in a factory. It was indeed an impressive, overwhelming spectacle.

During my first visit three years ago in 1930 we had only gone as far as this old crater rim. This time we had more courage. We descended into the old crater, which was a wild area covered with big and small stones. There were small openings everywhere emitting sulphurous fumes. The catechists and the youths were constantly hopping about, for even their hardened feet could not take this heat. It was a good thing that I had put on my stoutest boots. We were game enough to go as far as the base of the active cone itself, approximately 200 metres from the blow hole. We sat down and at such close quarters fully took in the fantastic spectacle. A regular increase and decrease of the thundering noise could be discerned. Six days ago I had seen the back of *E Pago* from Sakelarama, though only from a long way off. Then the extinct peak, which was now to my left had been on my right. We said an Our Father and, once more, blessed the volcano requesting that the plantations be spared from damage. After that, to spite the rough guy, we sang a cheerful *E Pago* song. It is very popular along the coast and the words were made up by the catechist at Vavua and sung to the tune "In the most beautiful green valley", *Amite la tau Pago,* we of the Pago clan.

Then we turned our backs on the volcano. The descent was even more dangerous because of the loose rocks and for me more painful as I had scraped myself on the sharp edge of a stone. This small injury was later the cause of some fantastic tales made up by the old Ghost worshippers on the beach to the effect that the great spirit of Pago Volcano had wounded me. They said *E Pago* was cross with me and had forbidden me once and for all to enter his domain. Months later this story was still circulating in the Bola area. While up there, I had not noticed any great spirit, the only thing that I had perceived was the strong smell of sulphur. It was already getting dark when we arrived back in Vavua tired out.

Then I was on my way home where everyone talked about my ascent to the dreaded Pago with fear and trepidation. (See Franke, 1934b).

Here and there, backwards and forwards

During my last visit to Buluma, the catechist introduced 14 catechumens who were to receive the last instructions in Valoka and who were to be baptised there according to their own wishes. On Monday, after my return from Vavua, Fr Schweiger went to Kwalekese to say Mass and in the afternoon the people from Buluma arrived together with their catechist. To pay for their food and tobacco, I had them work for a few days in the plantation and around the place. Every day, I gave them two extensive instruction periods to cover all the basic truths in preparation for their baptism. I baptised them on the fourth morning and during mass they received their first Holy Communion. Alas, despite their very good intentions, some of the newly baptised quickly break the mould into which they have been poured, and then they become the sorrow of the missionary.

On Friday of that week, I went off again together with my faithful companion, my bicycle, to say Sunday Mass at Buluma Village, which made a particularly good impression on me. They were even planning to build a new and bigger church. I had sent word to the Ruango Catholics that I would be celebrating Mass in Mai on Sunday: they arrived in full force. Several Banaule people came as well, and again, we had a veritable Babel of languages. It turned out to be a wonderful Sunday for me as their priest and for the many Catholics. Over the years I have done a lot of travelling, covering much territory, saying mass here and there. But it had never been quite like the last few weeks, “here and there, backwards and forwards”. It was too good an opportunity to miss, since Fr Schweiger was able to be in Valoka. In that way they did not miss out on Sunday Mass either.

On Sunday in Vavua, I reminded the people that we wanted to build a new school. Work was to start on Monday morning and by evening the school should be complete with roof. That was my plan. It is not so hard to complete a big task with the people if they like the job. However, it is important to distribute the work well and to join in too. I marked out one group to assist me in erecting the framework, another one to fetch timber and rafters and four groups were sent off in their canoes to the Kapiuru River to fetch leaves of the nipa palm for the roof. By Monday afternoon the frame and the rafters were up and by evening the *saksak* had arrived, as I had lent a hand too and the floor must have been drenched with my sweat.

We set out for the week-long bush trip leaving on Tuesday morning. For two hours we followed the big Kapiuru River and this time had no difficulty crossing the sandbar. Within about six hours we reached Ubai. With its 200 inhabitants, it is the biggest village I have come across in the bush. When we were leaving we had to wait until lunchtime for the high tide so we could get over the sandbar at the mouth of the river. In little more than an hour we were back on the open sea heading towards Tarobi, where we arrived in the afternoon.

Straight after Mass, we left Tarobi and went to Walo in Bangula Bay, where a patrol officer used to be stationed because of troubles. Now there was only a police boy there and he was waiting for us on the beach. We sorted out the luggage, this time we took the Mass Kit along, and by 12 noon we were ready to start on our bush tour. The track to Malitu, which is 5 hours up in the mountains, is good. We stepped out briskly carrying stout sticks, not as weapons, for as long awaited missionaries we had nothing to fear, but for support while walking and climbing. No sooner had we set out again when unwelcome rain fell – the usual bonus in the mountains – making our ascent difficult and soaking everything through. We did not reach Malitu that day but stayed in Sipa Village.

Near a foaming stream we came across the first bush people from Sipa who, unfortunately, had already been claimed by the Wesleyans. However, they soon forgot to be shy and watched us intently as we heated some coffee on the little spirit stove which had been given to Fr Schweiger before he came out and which was of invaluable service to us on this trip. We came to a plantation where other Sipa people were working. They were of short, squat stature and the men wore no clothes whatsoever. We were then faced with a terribly steep descent and ascent which cost us our last drop of sweat.

Once we had settled down in Sipa Village, we made up our beds and changed our sodden clothes, broke some eggs into the pan, made coffee again and solemnly opened the tin of Limburg cheese. This cheese was one of the rare delicacies that came the way of this missionary who is far away from the main station. Known as "smelly cheese", the local population did not always favour it and there is a story that a houseboy threw out a whole tin of it thinking it was rotten. However, nothing like that happened to us that day, since we opened the tin ourselves. Together with several slices of bread from a loaf, which was growing smaller and smaller, it tasted great, certainly ten times as good as a gourmet meal of choice delicacies would have tasted to a spoilt palate in a posh hotel. The people and, in particular, the youngsters, were very friendly but we kept to ourselves as this village already had a Wesleyan teacher, although he was absent at the time. We left a letter for him explaining that the rain had forced us to spend the night in his village. The night was cold and there was a strong wind blowing around our hut which was but two paces from a steep abyss. This and the pigs that were scratching themselves against the posts of the house, grunting all the while, did not make for a restful night.

On the way to Malitu Village, the *luluai* from Sipa volunteered to be our guide to the next section of the way and he went ahead with a knapsack on his back. Uphill and down dale, that's how we continued for the next two hours to Malitu, the former police post. Partly collapsed, it now serves as a reminder of the warlike and bloody past.[1] The murder of the four gold prospectors had necessitated a punitive expedition. The natives took up arms and there was severe fighting until the villagers finally succumbed. Malitu was then set up as a defence post. It is beautifully situated with a magnificent view along the whole of the Nakanai coast as far as Valoka and across mountains and valleys with hidden villages in between. We rested in the house in this neglected place. Suddenly the sounds of the *garamut* and of conch shells could be heard from the opposite mountain. Some years ago this could have been a signal to attack. We soon found out that it was an expression of delight over a wild pig that had been killed.

Kotou village, the Eagles Eyrie

After we left Malitu, on the way to Kotou, the road deteriorated and a very steep descent began. We had to constantly look for something to hold on to, so as not to go skidding down. And then there was the "delightful" prospect of an equally steep ascent on the other side of the valley to Kotou, high on top, which was our destination. We were richly rewarded for the exertions of the morning by *Ana*, a stream rushing over rocks, which with its icy waters, inviting us for wash and a picnic. We pulled out the frying pan, opened a tin of meat and adding some slices of *taro*, fried the lot. We enjoyed our tasty meal. In the meantime several muscular, men appeared looking wild with their trimmed beards. I was particularly impressed by the *luluai* who only lacked a spear. Women, clad only in small aprons made of leaves, were followed by the children. Our words: *Umala ge tataga, amila pater* meaning "don't be frightened, we are two priests" was enough encouragement for them to leap into the cold water and cross over to us. Urged on by our guides, they shook hands, repeating over and over, "*sagege, sagege"* meaning, "we are very glad!"

Having eaten, we looked at the steep mountain slope opposite with renewed courage. We were quite prepared for hardship but never expected it to be quite as difficult as it turned out to be. Two men carried us across to the other bank of the icy *Ana* and then we began the ascent. While our companions skipped up almost as lightly as chamois whistling and blowing air, Fr Schweiger and I had to make a tremendous effort. We were perspiring and breathing heavily. But the worst was yet to come. In a little more than half an hour we reached Bagela Village where we were greeted with great curiosity. We were pleased to hear that none of them wanted anything to do with the Wesleyans, but wanted only us, the *popi*. And they were very pleased when we assured them that the catechist, To Kakatu, whom we had brought along to live up in Kotou would give them instruction too. We recorded all the names, counting 60. The people showed a childish delight over the funny Muku songs sung to German folk tunes such as *Into the Mountains*, *The Song of the Watchful Rooster*, etc. As rain seemed imminent, we left quickly.

The next ascent was dreadful, at times we were on all fours. There was a narrow washed out stairway of peculiar reddish stone and during rain it would have been impassable for us Europeans. In places the slope was almost perpendicular. My heart was thumping wildly, my pulse racing. After taking a few steps, we had to rest, while the mountain people stepped out as easily as we would on level ground. They were even playing tunes with a bamboo mouth organ. It was a blessing to rest up for half an hour in nearby Bibisi Village where we had some refreshing sugar cane. I have often sucked on sugar cane, but I have never enjoyed it and been refreshed more by it than in Bibisi. We were amazed at the trustfulness and friendliness of the people. Everywhere we found them to be eager to become *popis*.

Then followed another dreadful ascent which took everything out of us and at last we reached our destination, Kotou. Fr Schweiger could not have thought of a more fitting name for this mountain village than "the eagles' eyrie". We estimated its elevation to be 1,000 metres above sea level. The natives, too, resembled the eagle: strong, muscular

types, short in stature, with trimmed black beards, somewhat flattened forehead and round heads. They were completely naked except that the women wore brief aprons of leaves and yet they greeted us with the utmost friendliness. Again and again we heard the words, "*sagege*, sagege!"

The people had previously sent a delegation to Tarobi requesting that a catechist be sent to them as soon as possible. Today I was able to assure the excited *luluai* that To Kakatu, the Catechist, would stay with them. We made up our beds in the leaky guest-house, which stood on posts. Under the house was the wild pig that had been caught that morning - we had heard the drum talk about it at Malitu. Next day we looked around for a suitable site for the catechist's house The site for a church had already been set aside. Then we sat down with the people in their low huts and made music. I had to sing songs over and over again and soon they were trying to join in. Every time the song, *In Mother's Little Hut*, was the favourite. At any rate, Kotou Village, the eagle's eyrie, was ours. And the following morning the Sacred Heart of Jesus took possession of this place in Holy Mass, another "ordination in the mountains". We were surprised at the extensive sugar cane plantings of the Kotou people. The mountains must be more suited for it, as there is not much growing on the coast.

Fr Schweiger said Mass and I distributed Holy Communion and preached the sermon as I had often done before in newly won over villages. Sometimes I was interrupted by the excited *luluai*; but I did not mind for I was pleased that he was following my discourse so closely. We were fortified by a good breakfast. Towards 9 o'clock we left. To Kakatu, the catechist, was left behind; he was very upset when the time came to say good bye to us. He would have a difficult task there because of the great distance from Valoka and because they would have little to offer him. The people stood up, high above in the village and for a long time called out after us. Four youths accompanied us as carriers, and also to collect the salt we had specially brought with us from Valoka, but it was still on board the pinnace at Walo. Salt is very precious to the inland people.

We followed a different route to enable us to visit other villages. This way we avoided the ascent and decent, but it was a difficult three hours to Umu Village which was "occupied territory". To avoid confusion we did not mix with the people but only rested for a while and continued on to Gaikeke village. The following day we split up. Fr Schweiger with a line of carriers went off to Walo where the *Josef* was waiting. Our engineer, disturbed by our long absence, was on the point of searching for us in the mountains with the police. He thought we had met with some misadventure by the hands of the mountain people. In the meantime I took my trusty valet and cook, Uma, and two other youths, a rucksack and the camp bed and in one and a half hours we made it to Kokiso Village where we had been before.

The last time my connection on the "tropical express", the little *Josef*, at La Loku had worked out well, but today I had to wait for a long time. I had only spent a short time at Kukula and by about 9.30 I was on the beach at La Loku where there was no sign of the *Josef*. I waited for an hour, two hours. Three Sisimi youths, who wanted to accompany me

to Valoka to fetch the salt, brought a freshly caught fish and more than a 100 turtle eggs they had found in the sand. It was a Robinson Crusoe episode on a lonely beach. Finally, at long last, *Josef* came puffing along. When he was close enough we waded out into the water to meet him so that the engine would not have to be stopped. We climbed on board and then I heard the reason for the delay. *Josef* had played up once again and simply gone on strike. We arrived back in Valoka after a difficult week but we could look back on it with joy. Let us hope that the light we took into the mountains may never be extinguished!

With this trip to Kotou my activity in the Valoka area had come to a definite conclusion. I packed my bags, took my farewell from Valoka which was so dear to me and had become my second home and boarded the *Josef*, my trusty assistant over last four years. Fr Schweiger took me away to Bitokara where dear Father Schumm made me welcome.

Footnotes:

[1] *See Endnote in Chapter 5.*

Village in West New Britain

Chapter 7

Diary of Fr Franke: Mission at Bitokara, 1933

This is not just the story of Fr, Franke. It also gives glimpses of the lives of the planters, government officers and other missionaries. This is a historical document and a precious record of the way it was in the 1930s. Father Franke is now in Bitokara. He accepts the trials and tribulations of the life there as well as the good times. His account of the early days of many mission stations is not recorded anywhere else.

Two hours out of Bitokara, we were greeted by the brilliant white cross on top of the church tower. On entering Hannam Harbour we saw before us the mission station spread out in all its splendour dominated by the magnificent new church, the largest in New Britain, if not in the whole of New Guinea. On the left was the new school, on the right the garden house converted to a villa and the new kitchen. As the boat was tying up to the wharf, Fr Schumm stood on top of the hill waving down at us. Then followed a hearty welcome to his hospitable home, which was now my new home.

Fr Schumm and I made preparations for the festivities, which would begin with *singsings* followed by the solemn dedication of the new church and then more dances. Fr Schumm had decorated the church in a simple way and on 31 August the Father Superior arrived with Fr Leo Bischof who had originally founded the Bitokara mission. By the time other visitors had arrived, everybody was in a festive mood. The *singsings*, which had been prepared for months, began on Friday. What enthusiasm they put into their dancing, their whole body; indeed every limb, danced as well. Only the men performed in the dances with the women and girls circling around them, full of joy. Parents whose children were performing for the first time looked on with pride and their mothers put *taro* at their feet.

From the verandah, we enjoyed the colourful scene and the delight of the people who had made use of the brilliance of nature to adorn their bodies. Often there were two or three dances going on side by side to a different beat of the drums. The constant throbbing of the drums is music for their ears but the white men's ears soon throbbed with it. There also was a great feast as the neighbouring planter had donated an ox. Towards evening, a tremendous downpour dropped the curtain on the performance of the dancers. Now the work for us Fathers began in the confessional. About 800 people were to receive Holy Communion on the following day.

St Therese's Church at Bitokara, 1933.

On Saturday, the blessing of the various banquets of pork, fish, *taro*, etc. was no mean task. The solemn

dedication of the new church took place on Sunday morning according to the rites prescribed for churches without permanent stone altars. The ceremonies begin. Everyone is outside, the doors are locked and the bell is tolling while we walk around the church and enter its interior praying the litany of the saints. The vast hall, not including the choir (28m long and 13m wide), is covered with corrugated iron and supported by fourteen slender columns. Now the following words can be heard throughout the whole building, "Hear us, we implore you that you may cleanse and bless this church and this altar in your honour and name it after Little Therese of the Christ Child!"

When the Rev Fr Superior and Fr Schumm gave their sermons in the Bola language, the people understood the great importance of the day. Bitokara now had a big, new church, a fitting setting where all the Bola people can go each Sunday and refresh themselves spiritually. The priest is overcome with gratitude towards the mission administration, which has made it possible to have this church built in Bitokara in spite of adverse conditions. The church at Bitokara is also a tremendous monument to the love and sacrifices of many benefactors back home and, with their help, plank was added to plank and sheet of iron to sheet of iron. Therefore let the church be a "spring running to eternal life". For them too, a deed which will entitle many to the fulfilment of the prophetic words of our Saviour, when he said: "What you have done for the most lowly of my brothers, you have done for me. Come and enter the joy of your Lord."

The local people returned to their villages and the *Julius* prepared to depart. On Monday we left for Valoka, towing the pinnace *Josef*. I was on board too so that I could undertake the inland trip with Fr Schweiger. We found Brother Ignaz had already made himself at home in Valoka. He will work on the buildings and in the plantation to make Fr Schweiger free for missionary work. He will be a great asset to the Father and I would have been grateful for help like that earlier. How often did I return hungry and tired from a long mission trip, unlocked the door, opened the windows and entered a lonely house, then had to wait a long time for a meal and two days for fresh bread; to find chickens killed by dogs, etc. How often did I sorely miss the opportunity to pour out my heart, which was overflowing with either a missionary's joys or the sorrows? In his friendly helpfulness, Brother Ignaz will become indispensable to Fr Schweiger.

From my desk in Bitokara, I have the most magnificent view across Hannam Harbour and the Nakanai mountains in the background, the area which has been my field of activity until recently. Looking at this scene daily, I am reminded of the first four years as a missionary, overflowing with enthusiasm and love, which I spent there. This is my second home and I am very fond of it. Father Schumm is completely tied to Bitokara, the heart of the Bola area. On any day groups from different villages arrive there for baptisms, marriages or funerals. It would be too much for the greying, though never tiring, Fr Schumm to undertake such difficult mountain treks or canoe trips, which often last several days. It is my duty to be the wandering missionary, a strenuous but gratifying task. Taking as little as possible, rucksack, camp bed, Mass case, I travelled from one village to another, by horse, on foot, or by canoe, whichever the terrain calls for.

Fr Franke and Fr Schumm at Bitokara. The people are enjoying a treat, listening to a gramophone playing

Travelling Missionary

There are approximately 20 Bola villages scattered along Willaumez Peninsula. The terrain, definitely mountainous, is much more difficult than in Valoka, where the coastal villages could be reached by bicycle on relatively good roads over low-lying coastline, or on the *Josef*. It is totally different here as I would not even be able to use a bicycle. A horse had recently been bought and I will be able to use it to visit some inland villages. The only means of sea transport will be canoes and I will not be able to visit some villages at all during the northwest season. The Bola people are a happy and outgoing tribe, who find it easy to communicate their joy. A few weeks after my arrival in Bitokara, I began my job as the wandering missionary of the Bola people. Vaganakai, on the west coast of Willaumez Peninsula, was my target on the first day. I took five local people along with me as carriers. As soon as I arrived in the village everyone appeared to shake hands, my workers went to the bush to fetch poles for my camp bed and set it up for me. The children gathered around in the afternoon and I gave them singing lessons. This was followed by religious instruction for everyone, then communal evening devotion and confession. Quite often we had a brief impromptu concert of folk songs in the evening. The children and the adults were very keen on happy songs in their language. The feast of St Therese was celebrated each year with great festivity. At the end of High Mass, her relic [a lock of hair] was presented in the Monstrance on the altar rail and was then borne in procession to the small chapel of Therese. After this, a great festival meal took place with children's games and singsings. Through this great veneration of our patroness, I too came nearer to her.

From Bitokara it is possible to cross the peninsula in one and a half hours. The coconut plantation belonging to the 74 year old Mr Pederson lay on the way. It was unbelievable how a man of that age coped with the hardships of a planter's life far away from civilisation. I called on him briefly in his tin shack. After crossing the peninsula we used a canoe and within one and half hours were close to Vaganakai Village.

There I had to stop for a while as a familiar Japanese boat was anchored nearby. Like so many of his countrymen, the Japanese fisherman was there to dive for trochus shell (*trochus loticus*).[1] When our canoe came alongside, I climbed aboard his single mast boat and received a warm welcome. He knew that a bottle of beer was always welcome in the tropics and soon there was one standing on the table. Year in and year out these Japanese follow their lonely occupation, for weeks or months on end they might not see a white face, so they are very glad to have a visitor. When I was at Valoka, Japanese men brought me a lot of fish that had been dynamited. I used to reciprocate by giving them vegetables, oranges and other fruits, as a landlubber. In this way we helped one another. That evening I sat on board the Japanese boat and he gave me some fish, which made a welcome addition to our evening meal of *taro*.

Later at Vaganakai, to the delight of young and old in the village, we sang many happy songs beneath the palm trees. After Mass next day, we packed our things into a canoe. Two people came along to do the paddling and we poled our way across shallows and reefs. On and on we went. Before us we had Mt Vangori, 1300 metres high and the highest mountain of the Bola area, and, like so many of the mountains scattered all over the peninsula, an extinct volcano. Now we were looking at its eastern flank and it would take us four to five hours to see its western flank. I sat in the canoe, beneath the sun which was getting hotter and hotter, saying the rosary and watching the reefs beneath me in their variety and strangeness of form and colour, with the blue green shimmering fish, or the wild coastline blown by the northwest wind. To liven up the oarsmen, I sang them a song or took up the paddle myself. Once the monotony was broken when a heavy swell endangered the canoe and threw some of the people into the water. How good I had had it in Valoka, sitting or board the speedy *Josef* cutting through the seas.

Towards noon we had a picnic at a watering place on the shore and finally Mt Vangori was behind us. Two hours later we were welcomed at Bulu Dava, where the people were about to move their old village from a site high up on the mountain down to the beach. It is interesting to note that there are similarities between the people of Bulu Dava and Bulu Nuri and the Nuku people of Valoka. They say their languages are related too. It is a fact that as late as 30 to 40 years ago, social exchange existed between them and the Nakanai people who used to come across the 100 km. or so distance of the bay in their canoes. However, this ceased following a canoe accident. The following morning, I said Mass in the open and, after a fond farewell from Balu-Dava, we faced a seven-hour trip home. In two days I had spent about 12 hours in a canoe.

On Sunday morning at about 10 o'clock, our mission boat, the *Teresa,* appeared unexpectedly. Father Leo Bischof, the missionary from Kombe, was on board and he was

New Britain plantation labourers.

a most welcome visitor. Two catechists and their wives were also on board bound for distant Unea Island, where they would begin their mission activities.

The *Teresa* had brought a saddle and bridle for our horse newly purchased from Mr Pederson, a local planter. Kastor is a fine horse and soon it became evident that he was well suited, especially on trips into the mountains. On Wednesday, after the *Teresa* had departed, I rode Kastor to Kabili, approximately four hours' distance from Bitokara. Since I was riding, I had enough time to detour to Komorake, where I had been the week before, to check on the progress of the church building. The framework was already up so I continued on my way. Trotting and galloping I was soon able to catch up with my boys. Then began the constant up and down, but Kastor managed it excellently.

When I arrived at Kabili, the village was still in the middle of moving. Because of sickness and many recent deaths, the people no longer felt happy about living on the old site. A large number had already moved their families and belongings to Komorake village. The rest had cleared a new site approximately half an hour away and they were about to move there. It is relatively simple to move a house here. The old house is taken down and set up again on the new site. Should any new parts be required, they are readily available in the bush. Most things are carried on the heads of the women. It is typical for the local people to move their villages frequently because of sickness or frequent deaths. The chief voiced his surprise that I had been game enough to spend the night by myself in the deserted village. I told him that I was pleased to sleep alone and undisturbed. He replied that was my affair and moved off shaking his head at my foolhardiness.

Because of the numerous mosquitoes on the beach, I slept up in the catechist's house. When sleeping in the village it is interesting to note how the conversation of the people dies down at around 8 or 9 o'clock. During the night, a child can occasionally be heard crying. Early in the morning, at about 5 o'clock, life starts up again. One can hear the sticks and canoe planks that serve as barricades being removed, loud yawns and blowing to get fires going. *Taro* is put in the fire, and then one can hear the roasted *taro* being scraped, it sounds a bit like the homely noise made by a coffee grinder.

On Sunday, the *Teresa* returned from Poi. The captain told of a very rough trip to Unea Island, where the catechists were now happily settled. The ship departed on Wednesday and the following morning we walked an hour to the Government hospital where the local Talasea people receive free treatment and food as required; usually they come in with very bad sores. Two years ago I spent a fortnight here to learn about treating sores and giving injections of the N.A.B medicine, an excellent cure for *Framboesia*, which is widespread. I received permission to give injections but, unfortunately, was given little of the costly N.A.B. medicine. How often have I regretted not having it, especially when I have had to watch children die slowly when I could have saved them with one or two injections. The people had great faith in these injections and would come from long distances to be treated.

I was on my way by canoe to a nearby village and we had to pass several small mangrove islands. What beautiful spots there were amongst them. In the far distance the Nakanai mountains were bathed in a blue haze. Many times that day I had to revive the flagging enthusiasm of my small oarsmen with a song, and by the end of the trip they knew them almost by heart. Towards noon we arrived at Garile and there the little schoolgirls were standing on the beach beneath the palm trees waiting for the inevitable handshake. Most of the women were still in the gardens and all the men were busy planting rice in an area of about two hectares. This is the wish of the government and it helps to earn some cash for the local people. To show I was interested I, too, planted a row with a digging stick. Then I was busy with a lively crowd of school children who did not give me a moment's peace. At about 5pm, I gave instruction, followed by evening devotion and confession. Of course the evening ended with many songs.

My departure from Garile turned out to be rather noisy as almost the whole school wanted to accompany me as far as the next village. There was nearly a fight over carrying my cargo. Halfway there I sent some of them back, but there were still about 10 boys and girls following me. As there was plenty of time and the children knew where to collect tasty seaweed we called a halt. They quickly dived into the sea to get some of this grapelike seaweed. Of course I had to try some of it and they told me, "Father Schumm likes it so much, we often bring him some".

Patanga village was on top of a very steep incline and it looked deserted. The people were in the rice plantation and I visited them there. Towards evening we all went into the village and the people then came to confession.

"Thou Shalt Not": I will now give you an example of the inconsistency and lack of character of the local people and of their stubborn adherence to their old ways. The Catholic *luluai* of Patanga, who led the prayers in church during the absence of the catechist, had fussed a lot over me and also received Holy Communion. However, the next day he was off to the patrol post to have a second wife, also a Catholic, the wife of his deceased brother, entered into the records. Unfortunately, as yet, there is no law against bigamy. It is an old Bola custom for a man to take over the wife of a dead brother. As his brother had bought the wife, he felt he had a right to her. Actually it is surprising that it does not happen more often. I think their morals with regard to marriage could well stand comparison with those of "civilised people".

Next day I had enough time to pay a visit to Mr Ireland, a planter, and I had lunch with him. I knew him well from his frequent visits to Valoka, where he used to call and spend the night on his way to Rabaul. In his great solitude he was always happy to have visitors. I was given an insight into his efforts to make some money. About four years ago he started to clear the bush to plant cocoa, which was then fetching high prices on the world market compared to copra. The establishment of such a plantation requires vast sums of money. He, like many other planters, is now a pauper, deeply in debt. However, if he has sufficient credit to see him through the next two or three years, he will be a made man, provided that the cocoa price does not drop so low as to make the running of the plantation an uneconomical proposition. At present, he is living on hopes and is almost always at starvation level. I felt for Mr Ireland and appreciated his delight later when he was able to show me his first cocoa pods: his wealth, his hopes, his future. I had lunch in his miserable, hot, wooden shed and he gave me some cobs of corn to take along for my dinner and, when roasted in the open fire, these were very tasty.

In the afternoon, I made the steep ascent to Nilu village from where we had a magnificent view of Stett Bay as far as the Nakanai Mountains and Valoka. I made a forced march from Nilu to Bitokara in three or four hours and discovered I would not be able to ride the horse on this track because of some bad stretches, such as rickety bridges and swampy creeks. Missionaries do not need to take up sport for exercise. The life of a Missionary is sufficient exercise.

I was lying on my bed trying to recover from the forced march and suddenly I could make out the familiar noise of an engine. Could it really be the pinnace from Valoka? We strained to hear. It was indeed little *Josef*. I rushed down to beach, filled with foreboding. Father Schweiger was not on board. A catechist rushed towards me with the news that Father Schweiger at Valoka had had four massive heart attacks one night the week before. The people had gathered, and crying and praying. They had pressed into his house, entreating heaven until midnight. Everyone, including, the Father himself, as well as Brother Ignaz, had thought that it was the end. The sick Father was already cold and his heart was barely beating. However, he gradually became better. In the days that followed he felt quite well and even walked around. However, on Saturday when he felt very weak again, he immediately sent off the pinnace to fetch another Father.

I left early Monday morning at 5 o'clock and arrived at Valoka at 1pm with my heart full of misgivings. On the beach I learnt that Father was better again. I rushed to his house and found him still very weak. The knowledge that a fellow priest was by his side soon made him perk up again. By Wednesday, Fr Schweiger felt well enough to go to Bitokara to convalesce and have a doctor check him. He made such a marvellous recovery that the doctor had no objection to his returning to Valoka. He left on the following Tuesday and I went along.

I decided to travel in this comfortable way with him to Ruango Village. It takes eight hours in a canoe and I intended to spend a week there. As this village is a long way off the beaten track, I could not get there very often and I had plans to build a small house, where could store all the necessities in a crate. I had a discussion about this with the *luluai* and the *tultul*, who were most enthusiastic about my plan and they started on the job straightaway and within 2 to 3 hours the framework was up and the rafters were on (2.5 x 4 metres). The next day we continued the work on the house. The women went off to fetch leaves of the nipa palm for the roof and the men went to get the vines to fasten the leaves. I attached the door and shutters to the windows. If the Government doctor had not arrived at midday to take a look at the sick and the sores, I would have been able to spend the night in my little new house. But, despite the doctor's visit, most of the saksak was sewn by night-time. I needed only six men the following morning to thatch the roof and finish off the walls.

I heard Barbara, the *tultul's* little eight-year-old daughter, say on Sunday, "we have been to Holy Communion, so we must be good". In the morning, I had baptised five schoolboys and together with five little girls who had been baptised before, they received their first Holy Communion during Mass. I must admit that I had never before come across a village with such dear and affectionate children, who tagged along and crowded around me, especially after my little house was built. As I was teaching them new songs almost every day, they went through the village singing until, late at night, I received a share of the pig that had to give its life in honour of little Barbara's first Holy Communion. The fact that two pigs were killed on the occasion - you must understand that to the local people pigs are very valuable - is an indication that they, too, appreciate the honour of their children receiving their first Holy Communion. But little Barbara's words pleased me most of all.

Bitokara, building in progress.

At 3:30 am, we left Ruango by canoe. It was beautiful moving through the black waters in the moonlight. Cool and invigorating. It was pleasant for the paddlers and pleasant for me as well, as I had had my share of sitting in the canoe under

the hot sun. Towards 4:30 am it became lighter and slowly the sun rose in the east from behind the Nakanai Mountains. After about four hours we reached Kilu. The two men from Ruango, who had taken me this far, returned to their village on foot. While my two young boys went off to the village to find replacements, I went to see the planter to have a cup of tea. This time the canoe followed the shoreline while I walked along the beach hoping to run into the chief of Patanga, the culprit with two wives.

Journey to Kilenge

Our mission boat, the *Julius*, was now due any day. We did not wait in vain. It came on 28 November 1933 on its way to take supplies to all the stations along the northwest coast, sufficient to see the missionaries through the wet season. Fr Joseph Stamm, the old Nakanai missionary was on board as a visitor, also Brother Zeidlewitz, who had become grey in the service for the mission and who was on his way back to resume duties at Kilenge after having had recreation leave at the main station. In 4½ years, I had never made use of the opportunity to go on a trip to the distant stations of Poi and Kilenge. As parish priest of Valoka, I had never been willing to leave the station for any length of time, but now from Bitokara it could easily be arranged. The following day, I was a passenger on the *Julius*, a vacationer with a light heart and open eyes to take in all the beautiful new things that were offering themselves. Apart from us Fathers and Brothers, there were approximately 50 labourers on board who were being repatriated after having completed their work contracts. Not only did they have cardboard boxes filled with their belongings, they also had chickens and dogs as well as about 30 pigs, which were kept in slatted crates on the foredeck. I think it was because of these bristly animals and the smells they emanated that I soon began to feel poorly. At Bulu Dava at the top of Willaumez Peninsula, we dropped some of the workers off.

In another 10 hours we reached the island district of the Kombe at Poi, where Father Leo Bischof had been active as missionary since June 1930. Kombe is probably one of the most difficult areas in the mission. Approximately 2,400 Kombe people live in 16 villages and only 4 of those are on the mainland, the others are small and widely scattered islands. Fr Bischof can only get to them in the pinnace and during the northwest season only occasionally. He was terribly disappointed when he saw that *Julius* did not have his pinnace in tow as they had not been able to complete repairs on it at Vunapope. Since October, he had been a prisoner on his small island of Poi and now he was to remain one till Easter. A terrible thing for a zealous missionary! Work is awaiting him on the islands but without a pinnace he cannot move. The Kombe people seem to be a difficult tribe, as difficult as the terrain during the northwest season. However, the spot where Father Leo lives at Poi is a jewel. We only spent one night at there and early the next morning we left him to his loneliness.

That day we passed through the Kombe Island region, past the Naliai coast and, in about seven hours, to Mareka in Bariai, where Fr Beckers has been living on and off for some months. He was delighted about our visit. He came on board in a canoe. He looked fit in spite of his difficult pioneering work. On coming ashore, we were amazed at what he had

achieved in such a short time. So far, he had built a small one room house with a verandah, out of bush materials, right next to it a big bush church, a kitchen for which we brought the stove, and a school. Poverty and frugality could be detected everywhere, but the eyes of the zealous pioneer shone with enthusiasm, and eagerness to work amongst his awakened catechumens and Christians. I was most interested in everything, as I, too, would probably have to start from scratch soon in similar circumstances. Founding a new station, that is the dream of every young missionary. Who could blame the two of us for sitting up late into the night, talking about the past as we had been to seminary together. The following day I was impressed by the enthusiasm and the good conduct of the people in church. Fr Beckers took advantage of the *Julius* to go and visit Kilenge for awhile.

In a little over 3 hours we were in Kilenge. The station was founded in 1929 and is situated almost on the outer edge of New Britain. The founder, Fr Joseph Ulrich, who has been with the mission since 1904, is still looking after the station. Last year Fr Beckers was assigned to him as assistant. As soon as we anchored safely, canoes surrounded us and the deck was soon swarming with people. They were expecting to see their friends and relatives on board after completing their contracts. We went ashore and were soon able to greet old Fr Ulrich, who had come down from his station, which is situated fairly high up. That Sunday was spent in Kilenge and I took the opportunity to learn about the Kilenge people. I went off into the village by myself and was surrounded by the children there. The houses were well built and the walls made of canoe planks. Inside I found fishing nets and nets for catching pigs, like the Nakanai people use. There were some beautiful pots and lots of long bowls carved out of wood from neighbouring islands and the New Guinea mainland. Outrigger canoes with large superstructures and sailing masts were pulled up on the beach, the sails fashioned of leaves woven together. According to tradition, the Kilenge people are able to buy these from the neighbouring Siassi Islands for only 3 pigs. I was surprised to discover that some words in their language had a striking resemblance to those of the Bola and Nakanai languages. The Kilenge people gave the impression of being healthy. It must be very rewarding to be a missionary to these people living in big villages not far from the station.

On Monday we said goodbye to Kilenge, raised the anchor and ploughed through a northwest swell to Unea Island, which we reached after 7 or 8 hours. There was enough time left before dark to take the small motorboat and, with Brother Droste as guide, go to Nakiri village, one hour away, where a new catechist was stationed. There were coastal reefs all along the steep coast and the northwest swells were breaking and foaming over these, making it difficult for us to find the narrow passage into the harbour. The catechist and his wife were overjoyed to see us and they were full of praise for the people. The big new bush church also bore evidence of this. We could only stay a short while as we wanted to get back to the ship before nightfall. However, the brief visit was enough to announce that Mass would be celebrated the following day and to have a message taken to the other catechist to invite him to come along with his people.

The next morning when Father Stamm began to say Mass, I saw the devotion of young and old. He spoke to them in Pidgin after Mass. He took the *Julius* and went around Unea

Island, which has about 2,500 inhabitants. He was gauging the attitude in the other villages and looked for suitable sites to establish catechists. In the meantime I planned to cross the island and get to know the villages over the other side. We crossed a bay and then we went up to the nearest big village. There were two long straight rows of approximately 25 houses facing one another. In one village I saw a tame sea eagle sitting on top of the chief's house. How much he reminded me of the people around me! They had been like free, wild eagles and now they were tamed. When I returned to the ship in the afternoon, Father Stamm was tying up the *Julius* after having completed his trip around the island and overwhelmed by the great readiness to embrace the Catholic Faith which he had met. After a hearty snack, I went off once again with two delegates to visit two more big villages. I was shown the site that had been chosen for the future catechist. On board that evening we swapped experiences. As recently as six weeks ago the people had given a rather cool welcome to the catechists but, now, everyone was clamouring for catechists. Lucky the missionary who was going to be privileged to be the priest on the island!

About 2am, we weighed anchor, left the narrow harbour in bright moonlight and headed for the open sea. I rose and sat with Brother Bahmann, the old Captain, who had been the master of this ship, which is so important to the missions, for more than fifteen years. It was a wonderful trip, with the sea calm and bathed in moonlight, the sky beautifully clear and the Southern Cross was ahead of us. The captain was telling me of his stormy voyages beneath the Southern Cross when he had weathered many a gale and, small as he is, has given tremendous service to the mission. I sat with him for quite some time and then I returned to bed. When I woke the following morning, Unea was a long way behind us and in front of us we had Bulu Point on Willaumez Peninsula. At approximately 2pm, we anchored off Bitokara.

In December 1933, we started preparations for Christmas at Bitokara. The church was decorated with flags, banners and greenery and lit with candles and lamps. A crib was installed. The area around the Church was illuminated by torches made of coconuts and the resin from almond trees. On Christmas Eve, Bitokara was overrun with adults and children and many large houses had been made available to accommodate the people for the night. At 9 pm, when torrential rain started to fall, the houses were jammed tight. For example, one house (4m x 5m) contained more than one hundred people. Then the rain stopped and the festivities began. Around midnight, two rifle shots were fired as a signal to get ready. The bell was ringing out the Christmas message into the dark. The torches were lit. The manger was uncovered and the candles and lamps set alight. The people were getting ready for the procession in front of the main entrances. Just before 12 o'clock they entered the Church. Four small angels led the way, followed by children carrying gifts of coconuts and sugar cane for the Christ Child, which they put down in front of the manger.

Later, we missionaries sat on our verandah with a little Christmas tree. Father Schumm sat in the folding chair, dreamily watching the light of the candles on the tree. It was a surprise for him when he returned from celebrating Mass to find his room lit up by the glow of candles. I had secretly made the little tree from branches and the young boys had

decorated it with the candles. I was just telling him that today was a sort of anniversary for me. It was five years today since I first joined the mission. Were not my five years as a missionary, five burning Christmas candles?

Four years later at Bariai, 1937

Bariai was considered the unhealthiest place in our mission on New Britain. All the villages on the beach were built in swamps where millions of mosquitoes, buzzing and singing their deadly songs, abounded. The people were more or less safe as they had developed immunity and slept at night in fire smoked huts. But what about us, with our fresh European blood?

Father Ulrich, an elderly priest, had been appointed to the Bariai district to start a new mission station at Kilenge where a few catechists had made the first contacts with the people. As the Kilenge and Bariai districts could not be covered very well by one priest, a young missionary, Fr George Beckers, was appointed to the sub station at Bariai where the people had a different language and customs and he set up his station at Mareka Village. Fr Beckers was a healthy young priest, full of zeal and drive and always happy. He started well and won the trust of the people. But he lasted only a few years before he fell victim to the "Malaria killer". We got the bad news in Bitokara about a week after his death. He was one of so many young Missionaries dying of malaria. Poor Fr Beckers once told me that he ate and wrote letters under his mosquito net. During a visit by our German Provincial, I was appointed by Bishop Vesters to Fr Becker's vacant mission station. It was 1937 and I soon found out why a young, strong missionary like Fr George Beckers could fall victim to malaria. Previously in Valoka and then Bitokara I had often had this fever in spite of all the daily dosage of the anti malarial drug, quinine, but Mareka Village was bad. After Mass in the morning, I put socks on my hands and covered my face to have my simple breakfast in a swarm of mosquitoes.

My superiors, knowing the danger to health in this mosquito infested place, tried to counteract all these hazards. They appointed our good carpenter, Brother Franz Kuenne, to build the mission station in Bariai in a different place a few hundred yards away from the beach on a little hill. It comprised of a bush church, a small schoolroom, a kitchen and a real two room house on two and a half metre posts with the most wonderful thing a mosquito proof wired bedroom. A place for the buildings had to be levelled out of the side of the hill. This was done without a mechanical bulldozer, but with human bulldozers galore. The people worked with hands, baskets and shovels to carve the building plateau; huge blocks and stones were carried, mostly by women, down the hill to build a dam in the swamps. Then, at last, Brother Kuenne was able to start the buildings. All the sawn timber was carried by very willing people from the beach up the hill. And what a wonderful job Brother did.

In the meantime, I took care of my mission work, wading and tramping through the swamps which were full of crocodiles. It was a miracle that I was not attacked and killed. The other section of my mission work was in the mountains behind. Still I was young and

strong and looking forward to my first mission leave home in Germany after nearly ten years. A group of missionaries, one year ahead of me, were already home refreshing themselves. They were on the point of returning to the Mission after a full year of home leave. It would soon be my turn. How I was looking forward to my leave to see my Mum and Dad, my sisters, and brothers. But because the Second World War intervened, it was to be thirteen more years before I saw my family again. As far as the war in Europe was concerned, I no longer thought of myself as a German and took no interest in politics but we were considered as enemy aliens in the Talasea area.

Footnotes:

[1] *Later it transpired that some of these Japanese fishermen were actually spying for Japan in the pre-war era.*

Fr Kapall at rear and Fr Franke in the middle with Br Eunkley at Bariai, West New Britain.

Eruption in 1937 when Benedict To Varpin was 10 months old.

Chapter 8

Benedict To Varpin is born, 1936

The Island of New Britain lies off the coast of Papua New Guinea. It is a curving island, so carved by nature that the north eastern end almost forms a square. On one corner of this peninsula is Blanche Bay, a beautiful, deep stretch of water. Thousands of years ago this bay did not exist. Where it is now, there once stood an enormous volcano, thrusting its cone through the clouds and towering over the surrounding land. As time elapsed, pressures built up and smaller volcanoes arose around its perimeter. Then during a large eruption, a thousand years ago, the central volcano itself burst forth in a series of violent explosions, which emptied the belly of the mountain, causing the cone to collapse into the crust of the earth. So deeply did it sink that a gaping hole was left at one end. Rushing into the breach, the hungry sea took possession, forming a bay out of the side of the old crater. This is now Blanche Bay. Tavurvur, a volcano on the edge of Blanche Bay within the old crater, was usually quiet with only a wisp of smoke from its cavernous jaws to show off the power that lay beneath. The people thought a Kaia*, spirit, lived inside Tavurvur causing an eruption when the people had angered him. In 1937 two volcanoes erupted: first was Vulcan, which had been a muddy low-lying island; and then within hours Tavurvur erupted with great force.*

In July 1936, a year before this eruption, Benedict To Varpin was born near Volavolo. Benedict was the first-born of Gustav To Gunan and Angela Ia Kilua who married in 1935. Angela, born in 1912, was the eldest of 5 children and went to school at Volavolo where she was taught by the Sacred Heart Missionaries and always remembered her prayers. Angela was a hard worker and very active in the garden and never seemed to tire, trudging all the way over Tunnel Hill to the Rabaul markets several times a week on the dusty or muddy road.

In May 1937, when the volcanoes erupted, Benedict was 10 months old, crawling around the village house. Incredibly he had been left on his own, his parents thinking he was with his grandmother and vice versa. All the while dust and ash plummeted down causing day to turn into night at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. In the village house where Benedict was, the roof was about to crash with the weight of the ash when he was rescued by his grandmother. The two volcanoes continued to rumble and throw out ash for the rest of the day and night covering Rabaul and the surrounding area. Volavolo was situated on the north coast and the North Daughter shielded it from the worst of the ash.

The day of the eruption began as any other in the village near Volavolo. As usual, Benedict's father inspected his coils of shell money and then he and Angela went to their gardens to work, thinking Benedict was safe with his grandmother. When the ash began to fall his father grabbed some of his shell money and they rushed to the church. It was almost like

a Biblical story with each side thinking Ben was safely with the other. It was like the story of Mary and Joseph thinking Jesus was with the relatives.

Ben told the story many years later:

> My grandmother, my mother's mother, was Maria Ia Vuap and my grandfather was To Vatangmule. Ia Vuap was light skinned and I loved her. I called her *Tumbuna* and often went with her. That afternoon on the way to her garden she brought me to my parent's house to sleep, thinking my mother would come along and find me there. When the ash from the volcano fell everything went dark. My parents thinking I was with Grandma rushed to the Volavolo Church to pray.
>
> My grandmother couldn't see anything. She was worried about me so she lit a *bombom* coconut branch as a torch and went to our house to see if I was OK. I was less than one year old, crying in the dust, all alone crying and crawling under the table in the dark. Grandma held the coconut torch up and saw me. "Oh Benedict. My baby Benedict." She picked me up and carried me to the church, which was a big concrete building. My grandmother was angry with my mother for leaving me in the house. My mother and father were worrying about the shell money and some clothes to take to the church. If my grandmother had been killed, I would not be alive today.

The ash continued to fall on the village houses and many collapsed under the weight. If little Benedict had not been rescued by his grandmother he would have been killed as he crawled around in the house. He often told this story later on, showing there must have been a reason for his rescue. It was related with much laughter. That is one thing you realise about Benedict. He enjoys a good laugh as many Tolais do.

On the day of the eruption, Saturday 29 May, Father Madigan was on Matupit Island. About lunch time, he heard of the long cracks appearing in the middle of the island, The longest was 50 feet long. The reef near Matupit was exposed about the same time and the Government Anthropologist, Pearson Chinnery (Chin), visited the island to inspect the cracks (Chinnery, 1998: 206). On Saturday, Brother Schaller and others were working on a mission boat at the mission slipway at Keravia, near Vulcan Island. While they were working they noticed that the island seemed to be rising and sinking. They also realised the tremors were becoming stronger and at about two o'clock they decided to return to Vunapope (Michael, 1957: 49).

On board the *Montoro*, was Brett Hilder, a well-known sea captain:

> Between Vulcan Island and the shore was a sheltered little strait, and a local firm had built a shipway nearby to take ships up to 500 tons. One of these ships, *S.S. Durour*, was up on the slip for overhaul and, this being completed; the crew were standing by to get her back into the water. The violent shakes were ringing the ship's bells continuously and had shaken all the props and ladders away from the ship's side. The crew could hardly be blamed for going over the side down ropes and they made their way up to the main road to head for Rabaul. They had just left the ship in time, for

> Vulcan Island gave a couple of convulsive heaves, then blew straight up into the sky like the cork from a bottle of champagne (Internet).

Vulcan Island erupted causing widespread destruction and death in the vicinity. People collecting dead fish were killed with this first large explosion. A few of them jumped into the sea and began to swim across Keravia Bay. Only one man managed to swim to safety. As his companions weakened, one by one, they said to him, "we are weak. We will die now, but you go on. We give you what little strength we have". He struggled on while fiery rocks fell hissing into the tossing sea. Vulcan Island was now a brand new volcano with dust, ashes, pumice and rocks falling all around. It had previously been just a low muddy island near the harbour entrance.

Over two hundred Tolais, gathered for a feast in Keravia village, were killed in subsequent explosions. Some survivors speak of running along the beach clutching their children and being petrified of the fiery rocks which fell around them and the black cloud which was forming above their heads. Some felt that the eruption was the work of a fierce *Kaia* called *Mirmir* who it was said, had originally flung Vulcan Island up from the sea when it had first appeared in 1878. Others, who were Christians, said the people in the Keravia area were being punished for continuing with the *tubuan*. At this stage the *tubuan* was frowned on by the Missions and there was a *taraiu*, a secret place, down on the Keravia Beach which was destroyed in the eruption.

Alois To Mailil was up in Taliligap when the first explosion occurred and he and others decided to leave for Vunapope at once. It was still afternoon when he left, but the Taliligap Road suddenly grew very dark when the smoke and dust from the volcano covered the sun. Later they saw the lights of an approaching truck though only as tiny pinpoints through

At the Jubilee celebrations for the Matupit Church in 1932: Fr Madigan at the rear, Fr George Boegershausen on right and Fr Franke on left. Fr Franke was just on a visit at this time. Stephen To Paivu is in white clothes at the back.

the haze. The truck had come to take them to Vunapope so they thankfully climbed in and were soon at the Mission Headquarters. The flashes of lightning and the rumbles of the volcano continued and Alois was worried about his parents, Ia Dok and Stephen To Paivu who were still on Matupit at this time.

On Sunday morning, Alois and Fr Madigan went down to the wharf at Vunapope to have a look at the new volcano through a pair of field glasses. They returned to the wharf later and were there when Tavurvur exploded sometime after one o'clock. Both Alois and Father Madigan were very worried about the people, the church buildings and Matupit Island itself. They saw a great cloud of black dust and steam shoot up from the crater.

On Matupit Island there was widespread panic. People fled over the causeway as Vulcan and then Tavurvur continued to erupt. Many of them still believed it was the work of the *Kaia*, To Lagulagu, who lived in the volcano and they regarded it as a punishment. Matupit causeway was flooded though it was possible to wade across at low tide. Many people managed to get across carrying children and belongings. However some sick, old or crippled people had no way of escape. The Catholics locked the Church doors and went over to the Methodist church which they thought was a stronger building. Here they spent the night huddled and praying in the darkness. They were very frightened of the large fiery rocks which continued to be spewed out of Tavurvur. They had no food and only a little water and they thought they would soon die. Those who left the island took any route they could over to Nodup.

Two days later, Fr Madigan decided to go to Rabaul and Matupit Island. Setting off in the Mission boat he tried to land at Malaguna but tons of pumice stones and dust had accumulated along the shore line. Then he landed at Matupit where he found people in a critical state. Many who had been sick before the eruption were now weakened from lack of food and water and were too sick to look after themselves. When Fr Madigan asked them where the rest of the people were they replied, "they have gone and left us". Fr Madigan then opened his own store and got out rice and meat to feed them all. He opened his tanks and gave them water. Next he examined the church and found everything intact. He looked around the island and saw the devastation caused by the eruptions. Trees had been smashed down and most of the island had been swamped by the tidal waves which accompanied the eruption. A strong current or rip was still circling the island bringing with it floating logs, coconuts and pumice stones which were then stranded around the beaches. However Matupit Island itself escaped damage from raining pumice dust which was blown more in the direction of Rabaul than over Matupit.

Meanwhile many Rabaul residents had already escaped to Nodup where the ships the *Golden Bear* and the *Montoro* had arrived to take them to Vunapope where an emergency camp had been set up. Tavurvur continued to emit steam, mud and rocks all through Sunday and the following night. A terrible choking gas accompanied the explosions so that many thought they would suffocate. Tavurvur had quietened down considerably by the Monday morning but Vulcan continued its violent outbursts and within the space of a few days a new mountain was built up where once there had been an island.

One person who died in the eruptions was an unfortunate photographer who climbed Tavurvur thinking to get a better photograph of the eruption of Vulcan. When the volcano under his feet exploded, he disappeared together with his photographic equipment never to be seen again. The other casualty was a crew member of the *Golden Bear* who thought he could walk on the thick pumice in the harbour. He stepped down on to it but the pumice was not strong enough and he sank, unable to rise again through the thick mass of pumice on the surface.

Another memorable happening on that same day was a wedding held on Saturday afternoon. The marriage service of Jack and Mel Trevitt had just been completed and the newly-weds were posing for a photograph at the Church when Vulcan Island erupted. The wedding feast was left uneaten. Still wearing her wedding dress, Mel fled with her new husband and the wedding guests and sought refuge in their house at Vunairima overlooking the harbour (Threlfal, 1975: 127). Until the sky was blacked out by the ash, they had a spectacular view of the eruptions. At night red fiery rocks were thrown out of both craters on either side of the harbour.

The *Montoro* was requisitioned to rescue people gathered at Nodup and take them to Vunapope. As people were boarding the ship there was a loud explosion from the direction of Vulcan, but much closer. Brett Hilder among others saw Matupit volcano (Tavurvur) explode in full production. At this a great many more people fled the town because the ash from Tarvurvur contained some "sulphur to add to the discomforts of suffocation".

As Brett Hilder recalled:

> After six hours' continuous running there was nobody left ashore but a few police, both native and European, who remained to look after the deserted township. The lifeboats, certified to carry 54 persons, were found to be loaded with 110 in most cases, a mixed bag of natives, Chinese and Europeans of all ages and conditions. The ship's decks were packed with a crowd of about 6,000, including about 250 Europeans. Most of them had a bundle of clothes with them, and one old Chinaman carried a bucket of what appeared to be potatoes. It was very heavy, for the potatoes were only a veneer over a mass of silver coins (Internet).

Out at Vunapope thousands of people were cared for on the Mission and on plantations. The *Rabaul Times* put out a special volcanic issue on 4 June and said: "It is only due to the great kindness and courtesy of the Catholic Mission at Vunapope that we are able to issue this small sheet and right here we wish to record the wonderful work done by the Mission all through this harrowing period and congratulate His Lordship, Bishop Vesters, and his untiring staff, on the excellent organisation and display of Christian spirit. - - We must remember this: Rabaul, the Garden City, has disappeared and there only remains an ugly mud-covered town."

The thousands of tons of falling ash raised the ground level around all the houses in the towns and villages. The village people lost their gardens covered now in thick ash and were threatened with starvation until they could grow more crops. But the ash was very

Two tubuan *on Matupit Island with the volcano in the background.*

fertile and bananas grew back quickly. Coconut trees whose fronds had closed like umbrellas opened up again. In town the dust and ash had to be cleared from everything. Roads, lawns, gardens were covered in it but, in a few weeks, the frangipani trees began to flower again. Their white, pink and yellow flowers were a welcome sign of hope to the townspeople who thereafter remembered the occasion with the annual Frangipani Ball. A day closest to 29 May, the day of the eruption, was chosen and each year the story of its importance was retold.

In the days that followed, large seas continued to rise and fall, each time beating the shores of all the coast including Nodup and Volavolo. None of the people in these villages died in the eruption which was quite remarkable because they were close to the volcanoes. Perhaps they believed that the old *Kaia*, To Lagulagu, who lived in the Tavurvur crater was not so angry with them after all. Following the 1937 eruption, there was a great clean up programme in Rabaul and the surrounding areas. Roofs had to be cleared of mud and debris and water tanks inspected for pollution.

Benedict To Varpin's family

Life in the Village returned to normal, and Benedict's mother took better care of him, resuming their normal lives. But Benedict was always thankful to his grandmother for saving his life.

Because the Tolais have a matrilineal society, the people inherited land from their mother's side and the women's brothers are of great importance in the scheme of things. Ben's uncles and aunts on his mother's side had a great deal to do with his upbringing. He often stayed with them and went hunting and fishing and helped them build their houses. He was known as *man bilong wok*. Young Benedict loved to go fishing with his uncles and aunts on his mother's side – Joseph To Purkakill, To Paluka, Ia Tanun and Ia Nue and their children. Following the Tolai custom, they were significant figures in his life,

Paddling his small canoe, he would follow them out or else sit in the large canoes holding his spear ready when he saw any fish on the reef. The evening sunsets were beautiful over Volavolo and there was nothing better than to sit by a fire on the sand and cook the freshly caught fish in the cool of the evenings. If they needed fresh coconuts to drink Benedict could climb up a palm tree and throw the nuts down. It required skill and no fear of heights. Many were the accidents of young boys falling from trees when they missed their footing.

But Ben also spent a lot of time with his father, Gustav, whom he described as, "a smart man who could heal people with bush medicines. He was not a *tena papait* – he was just clever". Gustav also believed in keeping as much of the culture as possible. He could see that the *Tubuan* Society was good as it had places the men could congregate together. Part of the ceremonies was the initiation of the boys when it was a time to learn the customs and rules that governed their society. *Tubuan* appeared at funerals when shell money was distributed.

Benedict remembers:

> I was initiated in the *taraiu* before the war and I was supposed to be beaten up but then my father went in and took the beating for me. Afterwards there was a big celebration. The *tubuan* stood in the canoe. Gustav, my father, had his own *tubuan* name and dressed up in the leaves and mask. I was initiated into my father's *tubuan* and he shouted its name out at the time. My uncle had one too but it is no longer used.
>
> My father smoked all the time and used to make jungle juice from bananas and put it in 44-gallon drums. The people were always running after him to make this juice and he made money out of it. His cousin brother taught him how to make it. My mother loved her betel nut and pipes especially with the *Muruk* tobacco from the tradestore. She taught me how to pray and be responsible and to help other people.

Benedict's parents had 6 children: Benedict, who was born in 1936, and became Bishop of Bereina and then Archbishop of Madang; Ia Ulavun who died as a baby before the Second World War; John To Mitare a teacher, who has four children, Joanna, Augustin, Angela, and John; Antony To Mission who joined the army; Ursula Fatima who has seven children, Ambrose, Benedicta, Antonia, Peter To Tua, Marti, Teresia and Alfred; and the youngest in the family, Martin To Varviliu, a policeman with two children James and John.

Young Benedict in between his two cousins.

Benedict's mother was a prayerful lady and said the rosary every evening and the *Memorare* in the *Kuanua* language and even sang hymns. The whole family joined in from an early age. It was in this religious atmosphere that Benedict was brought up. Their house had walls of woven *morata* leaves and the roofs were also made from *morata*. These houses were strong and cost very little as the materials were all from the local forests. Later corrugated iron roofs were introduced so that the rainwater could run off into water tanks.

Before the War, most Tolais belonged to one of the three churches in the Rabaul area: the Wesleyan Methodists (now the United Church), the Roman Catholics, and, more recently, the Seventh Day Adventists. Each village had its own church or churches depending on the number of denominations there were. Matupit Island had the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. Each Sunday, the people dressed in their best clothes usually white *laplaps* and shirts with the women wearing beautiful *meri* blouses with embroidered cuffs and neckline.

The churches tried to bring in the local culture where possible. For example, before a feast the food was blessed or before a boat was launched, it might be blessed with a special ceremony. It was difficult to see though just how far the older people had forsaken their old beliefs which were part of their psyche as they had been brought up with them.

The German bishops were against all forms of sorcery but, as Benedict To Varpin pointed out, there are different types of sorcery or magic. There is good magic and bad magic. Bad magic often associated with the *iniet* could bring sickness and even death to people. The bad sorcerer was called *tena agargar*. The use of this magic persists until modern times. There was also the good sorcerer, the *tena papait* the equivalent in the people's eyes to the local doctor. He would have a good knowledge of what leaves, bark, seeds of other treatment would be good for whatever the complaint was and he would administer it, often with beneficial results. He was also a good psychologist and could talk people into recovering if they were depressed or had a psychosomatic complaint. This would be the role of the traditional medicine man and they are still being called on today. When Archbishop To Varpin's mother lay dying, he administered the last rites to her, a devoted Catholic all her life, but her family also sent for the *tena papait* to make his judgment on her ailment and to try his remedy.

To most missionaries, the belief in sorcery was the thing they wanted to discard more than anything else. It was considered devil worship and belonged to the time of darkness. To discard this was to find the light. However the new Christian teachings about the devil and all his evil works seemed to affirm the notion that bad spirits could be very powerful.

Leo Scharmach, Bishop of Rabaul:

> The Tolai possesses as it were two philosophies side by side. While he clings tenaciously to the ideas and opinions inherited from his tribe, and these are very real and vivid for him, he at the same time absorbs the Christian teaching. However, he gives only a notional assent to it. So it happens that a native sees no logical conflict between *papait* (sorcery) and his religion. When a crisis occurs and the two sets of ideas come into conflict he gives preference to his vivid native belief (1953: 32).

Bishop Scharmach was against the *Tubuan* Society and it was banned for a long time. The Tolais however continued to use it on Matupit Island and I, the author, saw them several times in the 1960s standing on a canoe under the shadow of Tavurvur volcano. Apparently there was some tacit acceptance of the *tubuan* amongst the Methodists but not in regard to church feasts or festivities. Because of the association with magic, the Catholic church leaders were against the *tubuan*, but then the young Tolai priests began to question this attitude. They pointed out the different types of sorcery - *papait* the good *tena papait* and the bad *tena agargar* and wanted the *duk duks* and *tubuan*, both symbols of the secret societies to be reinstated as part of the Tolai culture.

When Benedict's father died in 1977, there was a complete ban on the *tubuan* by the church, but by 2001, when his mother died, there were *tubuan* everywhere. This shows the turn around within 25 years. Later in this book, we will see how this change came about largely through the efforts of Archbishops To Paivu and To Varpin.

Ben's family. Ben is on the left with his father, two brothers and mother.

Bitokara Church in modern times looks essentially as it did pre-war. It was here that Fr Franke stood and faced the bayonets of the Japanese.

Chapter 9

The War Years, 1941 to 1945

The Second World War broke out in Europe with the invasion of Poland by Hitler in 1939. It meant that German missionaries home on leave were unable to return to New Britain and those who had come out in 1928, including Fr Franke, were unable to return home for their holidays. It was a few years before the curtain came down on New Guinea, on the land and its people, on the government workers, on the defence force, and on the missionaries and their work. During the early 1940s, the Japanese took the Pacific by surprise. Rabaul was only defended by a few hundred troops. One of their leaders, David Selby, wrote *Hell and High Fever* and he says, "We had heard the news of Pearl Harbour on the wireless and the conversation in the mess at breakfast was full of excited speculation on what was in store for us".

The first air raids against Rabaul had occurred on 4 January 1942 when Rabaul's airfields were bombed, killing 16 New Guineans. A few weeks later, 109 Japanese aircraft raided Rabaul. The eight Wirraways that went on the defence were completely outnumbered. One crashed, three were shot down, two crash-landed and another was damaged. Between them, they shot down one Japanese bomber. The Lakunai aerodrome and Praed Point were initial targets, both near Matupit Island. The guns on Praed Point had been heavily targeted by the bombing and they were put out of action. As this was their first experience of a bombing raid, the Matupit people were terrified when eighteen heavy bombers headed towards them from the direction of Watom. The noise was deafening as they flew low over the aerodrome in formation. How many of the bombs overstepped their target and hit Matupit is not known but the people were badly shaken. They had few places to escape on their small, flat island and hiding under the large trees was not a guarantee of safety.

Coastwatcher, Mo Johnson, had passed through the Japanese invasion force by chance when fleeing from the islands off the coast of Wewak. His little boat, the *Saemat*, bobbed its way through the Japanese navy invasion fleet in the middle of a terrible storm off the coast. Mo and his passengers were saved by the darkness of the night and the terrible storm. As soon as they could get in radio contact they advised David Selby of the Japanese fleet. They were the first to view it as it passed along the top of New Guinea.

During the night of 22 January, the Japanese landed at many unprotected points around the Harbour. Thousands of Japanese soldiers landed and soon Matupit Island and the surrounding area were teeming with Japanese. The villagers must have watched the shadowy figures of the invaders from their houses.

Before Rabaul was invaded it had a population of 1,000 Europeans, 1,000 Asians (mostly Chinese) and many local people. European women and children had already been evacuated but the Chinese population were not and they felt betrayed. Stories about Japanese atrocities towards the Chinese on mainland China at Nanking (now Nanjing) were well known.

After the Japanese landings, and realizing that resistance was futile, the Australian commander, Lieutenant Colonel J.J. Scanlan, ordered his troops to withdraw with the statement, "every man for himself". Hopelessly outnumbered they had surrendered the town to the Japanese after less than one day. The Japanese captured many of the Australian troops as they retreated to West New Britain. Some were executed at Tol Plantation. The only knowledge of the massacre was from the few Australians who managed to escape and flee south. Left behind were many European civilians, six army nurses and some wounded soldiers in and around Rabaul who were imprisoned. Additionally, 350 missionaries, priests and nuns were interned in Vunapope.

The Village people

The people of Volavolo experienced the terror of war from the very beginning when young Benedict To Varpin was about 6 years old. Families cringed in their houses and, when the bombs began, they sought refuge on the slopes of Kombiu (Mother volcano) in tunnels they carved out for themselves. Benedict was initially not really aware of the dangerous position he and his family were in. In the first year of war, there was a drought, the volcano was erupting again, and food was scarce. Now his parents faced providing food for the invaders when they demanded it. But his father, Gustav, did not do this without a fight:

Benedict remembers:

> I was six when the war started but I was aware of the Japanese. My mother always taught me to pray about the war. She taught me to be responsible and to help other people. We were in the tunnel when the allied planes were bombing.
>
> When the Japanese occupied Rabaul, my father learnt to speak some Japanese and, because of this, was an interpreter for them. He buried the people who were executed by the Japanese for not obeying them or those who died by machine gun or bombs. I remember a couple of times I almost got killed. We were returning from fishing and the bombers came over and daddy threw me under a big tree called *ai,* if he hadn't done that I would have got killed - that very tree was hit by a bomb and there was shrapnel everywhere. Daddy had to get a big branch off me and then we went home with the fish. My mother saw the bruises on me, but Daddy was very good at traditional medicine from the bush and he fixed me up.
>
> The second time we went fishing, some Japanese soldiers tried to get our fish. One of them put his bayonet to dad's chest. Daddy was a brave man and would not give the fish up. The Japanese soldier then held the bayonet at his throat tighter but daddy got the bayonet off the Japanese and threw it up in the coconut tree where it got stuck. My father knew a little Japanese and he reported these soldiers to the Kempitai (the Japanese police) and they were punished. Another day, I had to rush home with my fish around my back and I was laughing, and my mother said, "why are you laughing? We are being bombed – our village has been bombed". My mother organised the women with her sisters.

On another occasion, there were a lot of planes dropping bombs and daddy threw me into a hole and the bombs came. I was breathing heavily in the hole and then when I got out because I was all right, I laughed. Then I heard the people praying and my mother was cross with me, "You little devil! What! What are you laughing for? We were praying for you and now you are laughing! We were praying that you were still alive". My relatives thought I had been killed too so they were very relieved to see me alive. I don't really know why I laughed after I was rescued. I was just full of life and happy to be alive. When we came out we saw these people who had been cut by the bombs. My mother was stressed because of all the bombs falling and dead people lying all around. Some of them had terrible wounds. Daddy was responsible for burying those who died.

Village life everywhere was disrupted by the Japanese Occupation. Some villagers thought it was a European problem to deal with but then it began to affect them personally. When the Europeans fled the scene, Japanese camps sprang up on Matupit Island, in Rabaul itself, in Volavolo and along the coast. The Matupit people found that they did not have enough food because there was a drought; the volcano erupted again destroying some of their gardens; the American bombing raids stopped them from gardening; and plundering soldiers demanded food from the gardens.

Initially, the Japanese would not let the Matupit people leave and settle elsewhere. They were forced to support themselves on what little they had. The people set about making things they could trade with the people across the bay. They made lime from the coral - something which they had always done. They made salt from the sea water - this was an art they had nearly forgotten in the easy years of buying it from the nearest trade store. But it was a laborious job making salt. Some people boiled sea water in their large saucepans; others did it by traditional methods using a basin made from suitable bark and evaporating the water over a slow fire. Once they had a supply of salt and lime, the Matupit women paddled across the bay to trade it for food with the Kininigunan people for *taro*, *kaukau*, tapioca and cabbage which they brought back to Matupit.

Benedict To Varpin with his father, Gustav To Gunan.

Sometimes Japanese soldiers would force the Matupit villagers to take them across the bay in

their canoes. Lying in the bottom, they were dressed in black so that the American planes flying overhead would not see them.

Eventually some of the Matupit people were ordered to move to the slopes of the Kombiu. They camped on one side with people from Volavolo and Nodup. They built houses and dug tunnels for emergency use. Many Matupit and Volavolo people died from sickness and war injuries. They were miserable and had only a poor diet; food they struggled to grow was taken by the Japanese soldiers; some gardens were destroyed by the large Japanese snails; frequent trips had to be made to get water in bamboo poles from the springs on the steep slopes of the mountain; and the Japanese often demanded this water as well.

Some Matupit people were more fortunate when they were ordered by the Kempitai to live at Malaguna, on the other side of the harbour. Among these were Paulina Ia Dok and Stephen To Paivu, the catechist, and their sons Alois, Michael, Louis and To Keta. Before they left Matupit, To Paivu gathered all the Church missals and registers, put them in a wooden box and buried them in the cemetery. As a result, the Church Register, opened in 1896, survived the war and its battered, yellowing pages bear witness to the fact. To Paivu's son, To Keta, buried the Monstrance in the village, but forgot to tell anyone where it was buried!. To Paivu and his family lived at Malaguna for the rest of the war. During the bombing they hid in a tunnel with two entrances, one entrance for them and the other for the Malaguna people. As the bombers did not work at night and it was stifling hot in the tunnel, they usually slept outside. During the day, they only ran into the tunnels if they heard the sirens going. The rest of the time they would be busy working in small gardens nearby or building little houses which they camouflaged with banana plants.

Each Sunday, Stephen To Paivu continued his visits to his people on Mount Kombiu. Before dawn, he would take his fishing gear down to his canoe and paddle off shore. He would throw his line in the water and pretend to be fishing. Gradually he would move across the Bay stopping to fish if any canoe approached. He paddled around Matupit Island now a flattened mess, and on to a secret landing place. He could no longer land at the hot springs as the Japanese used these to cook their rice. He would quickly clamber up to the shelter of the trees and make his way to the tunnels where he hid.

Usually the tunnels were nearly empty when he arrived because, even on Sundays, the people were forced to work hard for the Japanese. They couldn't all congregate at once for the Church Services so a few of them at a time would stop working and go off to the tunnel for a brief service and return to work before they were missed. Others would then take their place in the tunnel where Stephen would repeat the service. In this way Sunday services continued - babies were baptised and marriages celebrated. All at a time when the Japanese thought they had stamped out all practice of religion. On Monday morning, To Paivu would paddle back to Malaguna. The people were always careful to cover his tracks and the Japanese never learnt of his frequent visits to Kombiu. They thought he was a catechist who had given up his religion and was now spending his Sundays fishing!

The Missionaries in Vunapope

Early on the morning of the 23 January 1942, the missionaries at Vunapope woke to find the sea in front of them full of warships exchanging light signals. Some time before, Bishop Scharmach asked each of the missionaries if they wanted to be evacuated to Australia. All decided to remain with their people. However, they sometimes doubted if it was the right decision as they were unable to do mission work at this time. Through the war they had to contend with continual bombing from the allied planes; near starvation on a meagre diet, and tropical diseases which they contracted in the tough conditions. Many days were spent huddled in long tunnels dug to protect themselves from the bombing raids. They faced it all with a sense of resignation to the will of the Lord. Fortunately many survived. Food was brought by the local people: fresh vegetables and coconuts, once the drought had broken. Some of the Brothers were allowed to keep the gardens going.

Bishop Scharmach was a tower of strength. Those around him felt secure and consoled because their chief led all the conversations with the Japanese, saying he was a representative of the Vatican Embassy. People had absolute trust in him. Colonel Satoru Kikuchi, asked him about the future of the mission.

Bishop Scharmach replied:

> Some question that, but you will have my answer. Colonel, here you see us missionaries at the lowest stage of misery; frightened, pale and haggard; debilitated by malaria, dysentery and typhoid. Perhaps you expect us to implore you and your High Command to remove us to a place of safety. We feel safe enough here and we refuse to be removed from here except on our own conditions — when hostilities will cease and our freedom will be restored. Then, you will see these emaciated bodies regain strength and health by decent food and medical attention. You will see them setting out to work and rebuild all these destroyed mission stations and out of the ashes will rise something stronger and bigger than there was ever before. Colonel, it takes more than Japanese forces and American bombers to destroy our faith and our spirit (Scharmach, 1960: 167).

Outside the Vunapope Compound was a group of FMI Sisters, whose Order was founded by Bishop Couppé to enable local sisters to follow their vocations. The Sisters went to villages and used shell money to buy food. They lived at their Takabur Convent and soon eleven Sisters arrived from Tapo to join them, but Japanese soldiers soon invaded their church and convent. The church with its tabernacle was taken over by "a den of thieves". When the missionaries were moved into the Ramale camp, the Sisters moved to an area outside the perimeter and were occasionally able to attend Mass if it was celebrated in the open. Usually, however it was celebrated in the tunnels. They wrote a letter to the Bishop saying they wanted to receive Communion at Christmas and they asked the bishop to help them. Bishop Scharmach asked the Japanese to allow the Sisters into the compound for Mass. This was out of the question but they agreed to allow him to go out of the compound

so each of the Sisters could kiss his ring and wish him a Happy Christmas. As they kissed his ring, he gave each of them Communion: a happy Christmas Day for them (Ibid: 253). At Vunapope, the missionaries lived in some of the Mission buildings until the bombing intensified. They dug deeper tunnels until there was standing and sleeping room for all. Later when Vunapope was devastated they were able to survive the attacks.

Bishop Scharmach told an amusing story about Father Baumann, formerly a parish priest at Matupit Island, during one of these bombing raids. One afternoon while the missionaries were standing in the sunshine near the entrance to their tunnels a bomber flew over at low altitude and surprised them all. There was a great scramble for the tunnels. "Father Baumann, one of our oldest missionaries, happened to be standing just inside the tunnel opening. As he was rather stout and not very agile, the very first thing he did was to fall and block the entrance, but the avalanche swept over him. Next to him had stood a Sister serving cocoa. Alas, the pot was knocked out of her hand and its contents landed fair on Father Baumann's neck. He got a terrific shock. 'I'm wounded, blood, blood,' he shouted. In a few seconds the plane was gone. We helped poor Father to his feet. He felt the blood running down his spine. After closer inspection we were able to assure him it was not blood but cocoa. He had a good laugh at himself and we heartily joined in" (ibid: 177).

Fr Franke and the War

When the Japanese landed at Rabaul, the Australian troops, heavily outnumbered, were no longer under orders to continue fighting and were told to get out as best they could. Escaping the scene, they made their way overland, climbing steep rugged mountains and exposed to the heavy rains as they sheltered under vine clad jungle trees. The paths were slippery but they clambered up and down on their way to West New Britain and then hopefully to escape from New Britain to Australia. They were still hoping to engage in further campaigns but right now the position in New Britain was hopeless. For weeks they trekked across the forbidding jungle. All along the coast of West New Britain there were mission stations of the Sacred Heart Mission. On the north coast Fr Franke, among other missionaries, cared them for them. On the south coast of New Britain, it was Fr Culhane and Fr Harris who gave the most help. Fr Harris was at the Malmal mission, overlooking Jacquinot Bay, with a clear view of the open sea. He had set up his station with chickens, pigs and a vegetable garden so that he would be as self sufficient as possible. He was happy in the work: keeping in touch with the outstations; helping the children at the school; marrying couples; baptising babies; and attending to the sick and the dying.

When the retreating Australian soldiers travelling along the south coast came to his mission, they were ragged and weary from days in the jungle. Fr Harris fed them from his gardens and his mission supples. When they had recuperated enough he even handed over his small mission boat so they could escape to Port Moresby and then Australia. Fr Harris helped many Australians evacuate from his place. In the end a large ship arrived to evacuate them.

Again and again they said to Fr Harris, "Come on, come on! You will be safe with us. If you stay you will be killed by the Japanese".

He had only one answer, “If I deserted the people when they were in trouble how would I ever return to preach Christianity to them”?

He was killed by the Japanese as was his friend Fr Culhane who was four hours walk away at Uvol Mission. Fr Culhane had once given a lecture to young seminarians in Ireland. At that time he told them New Guinea would be safe from any World War, but he was not to know of the designs of the Japanese Imperial system.

Before the Japanese landed, war touched Fr Franke personally when a motor launch with an Australian Army officer aboard arrived at his Mission station, with orders that all German missionaries were requested to register as enemy aliens at the Government headquarters, Talasea. After he had registered, Fr Franke was re-appointed to the parish at Bitokara, which had become vacant. His monthly registration was very easy at the nearby District Office in Talasea where his friend, Keith McCarthy, was in charge. Bitokara had been his favourite parish and he happily settled back there living next to the large church dedicated to St Therese. The people of Bitokara were friendly and faithful people to their priest in the turbulent years of the war and during a devastating cargo cult.

Keith McCarthy knew Batari, the cargo cult leader, and arranged a meeting with him. This was in the period before before Pearl Harbour. Batari turned up with scores of his friends who revered him and his beliefs. McCarthy found him to be “the same meek, unobtrusive man I had known”. But Batari had had a strange dream delivered from the *tabarans* who lived in the Pago Volcano. The *tabarans* had said that McCarthy and Batari were both dead. Strange to be sitting there being told you were dead! Now in death, as Batari explained it, they had exchanged spirits so McCarthy was now inhabited with Batari’s spirit and vice versa. This meant that when the cargo came into Talasea it was really meant for Batari. It sounded like a crazy dream and McCarthy made him repeat it so he could understood the gist of the message.

> Batari went on to state: “In a short time, all the white men and all the Chinese will leave New Guinea. They will go and not return. The goods that the white spirits have prevented the New Guinea people from having, will then be distributed to the New Guinea people.”
>
> “When will this happen?” queried McCarthy.
>
> “Christmas will come and go”, he replied, “and then the white man will leave New Guinea.” (McCarthy, 1963:189).

How did Batari know this in advance? Two months after this conversation and prediction, Japan declared war in the Pacific and soon after Christmas the first bombs fell in Rabaul. In New Guinea an era had ended, and the white men had to go.

Fr Franke noted that, “Just at a time when we all should have been united in our religious convictions and faith the people nearly everywhere were influenced by a raving cargo cult. Two neighbouring tribes threatened our peaceful lives. Thanks be to God we, in Bitokara, were spared from this dreadful cargo cult disease”. For years, some people

believed that all the cargo and goods arriving in ships from afar and being received by the Government and the Catholic Missions were really sent by their ancestors for them. The tribe in the Bitokara kept their faith and turned against the cargo cultists and their anti-religious ideas and became more fervent in the practice of their religion.

Some Australian soldiers of the 2/22nd Battalion had gone along the southern side of New Britain but several hundred also started the long trek along the north side of the island through the jungle and along the beaches; weakened, starving, sick and full of tropical sores, they went along singly and in groups towards Fr Franke's mission station at Bitokara and nearby Talasea, where Keith McCarthy and Rod Marsland were organising their evacuation. They numbered about 300 men. Every day they expected to be cut off by the Japanese. Fr Franke gave them every assistance: he fed them and tended their wounds. When he was invited to join them and escape, he refused to leave his people.

J. K. McCarthy was appreciative of the efforts of Fr Franke of Bitokara and Fr Joseph Weigl of Valoka. They both gave all the help possible and declined to leave their mission stations for the safety of Australia. They said that as their Bishop was a prisoner in Rabaul, their place was on their mission stations. McCarthy observed "Father Franke looked sick and frail, for he had worked day and night doing all he could for the sick and wounded".

He said, "I could arrest you for your own good, and take you in as a German national".

But Fr Franke smiled, "You would never do that".

McCarthy concluded, "I wrote out another order which purported to show that I had forced the priest to assist us. I doubt if he ever used it when the Japs came to his mission and cruelly ill-treated him, for he was ever a man to suffer in silence" (ibid, : 210).

Before he left, McCarthy had handed over authority to Fr Franke in Talasea. He was left in charge of the hospital and the prison. Batari had been kept at the station under observation but now he escaped into the bush and rounded up his followers. When the people saw the Australian troops retreating, the cargo cult situation became worse. The cultists threatened to take Fr Franke prisoner, and hand him over to the Japanese. However his own parishioners sharpened their spears and got their weapons ready to fight the cultists. He said, "Thanks be to God, it did not come to such a pass". Batari had told his followers that the Japanese were their ancestors returning with all the cargo. When, later, they tried to help themselves to the Japanese goods, the cargo cultists were severely punished and became disillusioned.

It was a dangerous time for Fr Franke both from the cargo cult and the impending arrival of the Japanese soldiers. The Church was dedicated to St Therese, his patron saint and he sought her protection at this difficult time.

He noted:

> About three or four weeks after McCarthy's departure, a few Australian soldiers arrived by boat at Talasea/Bitokara having "missed the bus". I kept them a few days in my

house helping them to recover after weeks struggling along the coast. They had hidden their boat on the other side of the Peninsula, about one hour's walking distance away. Refreshed and full of hope they said goodbye and went on their long trip to Port Moresby and Australia.

Three or four days after these soldiers left, I saw three Japanese boats in front of our mission; it was not a pleasant sight. Judging from all the rumours and stories about cruelties, my hour might well have come. I had already destroyed everything that could have incriminated me in their eyes. I now donned my black soutane in order to be recognised as a priest. When I saw landing barges coming ashore and heard some shots fired at the Government station, I made a visit to the Church and I made a sincere act of contrition in front of the tabernacle. As I knelt there, I heard shouts of *Bansai*, war cries by the Japanese rushing up the cliff to the mission and I went out to face them in front of the Church, the Rosary in my hands as my only weapon. Here I stood without hope, may I say "hopeless". Four or five of them with fixed bayonets and, yes, I remember so well, with murder in their eyes, going for me constantly with fixed bayonets. My Rosary fell to the ground and I stood quietly surrendering my life to God with a fervent prayer. I believe that St Therese was there shielding me from the thrusts of the bayonets. Those few minutes while they played their deadly game gave their officer time to arrive on the scene and after some shouting by him I was saved. This incident to me personally led me to reflect that there is good in all no matter how bad they may be. I believed they could not kill me because they were young and I did not move.

The officer looked at my German Passport and having heard of the German missionaries at Vunapope, he was convinced that I was one of them and not an enemy in disguise. Later the ship returned and I was brought out to it in a motor launch. To impress hundreds of Japanese soldiers, a bugle call was sounded and I was led up to the main deck where officers and journalists were sitting at a desk covered by a red cloth. On one side was a seat for me, a Japanese flag was behind me and two guards with fixed bayonets, stood each side of me.

We had a strange conversation or you could call it a battle for life or death: the Japanese not knowing a word of English and myself not knowing a word of Japanese. Anyhow the outcome was: "Prisoner has to go with us to stand trial in Rabaul." Knowing what might happen if I had to face the Military Police, the Kempitai, I did not like it. I had the cheek to say, "If you take me to Rabaul all the people around Talasea/Bitokara will go wild. I am the only one able to control them." Thanks be to God they understood or were dumbfounded! The motor launch came alongside and brought me back ashore to my beloved Bitokara, safe again for the time being.

And what happened in this year after my Court Martial? It was April or May 1942 when I was free again, but I was under the constant strain of meeting our "friendly" enemies again. Despite the deadly tension of being caught, I was able to do my ordinary mission work, taking care of my flock who were troubled not so much by the Japanese but by the cargo cultists.

Of course I had no radio and depended solely on rumours about happenings around the world and in New Britain in particular. Strafing and bombing from planes reminded us that the war was still going on. My Feast Day, St Bernard, the 20th August, 1942, was celebrated with even greater enthusiasm than before, with games and *singsings* in honour of their priest. It was a sincere expression of loyalty. Yes, splendid. Then something wonderful happened. It must have been in October when suddenly the Aussies came back, yes the Aussies! What a terrific and hearty welcome they got from my people and myself. Naturally, we thought they came as liberators on their return to New Guinea and New Britain, the advance group of the armies to come. What a wonderful feeling after all that time existing between life and death.

I met them; dear Blue Harris, Mo Johnson and a friend from Rabaul, McNicolls, with a group of local police. They had landed on the other coast about one hour's walk away from Bitokara had hidden their boat and made a little camp. Yes, these men, the so called Coastwatchers, were the most hated people by the Japanese forces, because behind the lines they observed Japanese movements and sent their observations by radio to Headquarters in Port Moresby and very valuable information it was too. It is said that the reports sent by Paul Mason and his companions in the mountains of the Solomon Islands were the deciding factor in the victory of the Allies in the Guadalcanal sea battle.

Fr Franke at Bitokara.

The Coastwatchers stayed several weeks near the mission station. Yes they were wonderfully brave; heroes in the back-ground, enduring great hardship and in constant danger engaged in playing such an important and essential game. Oh those were wonderful weeks together with my friends, "Blue" Harris and company. Through him I heard about things happening in the world during this horrible war. It gave me hope to hear of McArthur slowly closing in. It would be a wonderful Christmas and we made preparations to hold a real Christmas party after Holy Mass on Christmas morning with more than one thousand Catholics from all around [Interview with Fr Franke by the author].

Years later I (the author) interviewed Mo Johnson in Madang and he remembered meeting Fr Franke at Talasea during the war and he knew about Batari, the cargo cultist. He said: "The Japanese kept an eye on the missionaries as they thought they were helping the units. We were warned not to contact them. It was in the routine orders of the Australian Military Service. I knew Fr Franke pre-war when I had been at Talasea but, in wartime, when I saw him from a distance I

feigned ignorance. There were always natives around. I was about seven months in the area and got across to Witu from where I was taken off by a Catalina flying boat."

Blue Harris, however, did talk secretly to Fr Franke. One day he said: "Father, I have just received an urgent message from Headquarters that two other Coastwatcher parties at Cape Gloucester and Arawa on the south coast have been killed or taken prisoner by the Japanese. I have to return as quickly as possible with my party and you are supposed to come with me into safety. Because you have already been Court Martialled, you will be on the Japanese Black List. You will be killed for having associated with Coastwatchers."

Fr Franke replied, "Thank you, but I am going to stay with my people".

Blue Harris answered: "Father, I understand, I am an officer." They shook hands and never met again as Blue Harris was later killed.

Fr Franke remembered what happened next:

> About a month after Blue Harris and his party had left, the Japanese arrived in a barge, to put up a supply depot in Talasea. I went down to the wharf and presented myself as a Catholic missionary to the officer in charge! It happened that there was an interpreter on board, a doctor whose German was worse than my English. Anyway he explained to the Officer in charge that I was a missionary and would not cause any harm. The Officer in charge was an educated man too. He had been a professor before the war so he was happy to let me stay on the station. The doctor interpreter used to come and visit me at night sometimes. I was free to leave the mission station and visit the next village where about three hundred and fifty people were living. We did not feel safe any more in the big Church because of all the strafing so I held services in the middle of the village. About eight hundred people would gather from the surrounding villages. We kept the schools going too for the first few months with the help of local teachers and catechists. There were about twenty small schools in different villages.

Then about May 1943, this all changed. For one and a half years, Fr Franke had been on his own living under terrific tension, expecting to be shot any day. If the Japanese secret police, the Kempitai, held the court martial and interviewed the village people about what he had done, they would not be as understanding as the Japanese doctor had been. Furthermore, if the Japanese had heard him telling the local people in their vernacular that the Americans would win the war he would have been killed on the spot.

More Japanese arrived and from then on, day and night, Fr Franke was under guard and house arrest until June or July when he was taken to Rabaul by ship, together with the young priest from Kombe, Fr Leo Bischof. The Kempitai harangued them for two or three days. When they were given a chance to speak they said they would be happy to go to the concentration camp in Vunapope. One day they were ordered on to a truck and brought to Kokopo. They saw the huge aerodrome at Vunakanau They were blindfolded and left standing in the sun for hours so had a glimpse of Purgatory. When he arrived at Vunapope,

Fr Franke broke down physically after the constant fear that he could die any time and the worry about his people in the Talasea mission station. He got amoebic dysentery and just began to waste away. Several of the older missionaries died outside or in the tunnels. One night, there were two deaths and they had to be buried in graves only about a metre deep near the front of the tunnel. One was an old nun a very devout person who had been dying for weeks. The missionaries were standing around her grave saying some prayers when Fr Franke jumped in and held her in his arms for a moment and then laid her down to rest.

Later the bombing from the allied planes got worse and Vunapope was just smashed to pieces and everything went up in flames. Missionaries were dedicated to their work but when the bombing on Vunapope got really tough they became disheartened. There were over two hundred of them altogether, sisters, brothers, and priests. Lulu Miller had been captured in Rabaul town where she had been sheltering a young girl. The girl was taken and raped by the Japanese but Lulu told the soldiers she had a deadly disease, dropsy, and they left her alone but ate her pet dog. Later she was brought to the mission prison camp but she never got the right medicine.

Bishop Leo Scharmach, who had been appointed Bishop just before the war, had had experience in the First World War. He foresaw that Vunapope might be cut off from certain things and so he prepared for that eventuality: he stored things up; cultivated crops on the land like stick tobacco, which he was keen on and he could make soap from coconut oil. He was terrific in this respect. During the war he kept a cool head when the bombing started in Vunapope and he had a special way of dealing with the Japanese. He played the strong man as "Deputy of the Vatican", and saved the missionaries from being deported to Japan. Bishop Scharmach did not show any fear. The supplies of rice lasted a long time. One or two of the brothers were still left in the nearby plantation and they were allowed to send food by cart so they had coconuts, *kaukau*, *taro* and bananas and no one starved to death. Many got malaria and at first they had no quinine to fight it. In the end Colonel Satoru Kikuchi gave the Bishop a personal gift of a box of quinine,

Sisters showing a tunnel used at the Ramale prison camp.

aspirin and other medicines, which were needed and said they were not mentioned in the Official Papers. The missionaries kept this a secret during the fighting and were grateful for the medicines.

Ramale

Rabaul was the main target of the bombers; one count being 250 bombers on one raid with many fighter planes around them. The bombing and the glare and the fire could be seen from the prison camp. The worst was when the bombers returned from bombing Rabaul and bombed and bombed Vunapope. The dug out tunnels came in handy and everyone rushed inside at the sound of their approach and huddled there until the all clear. Once an American boat entered Rabaul Harbour and shelled for hours and hours. In the morning there had been many deaths, but it showed the end was near. 11 February 1944 was a horror day when all of Vunapope was bombed and the two church towers fell. The statue and bells were rescued and buried in a bomb crater. After this, the Japanese transferred the missionaries to the Ramale Prison Camp, about three miles away from Vunapope and deeper in the bush. Some brothers had gone a week or so before to cut the bush and to put a few huts up.

One morning in June 1944 every one trudged to the Ramale Camp located in a deep valley where nobody had ever lived before. "Descend!" The order was given at the butt of the Japanese rifles. Old and young climbed down into the ravine, which was dark and cool but damp and unhealthy. The one thing that saved them during this time was the underground water which they accessed through a well. They were not able to use the beautiful creek which ran into the valley because it was for the Japanese further downstream.

Fr Franke said:

> Ramale was well chosen really, and we were never bombed in that place. From the sky no one could see there was anyone living there. But we had other problems: starvation was coming very near; it was really tough going sometimes. In the morning, we had hot water instead of tea and coffee with maybe two bananas, maybe a cob of corn. We started straight away to make a garden, and, under guard, we went out of the camp each day to the gardens. One of the first things we planted was tobacco and that was the thing we were all dying for! After a few months we had our own cow peas Oh that was a wonderful lifesaver, cow peas! Little brown peas, which grow quickly and we also had corn and tapioca and *kaukau,* so we did not starve quite so much! In the end we had more because the gardens were producing well. Of course we had no radio, but eventually the rumours reached us that something had happened in Europe and that the Allies were victorious and we were getting more hopeful The Bishop was called up to the Guard House one morning and was told, "America and Japan shake hands now". It was armistice at last. When the Bishop brought this news back we dared not show too much happiness.

> Then a strange thing happened. The Japanese Guards came and asked us to forgive them. We felt free, but of course we were still kept there in Ramale. It was not very long before the Australian soldiers came down the valley shouting that they had come to liberate us. It was in September [13 September 1945] and the most glorious day of our lives, the camp just went mad. The local Tolai people also rejoiced. Everywhere we heard cries of: *A malmal tada!* [Peace]. There was an Army Chaplain amongst the soldiers and an army doctor, Dr. Gee, who examined us. After a few days I was moved out of the camp with another priest and some of the Sisters, as we were some of the worst cases. We left the Ramale camp and were driven to Kokopo and Rabaul where we stayed one night at a Red Cross stand near Malaguna Road. I remember walking along Malaguna Road looking for where the church should have been and the mission compound and we could not find it; the botanic gardens, so beautiful before the war was now just bush. Everywhere you looked there were Japanese prisoners. The first Australian contingent had been moving up the coast before the war finished but they would have had a terrific fight against the Japanese because there were 80,000 of them concentrated there. Then the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. It killed so many but saved our lives and many others too. We were flown out from Rabaul to Jacquinot Bay then to Lae where I spent a few months in the hospital and later in the civilian camp. Some of our missionaries were flown out from there to Australia for recuperation; they all needed a complete break [Interview with Fr Franke by Bob Moore for the ABC Rabaul].

When peace was declared, the allies moved into Rabaul rounding up thousands of Japanese soldiers. They found that the Japanese had dug many large tunnels including a hospital, bunkers and the Japanese Headquarters. In total 70 km was dug for the navy and 80km for the army. One former Japanese officer, Captain Enari, was interviewed in the 1960s when he returned to retrieve the bones of dead Japanese soldiers. He said that during the war he read books to overcome the boredom in the tunnels but many ordinary soldiers could not read and they had little to do, crouching there hiding from the bombers.

My family explored one of these tunnelled hills near Rabaul. It was like walking inside a giant sandcastle with passageways veering off at every angle. If they wanted a window they burrowed to the outside and left a gaping hole for fresh air and light. There were several layers of these passageways and the kitchen cove even had saucepans and a small stove in a blackened corner. Brian retrieved some of the old radio gear but he had to be careful as many tunnels had been booby-trapped.

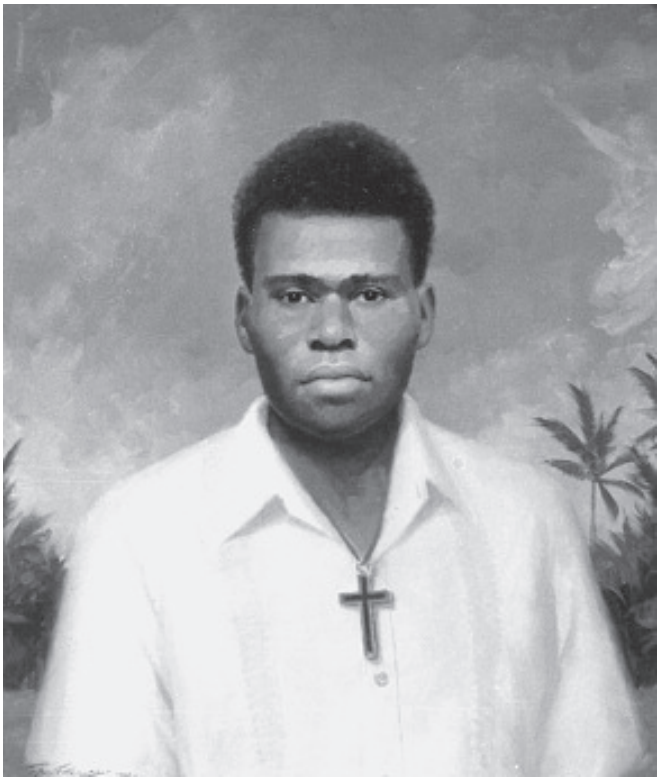
After the war, many Japanese war criminals were brought to trial, including those who had killed the Australian soldiers at Tol Plantation. Colonel Satoru Kikuchi, who had been in charge of the missionaries, was facing the death sentence. When Bishop Scharmach heard from the colonel's defence team, he provided a list of facts in his favour. Apart from the fact that he was polite and gave them a fair deal, the Colonel did not commit any atrocities against the missionaries and was considerate about their transfer to Ramale prison camp. He also provided them with a box of medicine including quinine. He was lucky to have this statement from Bishop Scharmach. Many were not so lucky. A set of

gallows was set up near Malaguna Village and many Japanese Officers were executed for cruelty (Scharmach, 1960: 167).

In 1946, Colonel Satoru Kikuchi wrote to the Bishop:

> War Criminal Compound,
> Rabaul New Guinea.
> 11 August 1946.
>
> Dear Bishop,
>
> Since the cessation of war I have not had an opportunity to see Bishop, and one year has already passed. I believe that Bishop is devoting to the reconstruction of Church and the spreading of the Christian Gospel. Owing to your deepest sympathy concerning my war crime, I was not only saved from my capital sentence, but also I was promulgated a very light sentence. - - I believe I can express my gratitude to the boundless Grace of God".
>
> Yours truly, Col. Satoru Kikuchi.

Young Benedict To Varpin took his memories of the war with him. Later, when he was a teacher, he described the bombing, the dead bodies and horrors of war to his students who were about the same age as he had been. "We must not let this happen again," he told them.



Blessed Peter To Rot, Catechist and Martyr. A Basilica in his honour has been built at Rakunai near Vunapope.

Chapter 10

Blessed Peter To Rot, Martyr of the war

> *No history of the New Britain Mission is complete without mentioning the story of Peter To Rot, the Martyr of the war. Of course there were many martyrs both Catholic and Protestant at this time. Many people died for their faith like Fr Harris MSC and Fr Culhane MSC in West New Britain and the many who died in the bombing at Vunapope and the Catholic and Lutherans missionaries killed on the* Dorish Maru. *There were also the earlier missionaries, the Bainings martyrs, killed at St Paul's in 1904. Here we have the story of Peter To Rot who stood up to the Japanese and was ready to die for his beliefs. The Tolai people are very proud of Peter To Rot who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1995.*
>
> *It shows how deeply the Faith was understood. Many other catechists like Stephen To Paivu ignored the Japanese decrees, but they survived, so little has been recorded of their work during the war. Because of this and because Archbishop To Paivu was named after him, his story has been included.*

In 1996, Bishop Benedict To Varpin said:

> The church is strong now and there has been an awakening of the faith since Peter To Rot was beatified. The Catholics are strong and there are many local nuns and priests and Christian Brothers. The Pope saw Peter To Rot as an example for young people who must be taught to live truly Christian lives: of grace and holiness in their relationship with God, and of truth and love in all human relationships. This was clearly shown by the figure of Blessed Peter To Rot who gave up his life to preserve the sanctity of marriage. Also young people should be taught to pray in a way that enables them to place their hope in God within their particular cultural needs.

Peter was born in 1912 in Rakunai village. He was the third of six children of Angelo To Puia, a Tolai *lualua*, and his wife Maria Ia Tumul, both of whom had been received into the Catholic Church in 1898 by the early missionaries of Vunapope. To Puia was a leader and highly respected in the Tolai tribe. He was initiated into the *Tubuan* Society and learnt something of the magic associated with the *Iniet* Society long before the missionaries came to the village. When To Puia was converted, he turned his back on these tradtional beliefs and brought his children up to be devout Catholics. His son, Peter, was annoyed when some of the Christians in his village brought *Iniet* magic material to the village. He persuaded them to get rid of it.

Peter To Rot had the usual childhood in the village: playing marbles in the hard ground between the houses; climbing coconuts to get the fresh *kulaus* to drink; accompanying his parents to the garden to weed and harvest and later taking the goods to market where shell money, *tabu*, was the going currency. Being from an inland village, his family bought fish, freshly caught in the bamboo fish traps by the coastal people. These could be purchased at the market with a length of shell money equal to the length of the fish.

Schooldays passed in the village with years of learning in which he excelled. Like his father, Peter was a natural leader. At age 18, he enrolled at St Paul's Catechist College. When he was about to leave Rakunai for this Catechist course, Fr Laufer, the Parish Priest, advised him, "be well and good". His father To Puia told the priest not to worry, "he is my son and he will do well". The following three years were spent at Taliligap learning to be a catechist. His studies included courses in theology, teaching, oratory, music and singing in which he excelled. Bishop Vesters attended the graduation concert and encouraged the catechists in their future work in the mission.

Returning to Rakanai in 1934, Peter helped Father Laufer with the Parish work. On 11 November 1936, Peter married Paula Ia Varpit and they had a number of children. Peter once beat Paula for not making some coconut mats he had requested. This was an acceptable custom of the Tolai bigmen who felt that women should be kept in their place. However Peter was more gentle and often referred to Fr Laufer for advice on behaviour. He apologised to his wife for the beating and this was most unusual for the men in his village.

Rabaul, with its numerous volcanic peaks surrounding the deep blue harbour, was a pretty town with hibiscus and frangipani blooming everywhere. Peter and Paula had been married for one year when two of these volcanoes erupted spilling clouds of ash on the town and surrounding area and destroying all this beauty. This catastrophe caused panic and fear that drove many people into the church. Here they prayed fervently thinking their last hour had come.

Rabaul was again thrown into disarray with the arrival of the Japanese soldiers during the war. When the Japanese took over Rabaul in 1942, the European missionaries were rounded up and sent to Vunapope where Bishop Leo Scharmach looked after them. The Bishop made life as comfortable as possible for his missionaries and supervised the building of tunnels for protection against allied bombing. During this time Peter To Rot and fellow catechists collected food and blankets and secretly took them to Vunapope for the missionaries.

Before Fr Laufer had been arrested by the Japanese, he asked Peter to look after the parishioners in Rakunai. Over the following years, he kept the people united in the faith: he instructed the children, baptised the babies; officiated at weddings and kept the parish register up to date. When the Japanese banned the Catholic religion, Peter refused to stop his work. For his views, he was taken to court several times.

During his first trial, To Rot was defended by To Keta, Stephen To Paivu's son. Because he had learnt some basic Japanese, To Keta was the chief interpreter and man-in-the middle in transactions between the Japanese and the Tolais. He instructed his people what to say and often succeeded in having them released or receiving only a light sentence. At this stage, the edict banning all religious services had not been made and To Rot was allowed to go back to his place. [To Rot's people all agreed To Keta did a lot of good work helping To Rot and many others in Court.] Later To Rot was to return to Court but he was not so fortunate that time.

For his second trial, Peter was taken to a place at Tunnel Hill near where the Rabaul Observatory is today. This hill gave an extensive view over the harbour which was dotted with scurrying barges, Japanese troop carriers and wrecks of bombed ships. The Americans continually attacked the Japanese posts and shipping everyday. When the bombers flew overhead, everyone took cover. At this second trial, To Rot was accompanied by his *luluai*, Tata. It was a frightening scene with the Japanese guards threatening them with fixed bayonets. When Tata was asked if To Rot continued to have church services he responded, "Yes". To Rot bravely stood his ground against the Japanese. When they accused him of praying for a Japanese defeat, he replied, "The church will not interfere with your war, but will strengthen the people in this time of fighting to obey you". The soldiers, however would not listen and forbade To Rot to hold any more religious services . This was about March 1944 (To Vanimara, 1993: 30).

Later, the Japanese issued an Edict forbidding all religious services outside the Ramale camp. To promulgate it, the Japanese police summoned all the chiefs of the district together at Navunaram. To Rot and his brother, Tatamai, went along and listened in silence as the Japanese police told the leaders that all religious ceremonies must stop. There were to be no more prayers, baptisms or marriages and men could take more than one wife if they wanted to. Shocked at this threat to the whole Christian concept of marriage and matrimonial fidelity, Peter condemned the Japanese Edict. This was one of the issues which caused him to be imprisoned and eventually executed. Japanese tolerance of the Christian faith changed to confrontation once they began to lose the war as they believed the Christians were praying for their defeat. Peter To Rot again was summoned to a meeting, questioned about his activities and ordered to restrict them on the grounds of wartime security.

Although he exercised prudence, Peter refused to cease doing what he regarded as his duty. He built an underground shelter on his property at Taogo and continued to bring people there for prayer and the Sacraments. They met each Sunday and said the Mass prayers. To Rot continued to witness marriages, taught the children and baptised the babies.

To ensure all their orders were enforced, the Japanese employed local people as police boys. Meshida, the Japanese officer in charge of Vunaiara, had a platoon of local men under him. Under orders from the Kempitai to find evidence against Peter, Meshida organised his police boys to spy on them. When To Rot criticised a police boy for taking a second wife, he reported Peter for officiating at the marriage of two Catholic couples.

Arrested in April or May 1945, Peter To Rot was sentenced to two months detention. At first, his two brothers were imprisoned with him. His sister, Ia Varpilak, remembered visiting them and sitting next to a fire where they had been cooking. When she began to cry, To Rot told her he was in jail for a good cause. "My two brothers are here for owning Australian money and will soon be out of here. I, on the other hand, am here for a matter of religion which is a much more serious crime." Many of the villagers tried to give presents of eggs and food to Meshida to buy To Rot's freedom but to no avail. When the *luluai*, Tata, visited him, he told Peter they should try again for his release. Peter answered,

"Forget it. I have already been sentenced to death". He was prepared to take responsibility for the religious ceremonies held in the cave on his property. "Tell the Japanese it was me who held the prayer services." He wanted to protect anyone else from being prosecuted later.

His wife, Ia Paula, brought him food and clothes. Like St Thomas More's wife, Ia Paula tried to persuade her husband to bend to the authorities so that his life would be spared, but like St Thomas he refused. "It is my task to die for my people, for the Lord's name, for the Father and for the Holy Spirit." It was a sentiment that has reverberated down the centuries – the voice of many martyrs before their death.

He was told a doctor was coming to give him an injection. As he was not ill, he knew this would be their manner of killing him. Looking around at the palm trees and the beautiful sky and listening to the birds, he calmly said his last prayers. Then he shaved and dressed carefully in this white laplap and shirt and put his catechist's cross around his neck. Next he tidied his house and holding his Rosary waited. Two Japanese soldiers accompanied the doctor who gave To Rot a lethal injection. The next morning, the family were told Peter had been sick and had died. The people knew that this was a lie because To Rot had not been ill and a white frothy substance coming from his ears and his nose smelt like poison. The people of Rakunai buried him in the mission cemetery, near the church.

Archbishop Brian Barnes of Port Moresby at the consecration of the Basilica erected in honour of the Blessed Peter To Rot at Rakunai Village, 7 July 1995.

Archbishop Hesse of Rabaul presiding at the Consecration of the Basilica.

It was about this time that the missionaries in the prison camps were told that outside the camp their religion was dead. This was far from the truth and To Rot's people continued to meet for prayers and were justly proud of their martyr.

After the war, moves were made by the Catholic Hierarchy in Rabaul to have Peter To Rot declared a saint and martyr. Fr Dempsey MSC spent many years of his retirement in Rome and in Rabaul undertaking research promoting To Rot's cause. His research proved valuable and on 2 April 1993 in Rome, in the presence of Pope John Paul II, a decree was promulgated by Archbishop Hesse of Rabaul regarding the martyrdom of Peter To Rot, killed *in odium fidei*. Each year since his death 50 years ago, the people have venerated To Rot's grave and now their belief in his sainthood has been recognised by the church.

In 1995, Pope John Paul came to Port Moresby for the beatification ceremony. The celebrations were to have taken place in Rabaul but once again the volcanoes had erupted with fire and brimstone as in earlier times. From the point of safety and organisation, the ceremony was transferred to the Nation's Capital.

Unlike many beatifications, which occur hundreds of years after the death of the person, this ceremony was attended by To Rot's daughter and his nephews and nieces. One nephew,

also called Peter To Rot, lives in Madang and was the Chairman of the Madang Committee for the Beatification. Representatives from the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Uniting churches were present at the ceremony in Port Moresby. It was a great ecumenical gathering.

On 17 January 1995, the people mixed their own cultural celebrations with Catholic ritual. Hundreds of people in feathered headdress, tattooed faces and swirling skirts danced their way along the road beside the Pope in his Popemobile. Just like Australia, Port Moresby had been experiencing a long drought before the beatification. When the Pope arrived, the skies opened and down came the rain. Some might view this as a jinx on the ceremony, and there were a few rain dancers who would like to take the credit; but the people themselves said the rain was a miracle from Peter To Rot who continues to look after their needs. He is the patron saint of happy marriages. Port Moresby was overwhelmed by the celebration of his beatification. The Mass was held at the Sir Hubert Murray Stadium, which was full of chanting praying people. Tolai warriors carrying ceremonial weapons entered first followed by the bones of Peter To Rot, which were placed near the altar, then his daughter, 49 year old Rufina Ia Mama, took part in the procession. Her powdered white face showed she was mourning for her long-dead father in the Tolai tradition. Then the Pope arrived in a special shaded truck and circled the stadium where dancers of various parts of Papua New Guinea were stationed. The Pope told the crowds, "Martyrdom has always been a part of the pilgrimage of the people of God".

Stephen To Paivu, Catechist, and To Keta, his son, who helped To Rot

When war broke out, Father Barrow was Parish Priest of Rabaul but he soon died at the Vunapope prison camp. The catechist, Stephen To Paivu, was helped by his sons, Alois To Mailil and To Keta. When they had to move from the island, the Kempitai allowed them to go to Malaguna near their headquarters. This was fortunate because Stephen To Paivu and his family had an easier time than the other villagers on the slopes of Kombiu. In Malaguna, they worked in their own gardens and only occasionally did they have to supply food for the soldiers. As related earlier, To Paivu did not forget his duties to the people on Kombiu. While Stephen To Paivu was away, Alois To Mailil took the service in Malaguna with his brothers' help.

To Keta got to know some of the Japanese police in the nearby Kempitai office. The chief of the Kempitai noticed how bright To Keta was and employed him as an interpreter. This was just what To Keta wanted as he hoped to help his own people by taking on this work. His brother Alois said he was only friendly to the Japanese with his mouth and was really trying to help his people. In this he succeeded to such an extent that some Japanese soldiers bowed to him as they were afraid of his position with the Kempitai Chief. Sometimes he would punish Japanese who stole food or chickens from his people. During the day, To Keta worked at the Japanese camp and at night he returned to his parents, Paulina Ia Dok and Stephen To Paivu.

He later became the chief interpreter and man-in-the middle in transactions between the Japanese and the Tolais including To Rot. Later, when the Japanese produced an edict forbidding religious services, To Paivu and Alois To Mailil decided to ignore it just as

Peter To Rot had done and they continued to hold religious services, often before dawn because they now had to avoid Japanese spies as well as American bombers flying overhead. They were lucky not to be betrayed by the spies to the Kempitai. To Keta never betrayed his own family to the Kempitai. although he knew they were disobeying orders.

Towards the end of the war, two American spies infiltrated the Japanese lines and talked to To Keta on the other side of Tunnel Hill. They told him the war was nearly over and the Americans had a base down the coast of New Britain. To Keta decided he would get a group of people together and walk down the coast to meet the Americans. He tried to persuade his brother, Alois To Mailil to go with him but their father Stephen To Paivu refused to let him go. He also tried to dissuade To Keta but to no avail. To Keta took his wife and son, Stephen, and together with a Manus man, walked off down the coast. They were resting beside a river at Put Put when the Japanese found them. To Keta and the Manus man were shot as traitors because they had both worked for the Kempitai. To Keta's wife and son, Stephen, continued on down the coast to the American base at Jacquinot Bay and ended up on Manus Island where she later married a local man.

Matupit would have been one of the hardest hit areas of the New Britain region. Most of the surrounding churches lost all their records and the large library at Vunapope was completely destroyed except for a few books the Missionaries managed to take with them to Ramale.

Fr Madigan at rear, flanked by To Keta on his right and Alois To Mailil. Catechist To Paivu and Paulina Ia Dok are seated, surrounded by their other children.

In 1945, after the war, the Matupit people returned to the Island and set about rebuilding their villages which had been devastated. Large bomb craters had be to be levelled out before houses could be built. To Paivu and Ia Dok returned with their families and Alois helped To Paivu as a catechist. One of the first jobs they did was to organize the building of another church. The people went back to the old campsite on the slopes of Kombiu and collected the bones of their people who had died during the war. After a service in the Church, they were re-buried in the Matupit cemetery. To Paivu dug up the wooden box containing the Church register and other books which he had buried before leaving Matupit. It is wonderful to think that the Church Register managed to survive the Second World War in this way.

It was in the months after the war that the Monstrance buried by To Keta was discovered. One day someone noticed two prongs sticking up at the bottom of a bomb crater. They dug down and found the Monstrance still intact although the prongs were rather bent. It was carefully cleaned and joyfully re-instated in the Church.

In March 1946, Father Seclan was appointed to the Matupit Mission four years after Father Barrow had been imprisoned by the Japanese. We have seen how the work of the Mission was carried on in those years by To Paivu and his sons. The names of those baptised during the war were added to the Church register when it was recovered from the cemetery. In the years that followed the war, many priests' names appear in the register.

Stephen To Paivu died in May 1951 and was mourned by Paulina Ia Dok and family and all those whom he had helped in the war. Fr Savage conducted the burial service. After a few years, Stephen's son, Alois To Mailil, returned to Matupit as the catechist. In 1951 Fr Bernard Franke was appointed Parish Priest of Matupit Island.

Archbishop Herman To Paivu MSC, named after Stephen To Paivu of Matupit

> A cousin of my father came and named me To Paivu (giant) after a famous catechist from Matupit Island. My father was a full member of the *Iniet* Secret Society and I was initiated into the secret *Tubuan* society. It happened when I was still a child at the time of the full moon. My father carried me to the *taraiu*, the secret place of the *Tubuan* Society and paid for my initiation with many lengths of shell money. As part of the ceremony, I was beaten lightly with a stick. When I was older I learnt the secrets of my tribe and the rules of their society.

Benedict To Varpin knew Herman To Paivu well:

> I met To Paivu for the first time in 1953. He was a deacon and he came to the High School at Vuvu. He was ordained in 1954 in Vunapope. Later when I was in the seminary he said Mass for us at Ulapia. I really got to know him when he was the Parish Priest at Volavolo. I was teaching at Nodup and I used to bring him his betel nut. To Paivu was a Tolai and knew the mentality of the people. He built schools and got money from outside but he told the people they should try to be self-reliant. When I was with him we talked about the *tubuan* and we thought that we should get

rid of the bad side of it but keep it as a custom. It began on New Ireland and our people brought it when they came to Rabaul. To Paivu was consecrated auxiliary Bishop by Archbishop John Hoehne in 1974 while I was in the south coast of New Britain. I did not go - I just looked after my chickens. People said I wasn't interested but I could not go. The weather was too bad and I would have had to go to Kandrian. Later To Paivu came for a visit and I told him people had said I was not interested. He said it was OK. Then, in 1975, he was appointed Archbishop of Port Moresby.

To Paivu had a lot to do with Benedict To Varpin's vocation to the priesthood. He was always urging him forward even to the extent of pushing him when he needed it, but always with a great sense of humour and friendship. Because he was so important to Benedict's story it is necessary to know his background as well.

Herman To Paivu started school in the village and later went to Vunapope to further his education. He was not expected to declare his desire to become a priest at this early age. In 1923, he remembered attending Archbishop Couppé's funeral. Couppé had died in Australia but his body was returned to Rabaul for burial. It was during the Archbishop's

Herman To Paivu, on the left, and George To Bata at their deaconate ordination in Bougainville with Bishop Thomas Wade.

requiem Mass that To Paivu decided he would like to be a priest. To Paivu was initially trained as a catechist but, when be expressed his desire to become a priest, was given over to the parish priest in Tapo, to start his Latin studies and other subjects. He was now at the beginning of his long road to the priesthood. One day, in 1928, he was sitting in Tapo Village studying Caesar's Gallic Wars when Fr Franke came to visit. Newly arrived in Rabaul, Fr Franke was amazed to see this young Tolai learning from the same book he had used at High School in Germany. Young Herman, studying under the coconuts, found Latin hard going. He nearly gave up several times until he realised that the Latin for a beautiful rose is *bona rosa* and the words for a nice rose in *Kuanua* was also *bona rosa*. After this, he thought there must be a connection between the two languages and kept plodding on. Over the years he learnt Greek, Latin, philosophy and many other subjects.

In 1937, at the time of the Rabaul eruptions, To Paivu was visiting some friends at Taliligap when they heard loud explosions. They found out that the volcano had blown up and people had been killed at Keravia Village. Many thought the end of the world had come. Most of the people were evacuated to Vunapope where To Paivu helped hand out blankets, food and clothing. Later when war interrupted their lives, the 24 seminarians were imprisoned along with the missionaries at Vunapope and so their studies continued behind the barbed wire. Inside, they built a Tolai style house learning from the few books they had with them. After the war, a new seminary was set up at Vunapope. To Paivu and three others, George To Bata, Paul Noga and Peter Tatamas were the first to be fully trained in Papua New Guinea. Because To Paivu was nearly forty years of age, the bishop hesitated to ordain him but he begged, "My Lord if I can say but one Mass after my ordination it would have been worth it".

> Old Bishop Vesters came again for the ordination of two Tolai priests. He ordained Fr To Bata at Vuvu, assisted by half the clergy of Rabaul, while the other half were at Vunapope for my own ordination. I remember one of the older priests called me forward, and the Bishop asked the people if they agreed that he should ordain me. I lay prostrate before the altar for a long time. Then I felt the hands of the Bishop and other priests, one by one, on my head. The bishop then put on me the official robes of my new office. He anointed my hands and gave me the chalice (cup) and paten (plate). Then we said Mass together. After Mass he gave me the power to forgive sins. At the end I promised to obey him (Steinbauer, 1974: 152).

To Paivu was ordained 15 November 1953 and was Parish Priest of Volavolo for a long time. Then in 1974, he was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Port Moresby and appointed Archbishop in 1975. Archbishop To Paivu had a great sense of humour. Once when he was giving a talk to the little Handmaids of the Lord in Port Moresby, his scarlet hat blew off in the wind. He retrieved it and put it on top of a post with the comment that the post probably had more brains than he did and so deserved to keep the hat warm. But Herman To Paivu was a very clever man and he was a man of the times. A man who brought his people full circle to incorporate their old culture into the church liturgy wherever possible. Years later, Benedict To Varpin, his long-time friend and fellow Tolai helped him. On the subject of culture, even though he no longer fully believed in the secret societies, To

Paivu said the *tubuan* figures had an important place in the Tolai culture and should be retained as figureheads even when the old beliefs and secret society was finished. He wrote, "Every *tubuan* is supposed to have a stone, called *palavat*, which is to enrich the clan. Every altar is supposed to have an altar stone on which the sacrifice of the Holy Mass is offered for the salvation of mankind". (ibid: 153)

Tarcissius Bola said:

> To Paivu was one of the church community's valuable ecumenical leaders with many years of yet more invaluable experience as a pastoral worker. - - Long before the period of ecumenical openness advanced he was practising it as, when he was a Monsignor working in Rabaul, he blessed his Tolai compatriots from the United Church. Special mention was made about his promotion of the local culture into the local church. He suffused the church with Papua New Guinean culture in the five years of his pontificate (sic) which began in January 1976. He insisted that decisions on the Church way of life should come from the people instead of being imposed by the church. And though the Council of Bishops had not always encouraged the Papua New Guineaisation of the Church, he was a proud believer in old Melanesian regions and an initiated member of the secret *Tubuan* society of his Tolai heritage. He introduced Papua New Guinea culture into the liturgy of the Church" (Post Courier, 17 Feberary 1981).

St Michael's Church, Matupit Island

Chapter 11

Father Franke in Rabaul and Matupit Island, 1946 to 1970

> *Long before the war ended, Vunapope had been wiped out and had reverted to a tangled mass of tropical undergrowth. "Sixty years of toil and not a rafter left". The outstations of the mission fared no better. Forty-one were totally burned out and the remaining four were heavily damaged. At the end of the war, the outlook was dismal: forty-five of the staff were dead, the remainder were hungry and in poor health; over two hundred major buildings had been bombed and burned out; and there was neither a hammer nor a nail left to commence re-building. But the Mother of God was smiling through the paw-paws (O'Neil, 1961: 11).*

Fortunately, before the war the Government had forced all property owners to contribute to a War Damage Fund and some of this money was now made available to the missions. The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) was in charge until 13 December 1946, when Australia entered into a trusteeship Agreement for administration of the former Mandated Territory of New Guinea, as approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Part of the agreement was that the customs of the people be considered and that respect be given to their rights particularly over land matters; that their educational and cultural advancement be promoted; that the people would be trained in administering their own affairs and be guaranteed freedom of speech and of petition (Pech, 1991: 186). But there was a lot of rebuilding needed before that could begin to happen.

At Vunapope, the missionaries lived in tents until the mission was rebuilt.

The Army and the Air Force, working nearby, used their bulldozers to clear areas and Bishop Scharmach began the heart-breaking task of rebuilding. Fr John Hoehne's energy became obvious in these post war years. Although he too had suffered in the prison camp, he kept his health and was able to begin work right away. He remarked, "It was a difficult time! But the enthusiasm of the Christians, who persevered for the four years without the care of priests, encouraged us". Vunapope purchased another mission boat, the *Waimana,* and both Fr Hoehne and the Bishop arranged for a great deal of left-over war material to be obtained from Manus Island including a number of Quonset huts. Vunapope was slowly rebuilt from the rubble. Other buildings were built afresh. Hoehne also returned to teaching and taught at the Vuvu school. He was a great man for getting the education system going for the local populace after the war. When the Christian Brothers came and took over Vuvu, Hoehne built another school at Kininigunan.

Although he was still quite ill after the war, Fr Franke was anxious to return to his people. As soon as the Mission boat arrived in Lae he returned to Vunapope. After his return and while he was sitting in a tent, he heard the sad news that his mother had died during the war. He was very upset, but his reaction was one of resignation, "We missionaries have to expect that. It is part of the game of being a Missionary so far from home."

In answer to the call for missionaries, the Australian Province of the Sacred Heart Missionaries sent five young Australian Priests to the New Britain mission - Frs Robert Hyland, Frank Quirk, John Dempsey, Virgil Copas and John Askew. Fr Askew was sent to Malmal, Fr Quirk to Pilolo and Fr Dempsey to Vuvu (Waldersee, 1995: 572). However, as part of his training, Fr Quirk went to help Fr Franke at Bitokara. Fr Franke found that the Gerua plantation manager was returning to his plantation so they both went with him.

As they approached Talasea, excitement grew. They could see the church on the top of the hill as they entered the harbour. "I clambered up the hill and there before me stood the bell tower with the bell rope still hanging. Oh with what love and joy I rang that bell". The reception they received was overwhelming. The people were so pleased to see their priest as they thought he had perished in the war. Surprisingly the Bitokara church, dedicated to St Therese, was left intact although the roof had been strafed. Along the length of the church were three large bomb craters. The bombs had obviously been meant for the church but had missed their target. Bitokara was one of only three churches to be left intact out of fifty. The presbytery on the cliff side and one of the school buildings was also intact. Because the people had been without a priest for nearly three years, there were many things that needed fixing and records to be updated. Fr Franke went around solemnizing marriages and performing baptisms. He and his Fr Quirk worked hard for the next five to six months. From village to village they went and everyone was looking forward to Christmas, a real Christmas again. But tragedy struck at the beginning of December 1946 when Fr Franke's health completely broke down. He suffered two big haemorrhages and appeared to be bleeding to death.

Luckily, on that very day, the superior and two or three priests came along in the *St Teresa*, and found him dying. They gave him the last rites. Some government officials including his good friend, Jack West, were also on board. They contacted headquarters in Moresby by teleradio and a Catalina was sent over to Talasea. He was carried down the cliff on a stretcher into the flying boat and was soon in Port Moresby in the hospital where Dr. May took charge and said, "He has one chance in a thousand of keeping alive".

> From Moresby I was flown to Sydney in a DC3. I enjoyed the flight and we had a beautiful view of Sydney from the air. However, I could hardly walk when I got out of the plane. My whole body was swelling up from the infected kidneys. I went straight to Lewisham Hospital where they operated. I remember how close to death I was. I spent the next three and a half months in the hospital looked after by those kind Sisters of the Company of Mary and the wonderful Doctors. The operation was performed by kidney specialists, Dr. Harris and Dr. Allan Gee. Dr. Gee had been in the group of Aussies who came to Camp Ramale to liberate us at the end of the war. Later I had another haemorrhage. Things looked very bad again. It seemed to be the end. May I describe the strange situation. I got so weak that I became half conscious. I saw priests and nuns kneeling around my bed saying the prayers for the dying. I felt like floating slowly away; it was like swimming or lying on my back in water without movements but a wonderful feeling of quietness and happiness in me. And then I floated into unconsciousness. What a wonderful death it would have been. About

midnight I woke up, feeling very well and surprised myself. I was sent back to do something more I am so grateful to Our Lord that he gave me another chance (Campbell, 1982).

During the year following his operation, Fr Franke stayed on recuperating in Australia. He visited the MSC Priests and Brothers at Kensington and met Fr Madigan who had been Parish Priest in Rabaul. Then Bishop Vesters invited him to Melbourne where he was Chaplain of the MSC Sisters in their newly acquired Mother House, a beautiful mansion in a huge park with flower gardens and a large vegetable garden. It was an ideal place for recovery and rest and Fr Franke stayed there for the following six months.

Bishop Scharmach and Fr Franke on their trip overseas.

Before the war, Bishop Vesters had called Fr Franke a "Living Miracle", considering a few near death escapades including Blackwater Fever. And now he called him a "Medical Miracle" as once again he had escaped death. During this time he met Archbishop Mannix and also visited the Carmelite Sisters in their Monastery and told them how St. Therese had saved him a few times from death, especially at Bitokara when facing the bayonets of the Japanese in front of her Church.

In 1948, Fr Franke returned to Vunapope and, for two years, taught religion in the different schools and taking care of the many labourers in and around Vunapope. He was still not considered healthy enough to be on a Mission station away from a doctor. Since he had left Germany in 1928, his first leave would have been due in 1939, but was postponed because of the outbreak of the Second World War. At last, in 1950, he was finally able to get away on his first home leave. Bishop Scharmach was returning on his first leave after 24 years and Fr Franke went as his secretary. They travelled from Sydney by ship via India and Suez Canal to Rome where Bishop Scharmach was due for his official visit. They had a private audience with His Holiness Pope Pius XII. What a privilege! They thought this a wonderful experience. Then they visited St.Peter's and other churches and the catacombs.

> After a few days in Rome, we went by train through Italy and the Alps, my first view of these majestic mountains. Then we travelled through Austria, Tyrol and Bavaria, where we visited our many Monasteries, and at last we arrived at our Mother House in Hiltrup where I had started my High School studies.
>
> Everywhere we were welcomed as returning missionaries after so many years. At last I had my holiday in my hometown, Warendorf, where I got a tremendous reception from my dear old father, who was 77 years old, my two brothers and three sisters and their families, little nieces and nephews. A big crowd awaited me at the end of our little street. Even little flower girls were there and brought me in procession to our

home. What a return after more than twenty years! But one was missing, my dear, lovely mother who had died during the war. I could only go to the cemetery and visit her grave. Those were wonderful months at home with my dad and family, telling of our experiences in New Guinea and listening to their hard trials during the war.

Everywhere I saw the destruction of cities, but I also saw the terrific task of rebuilding. Too soon the time was up and our Bishop and his secretary had to return to our Mission work in New Guinea. We went to Ireland for a week so the Bishop could contact families and relatives of our Irish priests and recruit some more priests to replace the many we had lost during the war. And, of all places, we visited Blarney Castle and of course they took me up to the tower where, on my back, I kissed the Blarney Stone. In later years when I was excited and talked too much, I always had the excuse, "Sorry, I kissed the Blarney Stone!" and people enjoyed it.

We travelled from England to America by ship hoping to recruit more Missionaries to take the place of so many who had died during the war. We also went to the Office of the Propagation of the Faith where we met Monsignor Fulton Sheen known through radio and TV. Our Bishop collected something worthwhile for our Mission. For me it was a very special joy to meet Sister Walburgis MSC, a sister of one of our Fathers whom I knew before we entered the MSC Mission Congregation. She came to work as teacher and nurse in America when I went to New Guinea. It was a wonderful *Wiedersehen* after so many years. At that stage, we were over 50 years old and are looking forward to seeing each other again in heaven. On and on we went. From San Francisco we flew to Sydney and then back to Rabaul.

Appointed to Rabaul

In June 1951, Bishop Scharmach called Fr Franke to his office.

"I'm appointing you to the Rabaul Parish, as assistant to Father White."

Fr Franke hesitated, "Oh my Lord Bishop, but my poor English?"

"You will be the right man for the job."

"But my Lord, you cannot mean it. I have been in the bush for so many years."

The Bishop replied, "Don't worry, Father, I am sure you will manage. Fr White asked especially for you. Anyhow you are needed there."

For Fr Franke it was the beginning of 26 years of joy, happiness, trials and difficulties. When he had been on Bitokara, he often wished to work with people who could understand his ways, and to whom he could bring peace of mind and happiness. Discussions with neighbouring priests were also high on his wish list. Now in Rabaul he had these things. He worked on his English and his friend John Fletcher in the Commonwealth Bank guided him on the right procedures for banking and writing cheques, all new to him.

After the war, Fr Ormond, an Army Officer, was the parish priest in Rabaul. He lived in a tent as Rabaul had been completely destroyed and celebrated Mass in a bush Church. With generous help from everybody he soon built a Quonset Church and a Quonset School. Many children, who had missed school during the war years, could now make up for lost time. Soon a simple Convent was built for the sisters who are the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, to teach all these children

Fr Dwyer and Fr Franke.

Father White was Parish Priest and introduced Fr Franke to Parish work. Both of them kept up the things that Father Ormond had started. They began or continued with the Holy Name Sodality, the Sacred Heart Sodality, the Children of Mary Association, the Catholic Youth Organization and later the Legion of Mary Association. The Marist Brothers

Procession of priests into St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Rabaul, for the ordination of Fr Albert Chan.

CYO Group with Fr Franke and Fr Browne in front of the Cathedral.

and Sisters concentrated on the Sacred Heart School in town, the St. Joseph's school in Malaytown and another one in Matupit Farm. When Father White was transferred to Malmal on the south coast, Fr Franke was on his own in the Rabaul Parish until Father James Dwyer came as parish priest. Fr Dwyer helped the Chinese gain citizenship in Australia. He was on the Legislative Council in Port Moresby and lobbied the government to allow the Chinese take up residency in Australia. Others were there to help in this matter as well.

At this stage, Rabaul had about 3,000 Chinese, 1,000 Europeans including English, Dutch, Germans, French as well as Americans and many Australians. In addition to these there were a few hundred Malays and Mixed Race people; and many thousands of workers from everywhere in Papua New Guinea who spoke about 30 to 40 different languages. The common language for all was Pidgin English. Fr Franke was fluent in Pidgin English, which is now known as *Tok Pisin*.

Father Dwyer built the Cathedral and the parish hall and both are monuments to his powerful drive and energy and a memorial of the overwhelming generosity of the parishioners. A builder in Adelaide, Mr Clarrie Bell, heard that a church was going to be built in Rabaul. Having special experience in concrete work, he offered himself at a very reduced rate. Father Dwyer jumped at the chance. Clarrie came and stayed about two or three years and did a tremendous job with only local boys as his assistants. Father Dwyer got the plan of the Wewak Church, changed it a little and then Clarrie went for it. The foundations were dug without modern machinery, the walls grew higher and higher like a tower up to about 30 feet. The cement was poured into wooden forms, and it was said to be the best concrete ever poured and with the smoothest surface. 80 year old, and half blind, Gabriel Chow Ying did his best to do his part, assisted by Thomas Ah Ying. How proud Gabriel was for, in about 1900, he had helped to begin the spiritual foundation of the Catholic Church in Rabaul.

Fr Franke with Fr Albert Chan and his father, John Achai.

Clarrie left after three years never to return to see his finished church. In 1960, Fr Franke visited him in Adelaide and showed him colour slides

Baby John Bernard Mennis held by Moira McGill. Fr Franke on right with parents Brian and Mary beside him.

of his church. Mr Dellatorre who had an Italian Building Company had just finished building the Nonga Base Hospital and finished off the upper part of the walls and the roof of the church and built the sanctuary in terrazzo. The marble for the altar came from Taree in New South Wales.

Fr Franke described progress in the Cathedral:

> A beautiful carved Crucifix from Oberamegau was fixed over the main altar; large paintings of many scenes: the parable of the Prodigal Son; St Peter's denial of Our Lord and his contrition; the story of Mary Magdalene; and Jesus as the Good Shepherd. On two paintings my friend was able to put in the view of Rabaul Harbour with the two Beehives; 14 Stations of the Cross were donated by our Chinese people; statues include a Mater Dolorosa, a model in clay, St. Joseph with the Infant Jesus and oversized figures of St. Peter and St Paul, carved in wood; wrought iron pulpits were done by my brother Herman, as well as four windows and the door to the Baptistery. We cannot forget dear Father J. Dwyer who had the courage and drive to build it. He never saw his Church finished as he was recalled to Australia in 1960 to be Parish Priest in Alice Springs. Here he built the most beautiful Church while knowing he was dying of leukaemia.

First Communion class of Chinese, European and mixed-race children with Fr Franke.

When I came back from my second leave in 1960, Father Dwyer was gone and I was alone again in our big Parish until Fr A. Browne, such a wonderful priestly priest, came to my assistance. Then he became Novice Master at Vunapau. When I was alone, our priests and missionaries at St. Peter Chanel College came to my help. Without their wonderful help, especially at weekends, I would not have been able to manage Rabaul, Matupit and Nonga Base Hospital.

Fr Franke and Alois To Mailil each side of the tabernacle in St Michael's Church on Matupit Island.

Then Father J. Hayes arrived with his zeal and kindness for all entrusted to him. He is now a parish priest in Texas, United States of America.

Knowing my limitations I kept in the background taking care of two Hospitals, our Sodalities and the thousands of our Chinese and our indigenous parishioners; and last, but not least, there was St. Michael's parish on Matupit.

Matupit Island Parish

Matupit Island was also Fr Franke's parish and he often stayed there overnight in a little hut which he dubbed "the house cockroach''. Later a better house was built by the Matupit people. He had first been to the island in 1932 for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the

landing of the first missionaries. "Since then I had not returned. Now I was in charge of it and I liked it very much. It became a real blessing when later, over-worked and over-tired, I could sometimes sneak out to Matupit and have a good night's rest without being disturbed by telephone calls."

In 1952, when Fr Franke celebrated the Silver Jubilee of his ordination, Bishop Leo Scharmach provided the timber and material for a new church. It was built by a Chinese carpenter on the old foundations and completed by the parishioners who made very artistic bamboo mats to cover the walls. A beautiful carved crucifix from Germany was placed behind the altar. Next the Parish Hall was built for parish meetings and opened by District Commissioner, Mr. Harry West, in the presence of all the three denominations on Matupit. Fr Franke was happy to welcome Rev Fr Haley, of the Anglican Parish and Rev Sharp of the United Church. The next project was to build a shrine for Our Lady. Built in cement blocks it has an octagonal form with a very steep kunai-grass thatched roof and coloured lighting. His Grace, Archbishop Hoehne blessed the Shrine in a very touching ceremony.

In 1972, Paulina Ia Dok, wife of Stephen To Paivu and mother of To Keta, was still living at Matupit. She was quite a character and always busy cooking and sewing. She was very thin and her legs were like sticks. She lived in a poor little hut by her own choice. Her sons Alois and Michael wanted her to live with them but she refused. "I'll live here by myself where I can have a fire on the dirt floor and have all by belongings around me", she said. On one side of the smoke blackened hut are her rolls of shell money and on the other her rosary beads and a picture of Our Lady above the plank that serves for her bed. Fr Franke called her "his favourite parishioner":

> Her deep faith in her religion, and her unshakeable trust in God, make her outstanding amongst them all. She

The Shrine of Our Lady on Matupit Island. The statue was carved by a famous artist in Germany.

> drags herself up to the church every Sunday, around her neck the Child of Mary medal she received as a young girl at Vunapope about sixty years ago. Oh, she is wonderful, yes, a pillar of strength for many at Matupit. Her deep faith, devotion and dedication to the church is living on and will live on in Alois To Mailil her son, who has now so many years been a teacher and catechist sacristan in Matupit. Without him I would be lost. God bless Matupit.

Having been born on the Davapia Rocks the previous century, the changes Ia Dok had seen on Matupit in the course of her long life, were tremendous, but she has made few adaptations. During the violent earthquakes in July 1971, while most of the Matupit people were evacuated and the causeway was once more washed away. Ia Dok refused to leave the island. "I have my rosary with me and I will stay here", she told Fr Franke and the kind policeman who offered to carry her down to a boat. She stayed and her son Alois stayed with her. Later the causeway was rebuilt and the people all returned once again to their beloved Matupit. They have evacuated their island at least three times last century; once for an eruption, once for a World War and once for an earthquake and tidal wave. Each time they have returned because it is their land - the land they have inherited from their *tubuna* who lie buried in its soil. Ia Dok often said quite philosophically that she was just waiting to die. Not long afterwards, I received a letter from Fr Franke saying that she had died in the early 1970s.

Relations between the Churches

Fr Franke, talking about the relations between the churches, noted what a difference has occurred in the years since the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries. When they first landed on Matupit in 1882, the Methodists (later the United church) had already been established for seven years. Their leader, Reverend George Brown, brought trained Fijian teachers or catechists with him. The whole of New Britain was open to them and they had the opportunity to choose the best, most populated places. When the German colony was established, most of the staff came from Prussia and were Protestants/Lutherans. They made the decision to divide the whole Tolai area into spheres of influence. The Methodists were given the most populated areas and the Catholics the least populated ones. The Administration insisted that these boundaries should be kept. This of course, created terrific tension, a kind of warfare between them. Bishop Couppé went to Germany, stood up in the German Parliament and fought this unbearable system. From then on, the MSC missionaries settled down and made contact with the people everywhere.

> When I came at the end of 1928 there was a kind of living together but still certain tensions existed. I remember the two words marking the different religions: Catholics were called *Popies* and Methodists, *Kutkuts*, because of their special haircuts, probably following the haircut of the Fijian teachers. Later, when I got my first appointment at Cape Hoskins, I found only a small settlement of Methodists. I do not remember any unpleasant happenings; only once when the Methodists made an attempt to establish themselves in an entirely Catholic village near our main station, Valoka and I recall how worried and unhappy I, and all the people, were. However, it was soon settled and the attempt was given up. Thanks be to God.

It is indeed a pity and so deplorable that this clashing of denominations happens in pagan countries; it is so confusing for the people. In other districts where I worked later on there were no conflicts, as I had to deal only with pagans and Catholics. When I arrived in Rabaul in 1951 and visited Nonga Hospital, and in Matupit, I came in close contact with other denominations.

One evening when I was invited by a Methodist Minister to give a talk in their church, I told them: "It was the most touching moment in Pope John XXlll's life and in the history of our church, when he, the Pope, humbly and sincerely confessed before the whole world that we Catholics had failed and sinned through pride and arrogance, non-understanding and lack of charity in our relations with our separated brethren." It seemed as if the people in the pews before me had never heard this and I am sure it did no harm but a lot of good.

Over the years, I formed a deep friendship with the friendly and zealous Rev Wesley Lutton, the United Church Pastor in Rabaul. When he was leaving for Australia, his people arranged a big farewell party for him and I was invited. I was very anxious to attend but I was confined to bed with a heart condition in our mission hospital at Vunapope 20 miles away. As I felt I could not miss this goodbye function, I persuaded Bishop Scharmach to ignore the doctors' instructions and allow me to go to Rabaul for the party. The Bishop gave me his car and driver and in half an hour I was in Rabaul attending the party. I stood up in front of the gathering and gave my sincere farewell to my good friend. Then I drove back to Vunapope and straight into bed.

When I came to Rabaul, I soon realised that visiting hospitals was the most important work of a priest, and I started at once. The indigenous hospital was built straight after the war in Edinburgh Street and nearby was the Malay hospital and the *kalabus* or jail, with people who also very much needed an understanding priest. A small Church built with bush material was the bond between the hospital and the jail where I said Mass every week. I still found time to give my attention to the prisoners. Having been a jailbird myself during the war, we had a lot in common, and we could understand one another.

Another hospital was built on Namanula Hill straight after the war by the Japanese prisoners of war. It was what you would call the Intermediate ward for paying patients. The wards were of tarred paper, it was primitive but in full swing with theatre, doctors and nursing sisters. The comforts that might have been missing were more than made up by the absolutely perfect site and surroundings, really the best place in Rabaul. How I enjoyed my evening visits driving up the Hill in my old Jeep away from the heat of Rabaul into the cool air of Namanula Hill. Having been so sick myself after the war, I could understand the sick and give them the sympathy they needed so much. This sympathy and love drove me to Namanula hospital night after night. I embraced them all.

I, the author, was a patient in the Namanula Hospital a number of times and always looked forward to Fr Franke's visits. As the walls were only paper–thin you could hear his voice as he stopped in various wards along the verandah. One of the doctors, Dr Radcliffe Taylor was in her nineties, or so it seemed. She had a mop of white, wispy hair. Our friend, Mr Bert Penders, was in the Namanula hospital with a bad tropical ulcer and he fell unconscious. He woke up under the mosquito net with the light shining on it and saw this white-faced figure bending over him. He thought he was seeing a ghost but it was only Dr Radcliffe-Taylor checking on his progress. The hospital was surrounded by lovely tropical gardens and it was a pleasure to sit on the verandah in the cool evenings. Our son, John Bernard, was born there and we named him after Fr Bernard Franke.

One day, Dr. Radcliffe Taylor delivered a blue baby and was frantically looking for someone in the right blood group. It happened to be Fr Franke. The blood was slowly drained out of the so called "Blue" baby, parents anxiously watching, and Fr Franke's blood was infused.

Fr Franke:

> Result of the procedure was one hundred percent successful. Of course people hearing about it had their joke ready and said: "Yes, it was a wonderful success; next morning the baby was already praying!" Anyhow the baby was saved and some years later the parents drew my attention to the baby now a fine strong boy. I wonder if he has kept praying all these years?
>
> Often I arrived at Nonga Base Hospital in the late evenings dead tired and sometimes a bit frustrated and depressed. As soon as I see the outpatients and go into the full nursing ward something happens to me. I forget myself and see only those suffering patients. Oh how wonderful they are in their suffering and I smile and go around blessing each one of them. The Intensive Care Ward for babies is usually overcrowded. That is the hardest, to see these babies suffer, doctors and nursing sisters fighting for their lives, sometimes for weeks. More cheerful is the Maternity section. Mothers expecting their first babies, look worried and a bit scared. And you should see them a few days later - all happiness, all smiles, breast feeding their babies and of course knowing that their baby is the most beautiful baby ever born. However I sometimes see mothers crying their hearts out because something went wrong. They need my special attention then.
>
> Leaving the tiny little babies, I go to the children's ward and there we have a lot of fun. Strange, how children recognise me after one or two visits. There are always some very bright children who stretch out their hands for a handshake. I try to cheer them up and forget all my priestly worries. All these children I meet there pick up the "Hello" with which I greet them all on entering the ward. In town, later, when they see me, they shout "Hello" and are happy when I smile back. Then come the surgical and medical wards. As these are not the really ill cases, I give them all a happy goodnight and God Bless you, turn to those who are looking a bit sad and depressed and move on. Sometimes I meet some of my former parishioners from Nakanai,

Cape Hoskins, Kimbe, Talasea and Bariai. I have experienced many sicknesses during my mission life. I now know how painful it can be to be treated by a kind but hard physiotherapist. My word, it was agony, experiencing pain I never felt before in my life. It makes me understand poor boys with broken legs from sport or accidents.

In the Intermediate ward, which is the paying section for all races, I come across cases which often keep me longer. It is a ward where many different types of sicknesses are treated. My special interest goes to the Maternity section where I find some former Sacred Heart girl students having their babies. I often meet the relatives and visitors of many patients. I bless them all.

Of course, I never make any difference or distinction towards people of different religions. For me they are all patients, suffering human beings and grateful for a happy, comforting smile and attention. Some might not have met a Catholic priest at close quarters before, but very soon they see and feel that Fr Franke is just a human being with a human heart.

For many years, I have been Spiritual Director for the School of Nursing. Every Tuesday evening after the Roll Call, I say Holy Mass for the students, and give them some Spiritual food. This keeps me in close contact with them. I am very proud of them. They have developed a very efficient, reliable nursing staff, taking over the wards. Their task is not easy, but they manage very well. With great patience and a friendly comforting smile and sincere compassion they treat their patients and attend to them day and night. Oh, how I love the following beautiful words:

In this troubled world it's refreshing to find
Someone who still has the time to be kind,
Someone who still has the faith to believe
That the more you give the more you receive;
Somebody who's ready by thought, word or deed
To reach out a hand in the hour of need.

Laurie Seeto wrote a letter about Fr Franke to canvas donations for the new wing of the Nonga Base Hospital to be named after Fr Franke for his Golden Anniversary.

What Father has meant to all and every one of us, we all know; he has really become one of us. With his priestly life and kindness he has won our hearts. The feast of his Golden Jubilee to the Priesthood was the day for all of us to show our appreciation of his goodness and kindness. As he said himself, "The priest is not his own", meaning that from the day of his Ordination as a Priest he stopped being his own and became a priest of all people in need. As we know Father has lived up to it and has become all these years our Priest. We all know that one of his outstanding characteristics is his love, sympathy and kindness for sick people. Everyone who has ever been sick will remember him as our special friend, as a Priest caring for body and soul. Despite his 75 years he is a daily visitor in all the wards at Nonga Hospital, blessing and cheering up the patients with his, "Count your blessings, it could be worse". Yes Nonga in

general and especially the Maternity ward, with its 1,500 babies born each year. There, he is very much at home and enjoys himself.

Benedict To Varpin said:

> Father Franke was a great man. He used to go regularly to the hospital. He saw it as his job. He could say Mass in many languages: Tolai, Latin, German, English and *Tok Pisin*. On the altar in the Matupit Church there was a pidgin book, a Tolai book, an English book and books in German - all sorts of books that Fr Franke had used. He could say the prayers in Tolai (*Kuanua*) and could understand the people but he could not speak it really.

Fr Franke during a visit to Nonga Base Hospital.

Chapter 12

Benedict To Varpin, 1946 to 1971

In Rabaul it took years to recover from the war: wrecks, old bomb craters, broken buildings, deposits of cordite and hand grenades caused hazards. In 1946, school resumed for children who had missed out during the war years. Fr Dempsey's first job was to re-establish the school system for the local people. He set up the school in Vuvu for local boys and the first head teacher was Father John Hoehne who subsequently moved to Kininigunan when the Christian Brothers arrived.

Benedict To Varpin was ten when he first went to school. Living in his uncle's village, he had been enjoying a free life fishing, canoeing, swimming and playing. His uncle decided to enrol him at school. Unaware of the strict rules about Catholic children going to Catholic schools, he enrolled him in the government school where he learnt bible stories and singing for Christmas.

Ben remembers what happened next:

> This strict German priest came along and went through the roll at the Government school. When he found my name on it, he was going to stop my parents going to the sacraments. My parents got me out of that school quick smart and beat me up saying, "you devil you, you *tambaran* you" and sent me to the Catholic school where we only did hymn singing for Christmas and a bit about the Bible. There was nothing much there until the sisters came. Sister St Paul who called herself Sister Pulpul (grandmother), taught me from grade 3 to grade 6 using the Papuan Readers. She is now called Sister Kathleen. Many years later when I was in Goroka, I got the message that my Pulpul wanted to see me. I was surprised and wondered who it was. Then I saw her and we hugged each other. She was in charge of the local sisters who were going to the Teachers College at Goroka. She remembered me from when I was a small boy at school.
>
> In school we called clever people To Kabinana. This is a bright light who sets goals. When I joke with someone I call them To Purgo - Purgo means someone who has no aim; a person who goes here and there, not mindful of anything. To Kabinana and To Purgo were two mythical brothers in the Tolai culture. One did all the good things and the other was stupid.
>
> I was still at home until 1952 and had an idea of going to Malaguna Technical College to learn to be a carpenter as my father was doing a lot of building and needed help. Many of my classmates are plumbers and carpenters.
>
> One day when I had nearly finished primary school, my father took me in to town to buy Chinese food, which I really like. While in town, we met this missionary priest who said I should go to the Vuvu School. He also told the Sister from school who called me up to the office and said I should go to Vuvu,

"Oh no Sister" I argued, "I want to go Mal Tech and be a carpenter."

"Oh well, go to Vuvu for a while and you will be a better carpenter."

In 1953, Primary School children were tested by the Christian Brothers for High School. Although Benedict was 17 by then, his name was put up alongside two of his classmates, who were just young kids. They had all got good marks in their tests. One went on to be a teacher. As a young student, Benedict watched the ordination of some Tolai priests in Rabaul. He thought, "how I wish I could be up there with them", but he knew it was not an easy task.

There were six Christian Brothers in the community at Vuvu including Brothers Barry Lewisham and Jim Gorman. I did grade 6 to grade 9 with the Brothers and we were the first group to start grade 10. There were 30 or 40 of us in our class at Vuvu but altogether there were 350 students there. Many of the students left and got clerical jobs. A lot of them went to the government or to the Teacher's College. Some were from the Sepik, Kavieng and Manus as well as local boys. Some sat for scholarships to go to Australia; the first time these had been offered. The Brothers really encouraged us in sports rugby, soccer and running. I was good at running and used to compete with other schools.

When we had finished at Vuvu, Father English from the Ulapia Junior Seminary came to interview some of the students. I saw my cousin lining up for an interview. So I thought I might as well go along too.

Benedict as a student at Vuvu School. Students were from all over Papua New Guinea. Benedict is third from right in the back row.

My cousin said, “But don’t you want to get married?”

“Oh *maski*! Let’s go and be priests.”

Thirty of us sat for the entrance examination for the seminary and about twelve passed. The priests then interviewed us about why we wanted to be priests. I felt God was calling me to work for Him. We came from all different tribes – Manus, Sepik, Tolai. I was at Ulapia for 5 years and we followed the Queensland syllabus and we did Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Physics and Latin. I fell behind with the Latin and had to do the year again. So altogether I did 6 years there. When we began in the seminary we were just kids and used to see the older students in the church but had nothing to do with them. I had already done Grade 9 maths so I found that easy.

Ulapia had the highest level of education in Papua New Guinea at the time. Quite a few of the students became teachers, doctors or lawyers. John Konia became an announcer for Radio Madang and some even went to Australia. We were taught by Australian MSC Fathers: Fr English, Fr Church and Fr Cunningham. In return I coached them in *Kuanua* so they could speak the language. Some students wanted to train as diocesan priests but I told the rector I would like to join the MSC order, as I liked their way of life.

The Bishops’ Conference of PNG was not keen to allow Melanesians to join Religious Orders. Andrew Pong was told that if he wanted to join the MSCs he should become a diocesan priest first and then after a few years he could do his novitiate as an MSC in America. However in 1962, the Father General of the MSC’s Fr. van Kerckhoven MSC visited Ulapia and told the seminarians that an MSC College would be beginning in Port

The student body at Ulapia between 1955 and 1960.

At the De Boismenu Seminary in 1963. Frs Twohig and Mitchell sitting.

Moresby the following year. It was good news for the eight seminarians who wanted to join the order. They would be pioneer students in the new system. At the end of 1962, Fr Bob Mitchell who had taught Benedict at Ulapia was appointed to the initial staff at the De Boismenu College, Bomana.

Fr Bob Mitchell:

> Then came Monday, 18 February 1963. Eight aspiring MSC's and I boarded a TAA DC3 and flew direct from Rabaul to Port Moresby. We flew side-saddle. That meant being uncomfortable and cold as we bumped over the Owen Stanley Range. But it did not depress our spirits, for we knew we were pioneers. We left at 8.35 am and stepped on to the boiling bitumen of Jackson's at 11.05 am, to be met, graciously and cheerily, by Bishop Virgil Copas and Father Harry Eather. De Boismenu Seminary, in existence canonically since the previous 8 December, was about to be peopled (Aerts, 1982: 10).

The original group of eight were: Thomas Tukaliu and Benedict To Varpin from Rabaul; Francis Misso, Ralph Tirang and Andrew Pong from Kavieng; John Sinou from Alotau; Paul Mea from Kiribati and Owen Ani from Port Moresby. Fr. Twohig MSC, fresh from Ireland, was the director of studies and had high expectations of his students. He also had trouble relating to some of the problems faced by them. Benedict, not one to stand back when he thought there was a problem, argued about the amount of study expected, "look we are just from villages around New Guinea" and about the lack of exercise, "we need to play football". After a heated discussion over these matters he felt he was already under a cloud.

Ben said:

> Our quarters were only temporary while they were building the novitiate. Thomas Tukaliu was the only seminarian studying Theology that first year and the rest of us were doing Philosophy. Bishop Hoehne came to visit and was happy that there were two students from Rabaul: Tom and me. I had a good talk with John Hoehne and he encouraged us. Fr Bob Mitchell was our professor in Philosophy and was a very smart man. He also took us for Theology.

Sadly, I was kicked out of the Seminary after that year. I had a problem with Latin and also I used to go out with John Kaputin and stay with his family because I had joined a Sports Club and played football. One time I hadn't finished my assignment because I was playing football. At the end of the year my marks were not good. Anyway the novice master gave me a letter to take to Fr Twohig. I took it to him not knowing that it said I was not suitable to become a Sacred Heart Priest. Fr. Twohig read the letter and then just kicked me out. He did not discuss it with me at all. I gave my cassock to my schoolmate and he asked me what was wrong. I cried and so did my cousin. Anyway that is part of life.

Fr Bob Mitchell was sorry that I had to leave and we remained friends. He came up to me years later at a barbecue and said, "You're a hungry bloke" in *Kuanua*. I said, "Oh you remember the talk, that's good".

When I came back to Rabaul I still wanted to be a missionary. Fr English, my old teacher was upset at the decision and said, "You are a man now, Ben. Look out for yourself." So I got a job at the bank.

Then Fr O'Hanlon, who ran the Catholic Education System, came to the bank to do business and was very surprised to see me.

He said, "What are you doing here?"

"Well I'm working here now."

Fr. O'Hanlon went to see the Bank Manager and told him that the Bishop hasn't finished with Benedict yet. Realising he still hadn't got the idea of mission work out of his mind, Benedict got a job as a clerk at Vunapope. He let himself go a bit and Brother Lewisham came to the store and found him looking like a "bushie" with thongs and old shorts. Brother told him to return to Vuvu where he could train as a teacher and become a Christian Brother. Following this advice, Benedict settled in at the Vuvu Teacher's College, training to be a chalkman – a teacher. Then Monsignor To Paivu came in and said, "If you become a Christian Brother you won't stick it out. If you become a priest you will stick it out". After Benedict got his Teacher's Certificate, he taught in the local Catholic Schools. He grew to love teaching and often regaled the children about his memories of the World War and how it should never happen again. They listened closely to his stories because he was their age when the Japanese Occupation and the subsequent bombing happened. But Benedict's teaching days were numbered.

I was teaching at Nodup and this fellow, To Paivu, kept coming around and asking me questions.

He asked me, "Why don't you go back to the seminary?"

"Oh I'm engaged!"

"Who to?"

"Oh to three women!" I laughed.

"Three women?" But he could see I was laughing.

"No seriously! You should continue your training at the seminary".

"Oh no. They kicked me out. I will be a chalkman."

Monsignor To Paivu.

Deep down Benedict still wanted to be a priest but that door seemed to be closed to him. However, Monsignor To Paivu, the people of Volavolo Parish and the people of Nodup where he was teaching thought he would make a good priest. "They saw some good in me." They were really questioning why he had been thrown out of the seminary. They approached Fr O'Hanlon who told Benedict to pray to the patron saint of priests, the Cure D'Ars, who also had had trouble in the seminary. Fr O'Hanlon was tough but kind and without him Benedict would not have become a priest.

Fr. Sean O'Hanlon arrived in Rabaul in 1949 with his classmates, Frs. A. Browne, D. Desmond and D. Savage. They had met up with Fr Culhane during his pre-war visit to the seminary. Later Fr Culhane lost his life to the Japanese bayonets but he had left an indelible mark on the young Irish seminarians and many followed him to New Guinea. In the following twenty years of dedicated work, Fr. O'Hanlon was a dynamic director of Education in the Rabaul Diocese. Mention was made in official reports of the high standards at the Vuvu Teacher Training School, which Benedict had attended.

Fr. O'Hanlon was known for his ability to "reach out to others to restore and make buoyant their spirits" (Twohig, 2005: 1121). He could see Benedict still had a vocation. He just needed help to set him on the right path so that he did not lose hope.

At this stage, Fr O'Hanlon came to visit me (the author) and asked if I would teach a young Tolai man Latin and English. As I had majored in Latin at University I agreed and that was how I got to meet and teach Benedict To Varpin in 1964 and 1965. He was the only student I ever taught Latin to. At that stage, Benedict was a young athletic looking man who happily turned his mind to study. Studying by correspondence, Benedict did his Junior Latin and English and then started Matriculation Latin. I helped him with his lessons. Other students, doing only English and History joined him. Over the next 18 months, they came regularly to our house in St George's Avenue and our young son, John, would crawl around during the lessons. Our dog, Tuffy, an Australian terrier, would allow the houseboy's scruffy friends into our yard, but he barked madly at these well-dressed students and regularly put Ben and the others up a tree if we had not tied him up. Eventually we got fed

up with the dog and offered it to Fr Browne at the junior seminary at Vunapau. Tuffy settled in quickly and within a few weeks had overcome his prejudices and happily led the young seminarians into chapel each morning.

Benedict was a serious student and passed his Latin and English. He seemed quite a devout young man and I thought at the time he would make a good priest. After success in his Junior Latin exams, Benedict was wondering what to do. He still did not think his Latin was up to scratch. However others had not given up on him yet:

> To Paivu came around to my village to speak to me about joining up again. As he left he said, "Oh well come and see me on Sunday," I thought about it all week while I was teaching the kids. To Paivu called some young teachers, catechists and students over to the Volavolo Church. It was open to us to ask questions and afterwards we chewed betel nut together. Then To Paivu told the others to go.
>
> "There's only one court case left now."
>
> "Who is that?"
>
> He pointed at me, "Benedict, You stay, the rest of you can go". He told me to say the rosary for enlightenment.
>
> I said, "Oh I have a rosary somewhere but it is broken."
>
> "Ok," he said, "the Bishop is waiting for you".
>
> "For me? What for?"
>
> "It's about a ticket to Madang."
>
> I scratched my head, thinking hard. Then To Paivu persisted, "OK the Bishop is waiting. Do something". I thought of the good life I was having with the kids with fishing, etc. I would lose all of this if I became a priest but something was boiling inside me so I agreed.
>
> To Paivu said, "OK dress up and let's go to the Archbishop's House". In the afternoon we went up there to Namanula to see the bishop in his palace.
>
> John Hoehne greeted me in his German accent. "Hello, my dear, how are you?"
>
> "Well I said there is a lot of confusion."
>
> "What confusion?" he looked at me.
>
> "It's the study. Latin is too hard. In the High School [at Ulapia] I did not get through, but I can read the Latin in the Bible. Dominus vobiscum etc"
>
> "Oh good, you can do it. That's OK just practise and practise."

So I said, "Yes OK I'll give it another go". That was the first time I had sat down with the Archbishop and really talked to him apart from the time I had seen him in Bomana. He promised to sponsor me at the seminary.

So he said, "Go and collect another shirt and two pairs of sandals, socks and long pants". After Mass at Vunapope, To Paivu and I went to see Fr Beerman who had been my parish priest and was now the manager of Vunapope. He had always encouraged me when I was training in running at Vuvu. When we met him he spoke *Kuanua* to us.

To Paivu pointed at me, "See this *raskel* here?"

Fr Beerman laughed, "Oh yes I know him!"

"Well he's joining up again. He needs some clothes."

"Oh no worries. He can have anything he wants. Take these trousers and shirts."

I was not excited. I was just getting the shirt and trousers and thinking of the kids I had been teaching. I knew I would miss them. And then it was too much and I cried.

Fr Beerman said, "Don't cry. You will be a good priest".

Benedict was philosophical about all the good times and the troubles he had experienced so far, "That's life!" he said. Then he caught the plane to Madang to train as a diocesan priest. It was 1966.

Benedict, on the left, at Kap Seminary in Madang, 1966.

The Seminary at Kap, near Alexishafen was opened in 1963 by Fr Murphy SVD, the first Australian to enter the Society of the Divine Word. Fr Murphy was a brilliant philosopher who had gained his doctorate in Rome. He was also a humane thinker and encouraged the local seminarians in his care. When Benedict arrived, he was assessed to find his level. Although his years of study were evident, it was difficult for him to take up the rigours of seminary life again. The vice-rector was Fr Raymond Caesar, an Afro-American, who fitted in well with the students.[1] The seminarians were encouraged to exercise and Benedict was happy to continue his running training begun at Vuvu. He had been seen as a possibility for the South Pacific Games at one stage but he got swollen legs. Now in Madang, he went to the Yagaum Hospital and saw the famous Dr Braun who diagnosed that fluid had got into his joints and ligaments.

Dr Braun asked me, "Young man, do you play sports?'

I said, "Yes, running."

Ben in the middle with classmates, Port Moresby 1969.

> Dr Braun said, "Well young man, there's no more running for you".

That was the end of Benedict's running career and his aspirations of being an athlete. After that he played ping-pong and volleyball that did not involve much running.

In 1968, the bishops decided to move the major seminary from Kap to Bomana in Port Moresby so that students who wished could do some subjects at the University of Papua New Guinea. The Capuchin Order in the Southern Highlands took over the Minor Seminary at Kap and called it St Fidelis College. It continues to this day to train young men for the major seminaries in Port Moresby.

So from 1968 until he finished his studies in 1970, Benedict was at the major seminary at Bomana near his old stamping ground in the MSC Novitiate. Sometimes the students of both seminaries attended common lectures. Benedict knew that he could not force the study beyond his capacity because people risked going crazy from overdoing it. He said, "In Madang and later in Bomana I was told to do the gardening and I did it. Before that at Vuvu when none of the students wanted to clean the toilets, I did it because it was good for me". He was to continue this attitude all his life even as a Bishop and it led to some problems when people took him for the gardener or the local mechanic.

But Benedict had not lost his fighting spirit. Maybe it was inherited from his ancestors, the old tribal warriors. He was still ready to argue for what he thought was right and it still got him into deep water. He took on the German missionaries as a group. "I was the only one to take them on", he remembered later. While he was grateful for all the work they had done for his people, he still argued that the Tolais should be able to retain the *tubuan* and more of their culture should be used as part of the liturgy of the church. But in the days at the Major Seminary in Port Moresby these ideas were rather new:

> I wrote an article in the *Dialogue* asking why couldn't we have the *tubuan* as part of our celebrations in Rabaul and I was nearly kicked out of the seminary again. To Paivu backed me on that. We agreed that there were bad things about the *tubuan* - murder and things but we argued that if we got rid of these bad things we could just use the dance itself. The *tubuan* should be kept because it is part of our culture and is also an entertainment.
>
> The magazine, *Dialogue*, was started in Madang. People were accusing us of being Communists. They were amazed at our attitude. Michael Somare and John Guise, the

> Governor General, were so happy that we were sticking up for our own rights. Then a German priest said, "Get that man out. He shouldn't be writing these things. They are the forbidden fruit". However I explained it in detail in my articles. And now the Tolai are putting a lot of emphasis on the *tubuan* and on the initiation, which is a time to discover yourself. A real man! When I was consecrated bishop it was the first time that the *tubuan* were allowed by the church in Rabaul. Now it is an ordinary thing.
>
> I had got to know Fr O'Hanlon well when I was in Rabaul and when I returned for holidays from Madang, he used to take me up to the Bishop's Palace on Namanula Hill with To Paivu too. They got me reading books from the Bishop's library. There was a place to stay there for me and they had a cook too. Brother Tismarcker who had been a captain for a long time on the boats was the secretary and got the mail; the chancellor was Fr Herbermann.

When he returned on holidays, Benedict also heard about the Mataungan Association; a type of nationalistic group formed by some Tolai leaders. Benedict knew two of the leaders, John Kaputin and Oscar Tammur. The latter had been in the Ulapia Seminary with him. The Multi-racial council was strong and the Tolais wanted it to consist only of Tolais and proposed radical changes. John Kaputin, Melchior Tomat and Oscar Tammur started the movement. The Mataungans wanted to get independence and to block the road near the Mobil gas station in Rabaul. Benedict approached Monsignor To Paivu for his opinion about the group. There had been some fracas earlier that day and people on both sides had been hurt. Together they went to Nodup to bless the people who had been beaten up.

Ben remembered:

> We were just at Malaguna and the police stopped us.
>
> To Paivu said to me "Don't talk. I'm the only one to say anything."
>
> I was not a priest yet, but he told the police, "We are priests here. We are going to see if anyone has been hurt".
>
> The police said, "OK, you pass by" and we went down to Nodup.

Fr. Franke, out at Matupit Island, lived in the thick of the trouble, as the island was the stronghold of the Mataungan Association. He was very distressed by it particularly when he found some of his workers were involved. Sometimes, the adherents got violent and threatened to close the airstrip; coconut trees were cut and fences pulled across the runway. All he could do was keep quiet and continue his work.

Meanwhile in the town itself, it was difficult for the residents of Rabaul including our family who lived up at Brennan Street. Being only a small town we were always aware of the police sirens or the warnings over their loud hailers. Some of the Mataungans were arrested and tried in the local magistrate's court. Trouble was expected and the riot squad was two deep outside the court while crowds of Tolais gathered on the other side of the road jeering at them. During this state of tension while the court cases were being heard

we had to park our cars further up the road as it was blocked off and then walk down the middle of the crowd to the shops. On one side were the riot police hiding behind their black riot shields and wearing black helmets and uniforms. On the other side were mobs of angry villagers ready to attack the police.

There was a big confrontation between the Mataungans and the police at Vunapaladig, near Keravat in 1970. My husband, Brian, was just completing the survey work on the Closer Settlement there and the Mataungans wanted to move onto the newly measured blocks. They were preparing to fight the riot police. Brian, along with a group of District Office staff, was behind the barrier of 700-armed police and all day long there were bulletins on the radio as to how far along the road the Mataungans had travelled on foot and in trucks. The tension was high; people on both sides were hot and thirsty. Who should come along but Mr. Whippy. Not one to take sides, he sold many ice creams to the Mataungans and they cooled down a little. Then, before the two opposing groups met at the bridge, Mr. Whippy sold ice creams to the police. Brian even managed to get a very watery one as the supplies had run out. The confrontation between the two sides was on the major newspapers in Australia. Hundreds of riot police on one side facing a large angry group of Tolais and there in the middle was the top of Mr. Whippy's truck. How much did he contribute to a peaceful settlement of the dispute? Mr. Whippy provided light relief to the opposing sides as well as refreshments.

In August 1971, not long after the strength eight earthquakes, the District Commissioner in Rabaul, Jack Emmanuel, was murdered. The Tolais saw this as the last straw in their frustration against the Australian Government as they wanted Independence for Papua New Guinea. They had taken their earlier anger at the multi-racial councils to a higher level. The United Church ministers also tried to work out a peaceful solution between the two sides.

Neville Threlfall wrote:

> At a major confrontation between Mataungan members and police at Vunapaladig, near Keravat, in 1970, a number of ministers led by the Bishop, went to both sides and pleaded for restraint, and no fight took place. Mataungan members called the Church representatives "the lamps", recognising them as bringing light into a dark situation (1975: 226).

While this was going on, Benedict was finishing his studies at the SVD Major Seminary at Bomana in Port Moresby. He also did his parish experience work in Rabaul under Fr Hayes a kindly Irish priest. Benedict was a devout, hardworking young man and this time there were no barriers put in his way: this time he was successful. When his name went up for ordination, Archbishop Hoehne was overjoyed as was Monsignor To Paivu and his many friends. Unfortunately, Fr O'Hanlon had already left the country suffering from cancer and was not there for the ordination.

Even though Benedict was not an MSC priest, the De Boismenu College half claimed him years later when he became a Bishop. The Post Courier mentioned the first eight

students of the MSC aspirants saying that six of the eight now held important positions including Benedict To Varpin, Bishop of Bereina. Admittedly, the College trained him well and for this he was grateful. Archbishop de Boismenu once said, "How blessed would we be if one day one of our children shall attain the order of our priesthood" (Post Courier, 22 October 1982). Whether this was the priesthood within the MSC Order or outside it would surely give the same amount of rejoicing.

Benedict To Varpin was ordained a priest on 24 January 1971 by Archbishop John Hoehne in the Francis Xavier Cathedral, Rabaul. It was a day he had looked forward to for a long time. On his ordination card he wrote. "In grateful memory of my Ordination to the Priesthood. Bless, O Lord, my family, relatives, friends and all those who have helped me to become a priest. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart."

Footnotes

[1] Fr. Raymond later went to Bomana for eight years and then was Bishop of Goroka. Sadly he died of a heart attack when he was just 55 years old.

Baptising a baby in the Mater Dei Church, Malaytown, Rabaul in the 1970s

Chapter 13

Fr Benedict in West New Britain, 1971 to 1977

In the middle of 1971, Rabaul experienced two strength eight earthquakes within two weeks. During the first one, our family was shopping in the Burns Philp store in Mango Avenue. As the building began to shake, goods began to fall of the shelves. People screamed and rushed out of the store, muttering and saying their last prayers. Power poles swung and the lines twirled like skipping ropes arcing with many electrical sparks when they clashed together. Cracks opened up in the pavements in some areas. On our way home, we saw that the water in the harbour had receded and many boats were left high and dry. As we watched, the water came back and just kept creeping over its banks and into neighbouring business areas. The time of the earthquakes and the ninety aftershocks was devastating for the Rabaul people.

The second earthquake was even more devastating than the first. Brian was taking off for Madang at the time but the plane was delayed because of the earthquake. Across the bay we could see the cliff side along the Kokopo road sliding into the water obliterating the Kokopo Road in parts. What a farewell to Brian after 12 years working in Rabaul. As I was staying on in Rabaul for a few weeks, I drove to the school in Malaytown to pick up our son, John, and then headed back home. By this time the tidal wave had come in a few blocks and was swamping shops along Mango Avenue and I had to make several detours. The ground was still shaking with the strong after-shocks and I thought the whole town might be destroyed and us along with it. Being near the presbytery I thought I would go to confession, maybe my last.

Fr Benedict, newly ordained, was holding the fort at the presbytery. When he saw me he burst out laughing. I wondered if he were hysterical with fright.

“What’s wrong, Ben?” I asked.

“Oh Mary. You should have seen them; these funny ladies all wanting to go to confession!”

“Funny ladies eh?” I queried.

I gave a little smile not wanting to be another “funny lady”. I asked for his blessing and rushed back to the children in the car, parked in the shade. On our way home, a policeman was at each corner directing traffic around the water from the small tsunami. That day there were dozens of strong aftershocks, each one measuring 3 or 4 on the Richter scale. Brian, not realising the after effects of the quake, had been trying to contact us from Madang.

Later I heard the full story of why Benedict was so amused. All his life he had this gift to be able to see the funny side in the face of death or destruction. As a baby he was nearly killed by an eruption; as a child he had laughed when he survived bomb blasts, which had

killed others nearby. Now he was faced with another disaster but had no fear for his own safety. He had been left in charge of the Rabaul Parish when the second earthquake struck. Fr Franke was out at his Matupit Island Parish and helped to rescue some of the islanders stranded when the causeway was washed away by the tidal wave.

The two other priests, Fr Vogt and Fr Hayes were driving to the Vunapope hospital along the Kokopo Road when they felt the earthquake. In their rear vision mirror they saw the thundering landslide we had seen from the airport. If they had been delayed a few seconds, they would have been killed.

Benedict was in his car in Vesters Street having just come out of the Sacred Heart School. When his car shuddered he thought he had a flat tyre. He got out and noticed rocks falling down from the mountainside. Quickly he returned to the school and told the teachers to organise parents to pick up the children who were all petrified of the *guria* (earthquake*)*. By the time he got back to the presbytery, there were people milling around outside and he went to see if he could help:

> There were many women, Europeans, Americans, mixed-race and Chinese, deeply distressed and calling out, "Is there any priest here? Hello any priest here?"
>
> When they saw me they called out, "Eh boy! Is there any priest here? Where's the priest?"
>
> I said, "Which priest do you need?"
>
> "Any priest will do."
>
> "Well, I'm a priest!"
>
> "OK Father. We want to go to confession."
>
> "OK."
>
> So I got my cassock and we went to the Church. One of them was crying and sobbing when she thought of her past life.
>
> She said. "I don't know where to start."
>
> So I said, "Do you know your Bible?"
>
> "Yes, Father I remember it."
>
> "Do you remember the story of the good thief in the Bible?"
>
> "Oh yes I remember."
>
> "Well he was a terrible criminal but Jesus forgave him when he said he was sorry for his sins. Jesus will do the same for you."

She began to sob and cry. More earthquakes kept coming and I could see the other people waiting. The tidal wave had come in two blocks and was lapping the presbytery grounds. Then she settled down at last and she was forgiven. The others were upset too but not so much.

[Maybe this would be a case of a general absolution of everyone at once?]

Benedict had managed to keep a straight face until he saw me and then burst out laughing. I, on the other hand, didn't see the funny side until later, much later, and then it was very amusing. When we meet up it is often included in the list, "Do you remember the time?" We would laugh at the memory and Benedict would re-tell the story.

Benedict heard a lot of confessions that week. It was good for him because being newly arrived and the first local man in the place, many people met him and accepted him: in time of dire need they were grateful for his assistance. This helped to get over that barrier. All manner of people came because the ocean was coming in to town with the tsunami and the earthquakes continued:

Many people thought it was the end of the world. I used this example in my sermons after this because we must always be ready to die. There are some people who do not have love in their hearts. This is the greatest commandment. We must love our neighbour.

Fr Franke always said, "Yes, Ben. You tell them that."

Fr Benedict becomes a missionary

Fr Benedict To Varpin finally became a missionary in his own country when he was posted to Malmal in Jacquinot Bay in 1972.

By then, the Malmal mission had grown in size and importance since its beginning 40 years previously when Fr Franke was on his mission at Valoka. Fr Culhane established the Malmal Mission on the southern coast of New Britain in 1931. After he had worked there for eight lonely years, he started another mission at Uvol two days walk away, leaving newly arrived Fr Harris in charge of Malmal. They met occasionally by accident on their travels or on planned visits.

Their mission work was disrupted by the arrival of the Japanese in New Britain. Both of them helped the escaping Australian servicemen. Both of them paid the ultimate price. Fr Harris died on a Japanese boat and Fr Culhane was shot on the beach at Uvol in front of his mission house. His body was left to rot (O'Neill, 1961: 14). After the war, Fr O'Neill and Fr Gendusa tried to find his remains to give him a decent burial but were unsuccessful. Fr O'Neill then took over the Malmal Mission. When he first viewed his new Parish, he realised it took in not only a long length of coast but much of the hinterland including steep mountain ranges and fast rivers with few paths between the widely spaced villages.

The Paulus*, used to take personnel and supplies to mission stations around New Britain. At the time the photograph was taken, the captain was Br Schaller.*

Fr O'Neill wrote:

> We passed twenty villages on the coast in the four hour [boat] run to Malmal but could see not one of them, for the jungle was all over them, all around them, in front of them in tiny islands, and in the mangrove trees that grew up through the sea. The little grass huts of *pulpul* peeped through the trees from a ledge a hundred feet above the sea. Below was a mile-long reef over which the sea surged and curled and pounded as it leaped in green-white breakers kicking up colonnades of angry, thrashing water. — Malmal was deep in this bay (1961: 21).

Fr O'Neill realised it would be a lonely existence with many treks into the wild bush area, with the closest mission being some 70 kilometres away. Nor did he know any of the languages of his parishioners. However *Tok Pisin* was a good medium and many could converse happily in that language. His Irish sense of humour helped him survive the quirks of life on a mission.

Twenty years later, in 1972, young Fr Benedict To Varpin arrived in Jacquinot Bay, appointed assistant parish priest to Fr Schürmann in Malmal but also took over Nutuve,

an inland Parish. During his visits to some of the outstations in Malmal he walked along the coast for a long way to the different villages and then the boat would come and pick him up.

From the Catholic mission at Malmal, he wrote a letter to our family in Madang:

> 17 July 1972.
>
> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Mennis,
>
> Just look at my new address above and you can guess where I am now. Yes I was appointed to Nutuve, but since it is a difficult place I am based in Malmal, staying with another priest, Fr William Schurmann and I only visit Nutuve monthly and sometimes stay for two weeks. Yes, it is about 8 hours walk and everything has to be carried up there by foot. The people are still primitive and under the heavy influence of a cargo cult. The school is almost abandoned and Sunday churchgoers are getting fewer. Towards the end of this month, I'll walk up again through swamp, mud and jungle. This is life and I have just begun to like it, in spite of the many difficulties.
>
> At the moment in Malmal I am helping the other priest to build our mission wharf that was wiped out by the (1971) earthquake and tidal waves. We are in a very difficult position to keep it going and especially in financial matters. With all humility and sincerity, I put my needs to you if you can help us, while the other priest is writing to some other people in asking for generous help.
>
> However, I do all my patrols by boat, by canoe and mostly by walking. Yes life can get tedious and tiresome and especially when walking through the jungle in the rainy season. Anyway there is nothing much to say since we are in the remote area and hoping that a lot of exciting events are going on in Madang.
>
> Finally I wish you every success and happiness in the coming year.
>
> Kind Regards from Malmal
>
> Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,
>
> Benedict To Varpin.

Climbing up the mountains to meet other villagers proved difficult for Benedict. He said, "I had not climbed any mountains before so I got blisters on my feet. I took my sand shoes off. The mission helpers had to carry me out. We had a radio and the priest at Malmal telegraphed the bishop who said, "this is a good lesson for you". They nursed my leg and it healed up all right and I had no more problems. After being in Malmal for eight months, Benedict moved to Nutuve up in the mountains. The area between the coast and Nutuve was wild country, heavily forested. and influenced by the cargo cultists. He came prepared with two guns and a bush knife. The guns could be used for hunting or for protection, in the worst case scenario:

Village in Jacquinot Bay, near Malmal.

There were numerous outstations at Nutuve. I had a garden there to grow my vegetables. The village pigs came and began to eat my gardens so I complained but the people did nothing so I shot the pigs. A few days later we were returning from a patrol and the people came at me with their tomahawks. I rushed in and got the guns. I was only going to shoot above their heads. My friends said, "Don't tell them that! They will kill you with their tomahawks. You must trick them!" I had my gun and fired in the air. Afterwards the people kept their pigs away from my garden. My mother and family were worried about me. One of my brothers came as a teacher to Jacquinot Bay. He thought he would be near me but you had to walk for eight hours and then you came to Nutuve.

I encouraged the people to cultivate copra, and keep pigs and chooks so they had some development. They grew vegetables and it was all going well until there was some opposition from the cargo cultists. [Two groups were fighting each other]. When I got angry with the people and chastised them, they came at me with tomahawks and again I had to take appropriate action, firing over their heads. If I hadn't done that the people would have continued killing each other. I rang the patrol officer and the parish priest and I tried to get everything under control. It was the time of the cargo cult and they nearly buggared everything up. They were collecting money. Money, money everywhere. They collected it and sent it to Pomio. The *tultul* was on my side but the *luluai* was on the cargo cultist side.

> Michael Koriam, a Morobe man, had settled up there. He was a member of the House of Assembly and a cargo cultist. He was telling people to collect money so the Americans would come and build stores and a big bridge across the Bay and lots of other nonsense. That was why I was sent in there to try and bring them around. The Irish priests were knocking the cargo cultists but when I joined Fr William Schürmann, we decided that we would get the people around to our way of thinking by just hard work. We didn't open our mouths against them but just worked hard.

Michael Koriam, the cargo cultist, began the Pomio Kivung Movement in 1964. Travelling around the villages, he described himself as a mere *rubbish man* who was bringing news about things the government wanted to introduce. By becoming well known he was elected to the first House of Assembly and his Kivung Movement has been represented in government ever since. When he died in 1973, Alois Koki replaced him. The Kivung leaders studied the Bible and made their own interpretation looking for secrets about the wealth of foreigners and the power of governments. Their beloved dead were purported to return in the future to stop racial inequality and bring about a better society.

Fr Benedict was trying to bring the people around from their cargo beliefs:

> One day while I was returning to Nutuve from Malmal, we came to a river. There were two fast tributaries with logs floating in the water. Some people had drowned earlier that day and the people wanted to run away. There were also many large mosquitoes buzzing around. I wanted to say Mass in the village on the other side next day. People wanted us to wait but the catechist, Dominic from Matupit, said, "No we have the Mass Kit here and Benedict wants to say Mass tomorrow". There were many carriers carrying iron boxes. So I blessed the water. The people came back and held hands and said, "He has blessed the water. Let's go".
>
> So I held hands too and we crossed safely even though it was very rough. When we got to the village, we washed ourselves clean in a creek as we were muddy and had a warm meal. The carriers were given a place to sleep too. Next day they returned to their village and we got more carriers to take our gear to Matong where I was to say Mass.
>
> The catechist told me there were some people to be married and others to be baptised. As Dominic was a Tolai teacher, I trusted him to have instructed them correctly. In the night we heard the people wailing but I did not know the reason. Next morning I asked for the list of children and babies to be baptized. Dominic pointed to one name and said, "Not that one. He died last night".
>
> After Mass I rushed up to the village house where the baby had died. They were still crying and mewling and weeping because it was a nice child.
>
> I got the people out of the house and said, "Clear the way. Let's have some fresh air".
>
> I remembered what Christ said, "Unless you are baptised you will not see the Kingdom of God."

I talked to God personally, "You created this child – it is a pity that he won't see you face to face. Let the child wake up so I can baptize him". It was as if I was challenging God.

"You made this baby. You should take care of it!"

I held the baby and beseeched God and prayed my heart out. "You are the Almighty One and nothing is impossible with You. We want this baby to go to heaven. Please just let it wake up so I can baptize him."

Then the baby boy woke up - he had been dead since the night before. The people said it was a miracle! They were smiling and laughing. I was able to baptize him. At first I baptised him right away with water as I thought he might die again and then I used the oils and everything. My hands were shaking. A few weeks later he died.

The people were happy that I had managed to baptise the baby. For me it was God who answered our prayers. Before, the church pews were empty because of the cargo cult. After this many of the cargo cultists turned back to the church and went to the sacraments. They could see there was no value in the cargo cult thinking. At this stage, there were only 700 Catholics but many others had not been baptised.

I built up many native material churches into permanent buildings and put corrugated iron on them so they could fill the water tanks provided by the government. The people were grateful. There was a big school up in the mountains and a hospital. I went back to Rabaul only once a year for my retreat because I felt my work was on the station. I had to get money from somewhere so had a little store and also Mass stipends and some donations from overseas.

In this way Benedict tried to be independent and fund his own mission station apart from the supplies, which came every three months with fuel and cargo from Vunapope. He later said he was happiest when he was just a priest in West New Britain and later in Rabaul, as he never really liked office work. He tried to be self-sufficient and only saw the Bishop once in a while. However later when he, himself, became bishop, he found priests would annoy him "for every little thing".

Village in Malmal area.

On one occasion when Fr Benedict heard Bishop Hoehne was coming for a big meeting, he took the small boat from Matong to Malmal to welcome him and then joined other missionaries on board the Mission boat to Sara for the meeting. The Bishop had his cabin on board but the local priests stayed on the deck chewing betelnut and fishing over the side. The sea was rough from Malmal:

We called in to Uvol to pick up the missionary there and then onto the beach below Aona which is in the bush and other places as well, then on to Turuk and finally to Sara for the meeting. We stayed there for two nights and had the deanery meeting for the south coast of New Britain. The Bishop blessed a new church while he was there and had confirmation. The people in the neighbouring parishes travelled in by motorboat for the ceremonies. I stayed in the parish house but some of the priests slept on the ship. Later I returned to Natuve and continued to work on the airstrip. Every now and then, I had to go down to the coast to get money from the patrol officer in Pomio.

Pomio at that stage was a small government station overlooking the water. The Patrol officer's house was up on the hill to catch the breezes but it was quite a steep climb. There were some good patrol officers. The Assistant District Commissioner at that time was John Karen who was a Catholic but, while he was living in the bush, never went to the bush churches. He helped Fr Benedict with a lot of money for the wharf in Pomio and money for the airstrip in Nutuve and was pleased with the work the missions were doing up in the mountains and on the Pomio mission jetty. Benedict described him as, "an honest Australian bloke and always spent the government money properly".

Once when Karen was in Rabaul, he visited Archbishop Hoehne in Vunapope and asked him to fix some papers so he could marry a woman from the Philippines.

The Bishop said, "No! I can't do this. You must go to your parish priest, Fr Benedict in Pomio".

"Oh OK", he replied, "I know Benedict. I gave him the money for the airstrip and the jetty".

So he came and asked me to write a letter giving him some accreditation. I did this and he married in Manila and after two or three months he came back to Pomio with his wife.

When he went back to Rabaul after a year down West New Britain, Benedict showed some slides of the mission stations to Monsignor To Paivu who was still the Parish Priest at Volavolo.

The Eucharistic Congress was to be held in Melbourne in 1973 and Benedict decided to go as a new local priest dealing with Europeans. He received some money for the trip from Ireland, probably from Fr O'Hanlon who was now back home. However, as Benedict was working in a cargo cult area where there was money everywhere, Archbishop Hoehne was concerned about the origins of the money for the trip.

One day he asked Benedict, "Did you go to the cargo cultists for the money?"

Benedict was aghast, "My Lord Bishop no never. I would never use their money. The money came from Ireland".

"Oh sorry, sorry", said Hoehne. "I just had to know."

Benedict thought going to Melbourne would also be a good opportunity for him to see the outside world. On the way he stayed in Sydney with the Reynolds family. Their son, Fr Tony Reynolds, was sick and they prayed for him and he got better. The family took up a collection for Benedict's mission in Jacquinot Bay. In Sydney, he ran into Bishop Moore who wanted to take him out to Kensington but he was staying out at Pennant Hills.

Pope Paul VI did not come to Melbourne but sent Cardinal Hildebrand to represent him. The Eucharistic Congress happens every ten years so it was an exciting time and attracted people from around the world. Fr Benedict stayed at Trinity College, an Anglican College in the University grounds. He got a loan of some clothes but he thought they made him look like an Anglican.

> Sitting at breakfast in the College dining room, one day, the man beside me asked, "Are you an Anglican priest from Africa?"
>
> "Africa?? No! No! I'm from Papua New Guinea. I'm a Catholic Priest."
>
> Then I asked him, "Are you a Protestant minister?"
>
> "No! No! I am a Jesuit Priest." We both laughed.

It was Benedict's first trip to Australia and catching trams etc was foreign to him. The first day he took a tram, he got lost. A lady helped him get the right tram. Even when he got to the gathering, he could not find the people he was supposed to be with. He met someone who had seen Monsignor To Paivu earlier but that was no good. He met Meg Taylor from the Highlands who was in Melbourne studying law. Eventually he found the right place and his friends amongst the thousands attending the Congress.

The Pope sent a radio message for the final morning, 25 February 1973. Part of it was:

> Though very many miles separate us at this moment, we are glad to be able to speak to you and to assure you that we have been praying with you and for you during these days of grace. Most especially we have prayed [about] the general theme of the Congress, "Love one another as I have loved you". - - We earnestly hope that the Eucharistic Congress has taught the lesson of love well. We hope that men and women the world over have seen and heard the challenge of the Congress, and that they will put it into practice in their lives, since this challenge carries within it the key to peace. We have said that peace is possible because love is possible; and we know that love is possible because we have been given an example by the Eucharistic Lord. To all of you beloved Australian people and all who have come from around the World to render homage to Jesus Christ, we gladly impart our Apostolic Blessing. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Benedict brought this message of love and peace back with him and passed it on in his sermons, but he was to find the cargo cultists did not always accept the message of love.

In 1973, Fr Benedict went to Sara near Kandrian:

I was in Sara for two years, 1973 and 1974. Sara is nearly at the end of West New Britain, a long way from Malmal. Fr Schürmann established the Sara Mission in 1965, and by the time I got there most of the buildings had been completed. There were permanent classrooms, a big church and the Father's house but I did a lot of repairs to the rusty louvres and painted them. Some of the water tanks needed repairing and I organised people to help. They painted the classrooms to make them look nice. It was a good time there because a lot of the staff were my Tolai *wantoks* so they co-operated.

Sara and Aulo were the two main places in my area. The headmaster at Aulo was Paschal who was from Peter To Rot's area. Matthias To Gal was the headmaster at Sara and his family was very good to me. They cooked for me and at night they played the guitar and sang down near the water or if it were raining we would sit inside and drink coffee and prepare liturgies. They had a nice big house. During the day we would often sit outside, as it was too hot inside under the corrugated iron roof. I had my own quarters at Sara. I fixed up the house and they used to joke and call it the *haus belong kiap*. I spent money fixing my houses in the outstations of Sara as well. They were made of corrugated iron and since I was a carpenter I knew how to fix them.

There had been a government school there but it was shifted to another place, leaving all the desks and blackboards for our mission. Fr. Norbert Birkmann, the Parish priest in Kandrian told the catechists to keep the desks and start up a little school. We got busy fixing the school. I got the corrugated iron to put on the roof so we could get water in the tanks. One day I was sitting on top of the roof hammering the corrugated iron and all my helpers and the village men suddenly began to run away to the bush.

I called after them "What's the matter? Why are you running away?"

"*Police i kam*. Quick Father." They left me on the roof and ran away. I kept working and hammering and saw the police arrive out of the corner of my eye. I did not know what the matter was. They came at me pointing their rifles.

"Eh you boy," they said rudely in pidgin. "You boy! Come down. You've got a court case."

I said, "I beg your pardon?" I spoke in English. "What's all this fuss about?"

"Come down now. Who are you?" They still pointed their rifles at me.

I got down from the roof, "Don't you know me? I am Father Benedict, the Parish Priest here".

They calmed down a little bit then. But they still looked very angry and were trying to be nasty with me. My helpers had run away to the bush and left me.

"Would you like some coffee and some biscuits?" I asked them. They were very hungry and thirsty. Now they put their rifles down so they could hold the cups. They drank the coffee and ate lots of biscuits. Very hungry they were. Then I found out they had the wrong information. They thought we had stolen all the desks and blackboards. I told them, "these desks, blackboards and cupboards would have been chopped up for firewood if we hadn't used them. Go back to Kandrian and see Fr Norbert; he was responsible for these things".

"Oh Fr Norbert! Yes, we know him."

After that they talked to each other about me, "A Tolai man!, Eh Tolai!" They nodded at each other. They saw me only as a Tolai who could discuss things and see the problem. I patted myself proudly, "Not just a Tolai. A priest too!"

When the helpers and villages came back from the bush, I said to them, "If it hadn't been for me, you would all be in jail, so now you must go and kill a pig and get some sago and we will have a feast tonight". So they did that. They killed the pig and cooked some sago and we had a big feast that night. Over the following months I continued to fix up the catechist's house and the bush church to make them semi-permanent with corrugated iron on the roof but the police did not come back again.

Another time, while I was at Sara, we had worked hard all day drying the copra because we had no drier. We turned it over by hand in the hot sun. Then because a storm threatened we had to carry it all inside. By nine o'clock that night, the storm was blowing a howling gale and the rain streamed down. I was exhausted. After eating and having a couple of beers, I was ready for bed. Just then there was a loud knock on the door. Thinking it was one of my mission helpers I said rather tiredly,

"Who is it? Come in!"

Again the knocking and this time impatiently I shouted, "Come in. What do you want?"

No one came in so I went to the door. There on the doorstep looking very wet and bedraggled was Bishop Bevan Meredith, an Anglican Bishop. He had been out in the bad storm and had got lost in the bush. I told the catechists to come and help and we got a bucket shower for him and made a meal with packets of rice and some meat. I had just got some fresh fish and pork and then we put some coffee on. Fresh fish and pork made a nice meal. We talked and talked far into the night. We discussed Augustine and Aquinas. He was the first non-Catholic bishop I had talked to like that and from that time on we became good friends. I apologised for not answering his knocking sooner as I thought it was one of the catechists bringing me something. He told me the problems he was having in getting money for projects. He could see that the German Missionaries had parishes back home to help them financially but he had very little. I told him our people should learn to be independent, as they could not always rely on overseas funds.

> It was a bit embarrassing at first because many of the Anglicans in the area had become Catholics when they married but he did not seem to mind. He attended Mass next morning and was so reverent, he put us to shame. At the consecration he had his head nearly on the floor. He gave me greater strength in my faith and after that I had even more respect for the sacrament.
>
> After Bishop Meredith had rested a day and dried out his clothes, he set off on a long walk along the coast. I offered my speed boat but he said no. He said he wanted to visit his people. There were still quite a number of Anglicans there. Anyway I sent some men along to arrange a canoe at the next river. There were a number of rivers along the way and unless people brought their canoes across there was no way of crossing them. When I was transferred to the Mai Seminary, he wrote me a long letter from Rabaul asking for a copy of the Seminary training programme we had put together. So I sent it to him and he wrote to thank me. He was a real man of God.

After some time, Benedict was sent to help Fr McSweeney, an elderly priest at Turuk who had come to New Guinea in the same group as Fr O Neill after the war. Previously, he had been the Parish Priest at Kilenge and was well remembered for his hospitality to visiting scientists and missionaries. Now in 1973, he was sick and needed assistance. During his stay at Turuk, Benedict learnt to ask for betel nut, *taro*, and *kulau* in the local language. There were so many languages in the area that fortunately the people used *Tok Pisin* to communicate. Benedict was relieved as he could use it during Mass and for sermons.

In 1975, Fr Benedict was transferred to Mai for two years as the spiritual director of the seminary. There were five priests working in Mai. Fr. Karl-Maria Brand was the director, Fr Kiessler, Fr Bernard Otto and two local priests, Father Benedict and one other. There was quite a big centre there with a big store, workshops and laundry. The Sisters ran the hospital and the school and did the cooking. The main road was sealed to keep out the dust. There was no need for boats unless people came from the islands and then they would use our trucks to get supplies on to the ships. The priests there were busy going around the schools with the catechists. The government built the schools but we built the catechists' houses and looked after the people.[1]

> From the seminary we went out to different parishes. As it happened, most of the teachers at the government schools were Catholics so I had to look after their needs spiritually and helped them to go shopping at Kimbe, which was 30 to 40 kilometres away. I was in the bush at Mai and got to know the people through the Legion of Mary. The language down there was difficult. It sounded like "Uburrr Uburr." I had to learn their talk, especially their sins, so that I knew what they were saying in confession.

Mai was one of the centres for the new oil palm projects that involved a large transmigration of people from various provinces. The Highlanders were the first to arrive; then came people from the Sepik, Rabaul and Morobe areas. Others came from West New Britain and Witu Island. They came in their thousands to settle on the small blocks in Kavui, Buvusi and Galai number 1 and Galai number 2. Most of these settlers were Catholic so

their spiritual welfare had to be attended to by the mission stations. There were many priests working there. Fr Benedict had to finish the church at Buvusi and collect money for the Galai Church which was completed after he left.

The history of the oil palm industry is interesting. Oil palm was introduced into West New Britain 1967 when the first plantings were made in the Hoskins area. The Company, Harrison Crossfields, set up a large nucleus estate and a processing mill. The government set up many smallholder estates to complement and help the local economy. Surveyors were deployed to subdivide these oil palm blocks in the thick jungle. My husband, Brian, was in charge of one survey camp and spent many months in the bush south of Kimbe which was developed as a town to provide a port and infrastructure facilities for the oil palm industry. Our family joined Brian in the jungle at Buvusi living in a tent. Bush rats would invade the tent at night and then large snakes would come in after the rats. I was terrified one afternoon when I saw a large python had wound its long body around and around the bedpost and was looking down with interest on our baby, Paul. As they could take small wallabies, a baby would be of a similar size. When I screamed at it, it soon disappeared into the deep bush where the cry of the whoop whoop pigeon echoed through the trees.

Eventually the smallholder oil palm blocks ranging from 2 to 6 hectares were carved out of the jungle and the planting of the oil palms began. The refined oil is used for cooking, particularly in the fast food industry, and in cosmetics. Oil palm has several attributes that make it suitable for small block development. It has few diseases and produces all year round. The global production of palm oil has risen rapidly and by 1995 it had become the second most important cash crop in Papua New Guinea. By this time Kimbe was a major town.

Fr Benedict said:

> There was a re-awakening of the faith there and church attendance increased. Now people come from everywhere to celebrate the great feasts. People from Kavieng, Manus and Rabaul come in a big ship for the celebrations at Kimbe; the Catholic Faith is strong. There are not many expats there, mostly local people. Later, the Harrison Company sold out to a Malaysian company.

In 1975, Papua New Guinea achieved Independence and the people of West New Britain had great celebrations to mark the occasion. Everywhere the new flag of Papua New Guinea was proudly raised for the first time.

In 1977 when Archbishop Hoehne recalled Fr Benedict to Rabaul town to work with Fr Bernard Franke, his experiences down the West New Britain was to stand him in good stead.

In all his future work for the church, his willingness to tackle any task however difficult was noted by the hierarchy as well as his great ecumenical spirit with pastors and priests

of other faiths.Benedict said, “I enjoyed my time in the bush but the Bishop wanted me back in Rabaul because Fr. Vogt had become sick and had to return to Europe - he came back after a year”.

Footnotes

[1] *Compare this with the description of Mai by Fr Franke in the 1930s. See Chapter 6*

Fr To Varpin, Fr Vogt and Fr Franke, in front of the Rabaul presbytery, 1977.

Chapter 14

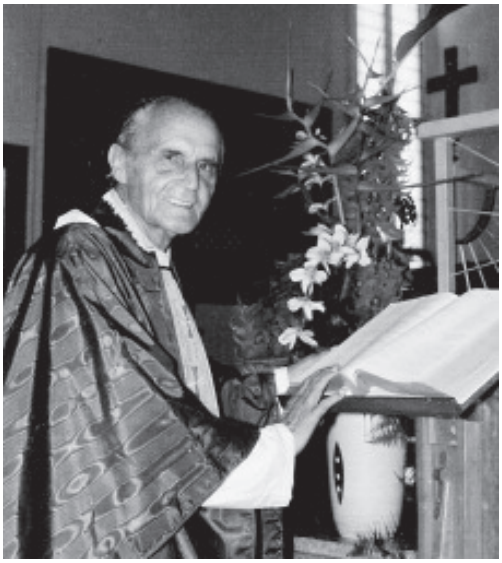
Rabaul Parish, 1977 to 1980

In 1977, after an absence of six years, I (the author) arrived in Rabaul for a visit and met up with both Fr Franke and Fr Benedict. Everyone was so friendly. The Sisters in the convent welcomed me and showed me my room at the top of the stairs. It was a great occasion the day Fr Franke celebrated his Golden Jubilee to the Priesthood. Many of his Chinese parishioners were present and the centrepiece on the table was the large cake with 1927 – 1977 on it. Lulu Miller was there for the celebrations along with Florence Cohen, long-standing friends of Fr Franke.

In his speech Fr Franke said:

> Looking back over the 50 years of my missionary work, I can only recall with amazement and gratitude the many manifestations of God's providence in my regard. They called me a living wonder. How often I was near death, already so to speak at the gate of heaven, but only God knows and Holy Therese, who cared for me in a quite particular way. I cannot walk as quickly as previously, but I can still do my priestly work in Rabaul, on the Island of Matupit and every evening in the government hospital.

Fr Franke never had a driver's licence but he had many drivers. Among them were Michael To Luana, who was a relative of Bendict's, and To Gura from Matupit. One of the drivers liked tinned fish so much he took the name "Tinned Fish". Only trouble in *Tok Pisin* the word for fish is *pis*. Fr Franke's vehicle was really a utility, or *half car* in *Tok Pisin*. We squeezed into the front when on a visit to Matupit Island. On the way, we travelled down Mango Avenue with all its busy shops and then the golf club and around the end of the airstrip and then over the causeway with the wonderful view of Matupit Volcano reflected in the water. I saw the damage the Mataungans had done to the side of the airstrip when they pulled the fence across the airstrip and cut the coconuts near the causeway. When I asked Fr Franke about it, he put his finger to his lips



Fr Franke at his Golden Jubilee Mass in Rabaul, 1977.

Florence Cohen, Lulu Miller and Fr Franke on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee.

motioning me to be quiet. Afterwards, he told me his driver was probably a Mataungan and could understand English so we had to be careful. Fr Franke himself he did not agree with the Mataungan ideas and, after Jack Emmanuel's death, thought even less of them.

Afterwards, another driver, Jacob, drove me out to Vunapope in the pouring rain as I was meeting up with some of the lay missionaries there and staying the night. Fr Franke's instructions were, "go to the yellow house, that's where you will be staying". It was pouring buckets when we got there and the first building we came to was yellow.

"Oh that must be it," says I. "No it's a convent", said Jacob.

So we drove on and came to three more yellow buildings. Fr Franke and his yellow house! Eventually we found the right one and it was interesting to meet the lay missionaries, "Oh we've read the book on the Tolai myths", they said and they pointed out the similarities between some of the myths and the Book of Genesis. Next morning at Mass the beautiful music and singing brought back memories of writing the book with Fr Janssen and Brenda Skinner in the house next to the cathedral.

At the Vunapope hospital, I visited Lulu Miller, a little old lady, who was Queen Emma's great niece. Wonderful how she has survived since the German times. Born in 1893, she could remember Queen Emma and Dr Hahl and rode around in Rudolph Walen's car in 1910. Florence Cohen arrived to visit Lulu and we drove back to Rabaul together. Florence, whose husband was a plantation owner, was a good friend of Fr Franke's. That night I saw Robin and Helen Cooke. (Rob Cooke was the vulcanologist who died tragically a few years later when observing Karkar Volcano). I got home to the convent in Rabaul very late and had to go up the stairs in the dark so as not to waken the Sisters.

Another day, Fr Benedict drove me around in the mission car. He remembered our old car we had sold him in 1971 when we left Rabaul. We had to teach him to drive it but he was thrilled to have wheels at last and he got the money from his parents. It was really an old car and I was worried about the fumes that I could smell in it but he was pleased. He said: "In 1971, when I walked around town and did not have a car, the people would say, '*Masta walkabout long car, kanaka walkabout long leg'"*.

Fr Franke was a well-known sight in Rabaul in his utility with one of his faithful drivers.

In 1977, Fr Benedict wanted me to meet his youth group who were putting on a concert in the Parish Hall. The young Tolais were anxious to talk to him and he seemed very popular with them. He obviously enjoyed his time with the youth and had settled easily back into life at the presbytery. We went down town and I interviewed Daniel Rumet, Sales Manager at Ela Motors. He was one of the main leaders in the Mataungan movement and filled in some interesting details. At the United Church, we met Neville Threlfall who is thinking of doing a history of Rabaul and had a few interesting anecdotes of the conflicts between the Catholics and Methodists in the early days.

Benedict had a follow-up story about his friend, the Anglican Bishop:

> I had previously met Bishop Meredith down West New Britain and when I was back in Rabaul, I was hearing confessions one Saturday afternoon and this man came in. He told me he had found a cheque for a thousand dollars outside a house along Malaguna Road. Anyway he gave me the cheque and later on when I looked, it had Bishop Meredith's name on it. I drove down to the Anglican Church and was welcomed by Father Bob, an elderly priest and his wife who told me Bishop Meredith was over in Bougainville. I told the wife about the cheque and she was delighted and gave me a big kiss. "Oh the Bishop was getting wild with me for losing it. Oh thank you my son. The cheque had been on the table and the wind blew it out the window." When Bishop Meredith came back he found me again and said "Oh my friend. We are true brothers in Christ. Your Bishop might have millions at his disposal but we have only a few thousands". It strengthened our relationship.
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> When I came back from West New Britain in 1977, I was not really known in town. If there were a function, Fr Franke and I would be there together. There were a lot of

festivities to enjoy together. I went to Matupit and said Mass when Fr Franke was away and also saw my cousins who belong to the SDA and United Church there. On the way home, the road goes past those brothels in Malay town. I knew some of those women and tried to change them. They sometimes called my car *car belong raskel* or *car belong pamuk* (prostitute) but I just helped them. They said, "You will be a Bishop, one day". Some of them have changed and go to confession. People asked me, "why do you do this?" but they need help too.

One day, I was talking to a family from New Ireland. The wife was a Methodist and the man was a Catholic but not married in the church. I had baptised all the children and I rectified the marriage. I was sitting there with the family having some food when Fr Franke knocked on the door. I said goodbye to the family and went to see Fr Franke.

He had been pacing up and down saying the rosary. "Father Benedict", he called, "Come quickly I need your help!"

"Fr Franke! What's happened?" He seemed very upset.

"A poor woman has overdosed."

We went out in the car and Fr Franke said the rosary all the way. We got to the house and parked outside.

The author with Fr Franke, 1977.

"Is this the one?" There was still the tinkle of plates inside and everything seemed to be normal. Fr Franke did not know whether to go in or pretend we knew nothing. Sometimes that happened, People overheard things and got the wrong message but the priest felt obligated to follow the case up.

Benedict took a choir of boys and girls for singing one morning. They were all getting hot and bothered in the sweltering day as there was little breeze, so he went off to get them drinks He handed some helpers the drinks to take back and then the phone in the presbytery rang. It was Bishop Hoehne, his spiritual father, calling to say he was too ill to go down the Bainings for the confirmation celebrations and could Ben go instead. Benedict was the Vicar General so he knew he had to help the bishop but he was beside

himself with worry. He had never done anything like this before. He grabbed his cassock and vestments and rushed off down to the wharf where Fr Hesse was loading the small mission ship with foodstuff and trade store materials to take to the Bainings. Fr Hesse looked up as Fr Benedict arrived.

Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at the Rabaul Convent in 1977.

"Where's the Archbishop?" he asked. "We're nearly ready to go."

"Sorry the Archbishop won't be coming. He's too sick. He's asked me to go instead. And my knees are shaking. I've never done anything like this before."

"O, come on. I'll help you. I'll show you what to do. Get on board". Fr Hesse encouraged me.

Benedict was worried that the Bainings people would not accept him. St Paul's mission was a stronghold of the Church because of the martyrdom of the 10 priests, brothers and sisters in 1904. He decided he could not let them down, as they were quite fervent in their faith.

As the boat chugged its way along the coast, Benedict sat outside the archbishop's cabin. He felt too dirty to use it as he had got on board in such a rush. About five o'clock in the afternoon he could see the Mission buildings of St Paul's in the distance. He sat on the deck chewing his betel nut and then checked the fishing lines over the back of the boat. Fr Hesse came and sat next to him.

"Oh come on Ben, The people will be waiting for you.**"**

But I had lost heart. "The people don't want me. They want the Bishop. They will be so disappointed."

"Come on. Do Something**.** Go and have a wash and get dressed up, ready for the people."

So Fr Benedict had a shower, put on his good clothes and his cassock and felt a little better. As the boat approached the wharf, he could see the people crowded around the boat ramp edging forward to catch a glimpse of the Bishop. They were all decked out in their bird of paradise feathers and the area was decorated with colourful arches. The choir was ready to break into song.

The people kept calling out for the Bishop. "Where's the bishop?" they asked, anxiously.

Fr Hesse looked up at the crowd, "Sorry, the Bishop is sick."

"Well who will do the confirmations?" Just then Benedict appeared on deck in his cassock.

Fr Hesse pointed. "Fr Benedict will do them. The bishop asked him to."

The people went very quiet and with big eyes they stared at Benedict. This was the moment he was worried about. He could see some of his relatives in the crowd.

"Benedict. Eh Man! You are one of us!" They began to clap excitedly, "Yes! You're one of us, you will do!! You can be our archbishop for the day."

'No I'm not an archbishop", he protested; but they continued to clap and the choir burst into song. Everyone was so happy. The following morning he did the confirmations and all was well. After that, he had to do confirmations in quite a few places for the Archbishop.

Death of Benedict's Father, Gustav To Gunan

> I had been down to West New Britain for six years and when I came back my father got sick. My father was a Christian and I gave him the last rites before he died. He was a smart man. He could heal people with bush medicines but he was not a *tena papait* (sorcerer), he was just clever. My mother used bush medicines also to heal people
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> When my father died in 1977, there was a great gathering at his funeral. Even the Christian Brothers from Vuvu came to the cemetery. We had just started a new cemetery just below Vunakokor and my father was the first one to be buried there (now it is full). He was about 61 and I turned 40 at the time. He smoked all the time and used to make jungle juice from bananas, which he put in 44-gallon drums. The people were always running after him to make this juice up and he made money out of it. His cousin brother taught him how to make it after the war. These old uncles died but their wives were still there then. There were no *tubuan* at this funeral because they were forbidden. However daddy had a lot of shell money, *tabu*, which was distributed to show he was a big man.

Benedict knew his father would have wanted to have the *tubuan* at his funeral but it was still forbidden by the church. This was what he argued about unsuccessfully in the seminary. Later when he was Bishop of Bereina and To Paivu, Archbishop of Port Moresby, they were in a stronger position to make some changes and do something about it. As result, by the time his mother died in 2001, there were *tubuan* everywhere and they had achieved what they were fighting for.

> My village is Toliap and further around is Vunakokor. We have a matrilineal society and when my father died we were supposed to go to our mother's village. My daddy was a carpenter and he got bricks and he was going to have a two-storey house built

but he died. We were divided whether to stay in his village or his uncle's place and the bricks were still there. Just before I was going to be made bishop I got a cousin from Matupit to put up the building with the bricks in Vunakorkor. When I got the appointment of vicar general I used to help my wantoks with all their problems. All these young priests had trouble relating to Europeans. We used to go to that brick house and we would talk. My mum would help me to advise these priests when they were not being accepted. My mother supported me all the way. My father was against my going to the seminary but he often helped the poor people. My mother always gave vegetables and watermelons to the sisters and priests who came to the market.

Archbishop John Hoehne

While Benedict was grieving for his father, Archbishop John Hoehne lay dying of cancer. Benedict regarded Hoehne as his spiritual father who sponsored him at the seminary. Born in 1910, Hoehne was only 68 years old but had suffered cancer in the leg for a long time and had even lost part of his leg to it. He had been Archbishop of Rabaul since 1966 and during this time he had encouraged the local people to take a stronger position in the church. He started the parish councils and encouraged the people to have many meetings.

On his patrols down West New Britain, Bishop Hoehne had seen Fr Benedict working and was very impressed. When Benedict was transferred to Rabaul, he understood the difficulties he was facing and invited him up to his Bishop's Palace on Namanula Hill for a friendly chat. The Archbishop had a brother who ran a Mercedes Benz business and had got him a black Mercedes at the cost of a Holden car. It was a comfortable way to travel and, with all his problems, Hoehne really needed this. He used to go to Australia and Germany for medical treatment but in the end, no more.

Benedict said:

> The Archbishop was looked after at the Vunapope hospital and I often visited him there. He would say to me, "Oh Benedict keep up the good work. Keep the flag flying for the Church and for New Britain". When he was dying, they rang me and I rushed out to Vunapope. The Parish Priest had already given him the last rites by the time I arrived. I was the only one allowed in. Bishop Hoehne seemed to have a certain job for me. He kept repeating, "Benedict keep up the flag for New Britain. Charge! Charge!" Then he died in my arms. It was 27 May 1978. He was my spiritual daddy.
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> There was a big funeral at Vunapope and I had to organise it. Important personages began to flock to Rabaul for the funeral and somebody had to be at the airport to meet them and then organise the accommodation. That is when the bishops got to know me and, because I had helped Bishop Hoehne, I was able to understand a little about the administrative work of a Bishop.

Part of the official report on Hoehne's life by Fr Ewald Schröder MSC noted that Bishop Hoehne knew many of the political leaders in the country because he had taught them at Ulapia. They respected him and his advice. "His many years of teaching came in good stead for the archbishop during deliberations with politicians and government departments." He was also credited with helping with the smooth transition to Independence in the country. He received a medal for services from PNG government in 1976, and a medal for services from the Federal Republic of Germany.

Our family kept up quite a correspondence with Fr Franke over the years. In June 1978 he wrote about the terrific strain the priests in Rabaul were experiencing with the death of their Archbishop:

> Dear Brian and Mary,
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> Three years ago in Germany, Archbishop Hoehne lost his leg through cancer. Then the cancer spread to his lungs. He was looking forward to guiding the two newly appointed Auxiliary Bishops in their work: Bishop elect, Fr Hesse, has been in the Bainings for the last 12 years and Monsignor To Bata at present parish priest and Vicar General in Kimbe West New Britain.
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> Fr Benedict To Varpin, our Vicar General, is faring very well in his present very difficult time representing and acting as Bishop. He is really marvellous. If he had been a few years older I am sure he would have been appointed Bishop. You can imagine that I do my best to assist him.
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> Thanks be to God, I feel very well and can still do my usual work in Matupit, Nonga, Rabaul from 5am until 10pm at night. I say it again. It is wonderful to be a priest. I will be 75 years old in June and coming Christmas 50 years in PNG.

After Bishop Hoehne died, Rabaul was without an Archbishop for two years. In the meantime, two auxiliary bishops had been appointed in 1978, George To Bata and Karl Hesse. Because Bishop Hoehne had already died, there was some concern as to who was going to consecrate the new Bishops. On behalf of Father Kiessler, the Vicar Capitular in Rabaul, Benedict wrote to Bishop Schmidt in Mendi who was the chairman of the Bishops' Conference. When the Nuncio found out, he rang Benedict and sounded put out. He wanted to know who is higher, the Nuncio or the Chairman of the Bishops' Council? Since the Archbishop had died, he said he was the higher authority. As a result, the Nuncio, became the main celebrant at the consecration of Karl Hesse and George To Bata in 1978 as Auxiliary Bishops.

When Benedict had been appointed Vicar General, he was the first local man to be appointed to the job and as a result he struck trouble. He said, "really the Rabaul Parish needed an administrator. I had been bush for five or six years and was called back to be the Vicar General in Rabaul". Monsignor To Paivu, at Volavolo until 1974, had helped Benedict and introduced him to parish work. At first people did not recognise him as a priest, and he was often mistaken for one of the workers. This was partly his doing because he still

loved to get out and work in the garden, fix up the cars or do some carpentry work. Sometimes incidents occurred which Benedict remembered long afterwards with much humour:

> One day I was doing some gardening and then I fixed the car. I had grease all over me and along came this limousine with a visiting priest. I had never seen him before and he called out to me:
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> "Eh! You there Boy! Where is the Vicar General I would like to speak to him." I looked at my dirty hands and was ashamed.
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> "I will go and find him", I said and I rushed into the presbytery, cleaned myself up, went to the door and opened it wide to the visitor.
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> This time I greeted him properly and said, "You want the Vicar General. It's me. I am the Vicar General".
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> The visiting priest was embarrassed, "Oh sorry, I have heard about German Missionaries and French missionaries but never have I heard about local priests. This is wonderful".
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> This priest had just arrived on a cruise ship in Rabaul Harbour. I took him around Rabaul. When we returned to the ship, he filled up my pockets with cigarettes.
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> "You want some money?" he said, "Here you are." He gave me some kina.
>
> I said, "You don't need it?"
>
> "No I can get some more in Port Moresby."

There were some Sepiks selling their carvings on the wharf so I gave them the money and they thought it was like a cargo cult.

At that stage, Fr Franke was still the parish priest for Malaytown and Matupit but his health was not good. Because of this, Fr Benedict was running the parish of Rabaul with Fr Vogt as well as helping with the other two parishes and doing the hospital visitation. He liked this work and Fr Franke really encouraged him and was happy to have Fr Benedict's help in his old age. With a happy smile and laugh to greet the many patients, Benedict soon learnt from his old friend how to visit everyone in the hospital; how to talk to the down and outs, the women of the night and others who might need a helping hand.

In Madang, we heard constantly of progress and in one letter in particular, Fr Franke was full of praise for Fr Benedict. He thought Benedict would make a good bishop one day. His prophetic words came true very soon, far sooner than Fr Benedict had ever imagined.

A letter from the Papal Nuncio arrived out of the blue in October 1979, telling Benedict that the Bishop of Bereina, Bishop Vangeke was retiring at the end of the year and stating he had been chosen to replace him. Benedict was flabbergasted. He knew how big the job

was and felt quite unprepared for it. He read the letter a few times and then put it under his pillow so he could pray over it. And that he did night after night. The Nuncio at the time was Archbishop Andrea di Montezemolo. He was an Italian and keen that Fr Benedict become bishop. Some of the local priests and bishops also guided him if a diocese became vacant. The Nuncio compiled all this and sent it to Rome. Fr Franke would have been one of them but the main one was Archbishop To Paivu.

Ben remembered the sequence of events later:

> Occasionally, my brothers sent me money for my mother and when I got the letter, I thought it was from my brother but it was a note from the Nuncio saying I had been appointed as Bishop of Bereina. That afternoon I went off to Malaytown to work and wondered about the letter. They had not asked me they had just told me I had been appointed. They should have asked me really. A few days later I went out to the hospital to visit the patients and when I got back to the presbytery, Fr Vogt was there. He had just had a phone call from the Nuncio asking if I had received the letter,
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> "What letter?" I pretended not to know.
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> "The one from the Nuncio telling you, you will be Bishop."
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> "Oh, that one. I put it under my pillow. I didn't know what to do about it."
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> "Oh, come on! Have you still got it?"
>
> "Why? Do you want it?"
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> "No, no" he replied, "It's not for me. Do something, the Nuncio is waiting for an answer. He is ringing back tonight at 9 o'clock".
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> I was very confused. I did not know what to do. When the Nuncio rang I said, "Will you give me three months to think about it?"
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> "Three months? That is too long, I will give you three days", the Nuncio replied.
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> So after three days he rang again.
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> I said, "OK I have been praying about it. You are trying to burden me with these things. If I fail, it will be your fault."
>
> "Do you accept?"
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> "Yes I accept."
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> "Oh well congratulations. It will be announced officially soon."
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> After this I was running around in Kavieng and Manus attending the ordinations of some of the priests and they were already calling me Bishop. I said, "I'm not a Bishop

yet". And then I got very sick with cerebral malaria. I was lying in hospital and the matron came in and touched my head.

She said, "I want to ask you a question".

"OK I'm listening."

"Benedict, which is better: to die or to become bishop?"

I didn't care at that time I was too sick. I knew the job of Bishop already a little because when Archbishop Hoehne got sick, I had to run around and do the work. I had to answer nasty letters or letters of praise while he was away. I did my job as best I could - all you can do is carry on. But I always remembered the prayer. "Thy will be done" and I later made these words part of my coat of arms when I was consecrated bishop. It was even written in Latin – the language that had been the bane of my life.

Benedict recovered and was appointed Bishop of Bereina on 30 October 1979. The two people who had helped and encouraged him the most on the road to be Bishop were already dead when the announcement came - Fr O'Hanlon and Bishop Hoehne. They would have been very happy to hear about it. What amazed Benedict were the people in Rabaul and Bereina who wanted to know how he had become Bishop. "There were others ahead of you. How come you got the job?" He could only look at them with open-mouthed wonder. As if he had wanted the job! He felt like referring them to the Apostolic Delegate for the real story. Still he had been nominated Bishop of Bereina and he was determined to do the best he could.

Thy Will be Done!

Mekeo Dancers at the Consecration celebrations in 1980.

Chapter 15

Thy Will be Done, Bishop of Bereina, 1979 to 1987

Fr Benedict To Varpin, Bishop-elect, felt a little overwhelmed when he arrived at the bishop's residence in Bereina. The mission workers helped him carry his bags and get settled. Entering the main room, however, he was faced with the framed portraits of his predecessors staring down at him from the wall: Bishop Navarre, Bishop Verius, Bishop De Boismenu, Bishop Sorin, Bishop Klein and Bishop Louis Vangeke. Were they summing him up from the wall? He decided to study these earlier bishops to see what years they had been in the area and what their achievements and ideas had been. Most of them were French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and most lived to a good age.

Bishop Navarre MSC was the first Bishop. He was born at Auxerre in France in 1836 but only began to practise his religion seriously after the age of 24. He was ordained in 1872 being older than his confreres in the seminary. Later he was the leader of the first group of missionaries to New Britain in 1882. Strange that Bishop Benedict's ancestor, To Momulue had helped Navarre when he arrived in Volavolo in 1883 and here was his descendant in Navarre's old diocese. Could Benedict discern a hint of a smile in Navarre's portrait on the wall? Navarre was consecrated Bishop in 1887. He died in 1912 when he was 76 years old and was buried on Yule Island.

Bishop Stanislaus Henry Verius MSC was born in 1860 in Italy. From an early age he dreamed of being a missionary in faraway Papua. Like Benedict, he had had trouble with his studies in the seminary but was ordained in 1883. Arriving before Navarre who was on Thursday Island, Verius said the first Mass on Yule Island on 4 July 1885. In Papua, he was a great explorer and together with Fr Couppé explored many mountains and rivers opposite Yule Island. In 1889, they founded their first mission on the mainland at Mou Village where, struggling with hunger and deprivation, they built the first tabernacle on the mainland (Verges, 1993: 122). Verius became Coadjutor Bishop to Archbishop Navarre in Papua and was consecrated in Rome in 1891. He was described by Pope Leo XIII as "a Bishop who is truly a saint". Returning ill to Europe, he died in 1892, worn out with fever. Only thirty-two years old, he was buried in Oleggio in Italy. His name has been put forward for canonisation.

Bishop Alain de Boismenu MSC was born in 1870 in France and came to Papua in January 1898 and became coadjutor Bishop in 1900. He was very outspoken against the spheres of influence introduced by the government in Port Moresby. Catholic missionaries could only work in certain areas and the Protestant missions had their own areas. Under this policy, the Catholics were squeezed into a 23 kilometres stretch of coast, although they were able to extend inland. De Boismenu was cautious in his mission work and did not want mass baptisms as had happened in some areas. By 1908, Navarre had handed powers over to de Boismenu. During de Boismenu's long time in office he gave the mission the guidelines that still apply today and is rightly named "the Father of the Papuan

Church". In his time, the Yule Island Mission developed gradually and spread to the mainland and the mountains, but the advent of World War II put a stop to active mission work. Bishop Benedict had attended the de Boismenu Seminary in Port Moresby and was familiar with his name. De Boismenu too smiled down from his portrait. He was consecrated Archbishop and retired in 1945. He died in 1953 at 83 years old and was buried at Kubuna. He, too, is being considered for beatification.

Bishop Sorin MSC was born in France in 1903. He joined the missionaries of the Sacred Heart and was ordained in 1929. When he was consecrated De Boismenu's successor in 1946 he was keen to open the Goilala area in the mountains behind Bereina. Being very musical, he encouraged the people to bring their music and art into the church services. This attitude was before its time and appealed greatly to Bishop Benedict who encouraged the people to bring their culture into the services and rituals. Bishop Sorin died in 1959 and is buried on Yule Island. He tried to set up a "pilot" village for the whole mission in Tsiria Village on Yule Island just as Verius had tried but, as Verges said, he did not have much success in this either. He died in 1959 at 56 years old and is buried on Yule Island (Waldersee, 1993: 74).

Bishop Eugene Klein MSC was born in 1916 in France and was ordained in 1943. He first came to Papua in 1947 and was consecrated Bishop of Bereina in 1960. Bishop Klein had to face the prospect of setting up secondary schools and providing teachers for the new National System of Education. He was a fine organiser and businessman and began a better financial system for the mission on its path to self-support. He was a realist and had a sense of humour.

After becoming Bishop in Bereina in1960 he wrote:

> Here I am back in the Papuan work place. The mission dressed itself up to welcome me, but the celebrations are over and now I am sitting alone thinking in my grand white-ant-eaten Episcopal palace. Dear God, how empty this house is! And how much work awaits me outside! The priests in the mountains ask for teachers and catechists. Where am I to get them? There are churches to build, a large hospital to be established – so much work for such a minor bishop, just consecrated and without any money. And then there is the old mission boat. I can see it out there in the bay, waiting so like a stricken deer for someone to put it out of its misery (Waldersee 1995: 343).

Bishop Benedict would have identified with Bishop Klein's sentiments about settling into the presbytery and the amount of work waiting to be done in the Diocese. In 1971, Bishop Klein became the Archbishop of Noumea and there was speculation as to who would succeed him. Fr Vangeke MSC was the top favourite as it was the lead up to Independence in Papua New Guinea and localisation was the order of the day. In January 1973, Fr Virgil Copas was nominated as Administrator of Bereina, but not the Bishop and Vangeke was nominated the Vicar General of Port Moresby. So there was a gap between Bishops.

Bishop Louis Vangeke became Bishop of Bereina after a break of five years. He was the first local priest in Papua New Guinea and was now the first local Bishop. Born in Veifa'a in 1904, he was not accepted by his family and brought up by the Sisters. Vangeke, trained in Madagascar, was a cultured, pious man. Ordained in 1937, he was a priest for 46 years and spent many years with the people of Ona-Ona in the Bereina diocese. A humble man, he had the interests of his people at heart. In 1970, he was consecrated Bishop by Pope Paul VI in Sydney during a Eucharistic Congress. While in office, he invited the Missionaries of Charity to the Bereina Diocese. Bishop Benedict said, "Bishop Vangeke was happy that I was succeeding him because of my attitude to ecumenism". After Benedict's consecration, Bishop Vangeke left for Kubuna by truck. He kept his little car in the Kubuna Mission Station where there was also a school and convent. Benedict kept the airstrip open there so that Bishop Vangeke could come and go at leisure. Vangeke died on 12 December 1982 and was buried in his village of Veifa'a. He was 78 years old.

Benedict To Varpin was the seventh Bishop of Bereina. The invitation to the ceremony came from the diocese of Bereina, "for the Episcopal Ordination of bishop-elect Benedict To Varpin". The Principal Consecrator was Bishop Louis Vangeke MSC assisted by Bishop George To Bata and Bishop F. Schmidt OFM Cap. Archbishop Andrea di Montezemolo, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to PNG and Solomon Islands, presided at the concelebrated Mass of Ordination, held on Wednesday 19 March 1980 at 10am in St Paul's Church at Veifa'a. Brian and I travelled down with our daughter, Joanna and friend Maria von Trapp who

Consecration Mass. From left: Bishops To Bata, Vangeke, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio, Bishop Benedict To Varpin and Bishop Schmidt.

Bishop Benedict with his family and friends after the Consecration Mass.

was living in Port Moresby at the time. We all enjoyed the day. The Mekeo people put on a wonderful reception for Bishop Benedict with dancing and singing. They probably have the most colourful headdress of Papua New Guinea. The Papuans surely know how to celebrate.

As not many of his own Tolai people could be present at his Episcopal ceremony, big celebrations were organised in Rabaul on his return there. The work of Archbishop To Paivu and Benedict had paid off and *tubuan* were now allowed. It was worth the discussions and heated arguments. They knew what it meant to their people. It did not mean that the *tubuan* became part of the liturgy in the church. No! But they were now accepted and even encouraged in village and school celebrations whereas before they were banned from appearing at all. The initiation ceremonies leading up to joining the *tubuan* were now seen as a chance to instil some social training and ethics into young men, something that had been missing since traditional times.

A proud moment! The author and her daughter congratulating Bishop Benedict on his Consecration.

Benedict said:

> After I was consecrated bishop at Bereina and returned to Rabaul, there were lots of *tubuan* and *dukduk* gathered from Malmal and Matupit. Dozens of them, including a d*ukduk* called *Tor*. In Vunakorkor and nearby at Toliap we held a celebration. Mostly they had the shell money hanging on big bamboo. It was organised by my uncles, the brothers of my mother.

Bishop Benedict with a tubuan *on the left and* dukduk *at the festivities at Volavolo to celebrate his Consecration as Bishop.*

After Benedict returned, he threw his soul into his work. He began improvements around the presbytery. Donning his old clothes he cut the grass and dug in the garden. Doing this he was making the area into his place, from the grassroots of his lawn upwards. One day he emerged from the garden all scruffy with a bush-knife in hand to be asked by officials where the bishop might be. Now he did not hurry off to get cleaned up. He stood his ground in his dirty clothes and said, "Hello! I'm the Bishop". The officials were amazed but pleased.

The people in Bereina looked after him and accepted him as their Bishop. The Mekeo and Roro make a lot of money from fishing and betel nuts and when Benedict was on patrol to the many parishes, the people contributed a lot of money. They earned enough from their crops to build permanent houses. A lot of the priests and sisters were Tolais trained in Rabaul and so were very friendly. Following his practice from West New Britain, he again travelled to outstations up steep mountain tracks or along crocodile infested rivers where he lost his first Bishop's ring.

> After I had been consecrated bishop there was a Bishops' conference in Sydney and I was tossed in with them and unsure of myself. I met bishops from many places but I knew some of them already from PNG. I stayed in the Kensington Seminary as the students were on holiday.
>
> Later when I preached in the Lutheran Church in Lae, I was announced as the Bishop of Bereina and they were happy because I could relate to the people of different churches.
>
> As Bishop, I was sent to various meetings for church leaders. There was a meeting in Sogeri of the Anglican and Catholic Bishops and Bishop Meredith greeted me warmly

and congratulated me. He told his friends, "This man, Benedict, helped me when my money got lost on the road. He is the right person to work with us as he knows us. If you get lost in the bush, Bishop Benedict is there. He is your brother". During the eruption of the volcano in 1994, Bishop Meredith worked with Bishop Hesse to help the people.

There was Fr Isaac, an Anglican priest I had known in Kimbe. Afterwards he went overseas for many years. On his return. he was nominated Bishop, based in Port Moresby. By this time I was already Bishop. So when I was asked to go and meet him, I dressed up in full Episcopal dress and went to the Anglican presbytery with the Papal Nuncio. Isaac too was dressed as a Bishop and when he saw me his eyes lit up.

"Man! Oh man! I didn't know you were a Bishop"

I said, "Yes I've been a Bishop for five years now."

We laughed and hugged each other and the Nuncio was amazed that we knew each other so well. Later on, I had to work with them in the Melanesian Council of Churches. The Lutheran, Methodists and Catholics put me as their chairman of the world Council of Churches. Fr Isaacs's children used to call me Uncle; Bishop Uncle Benedict and I used to give them lollies. The Nuncio was happy because he could see we would work together to serve the people of God. Fr Isaacs was from Popondetta and a lot of the Anglicans in West New Britain were from Popondetta. They really seemed to like me and I worked with them like Christians. In the bush I helped them get their foodstuffs with my boat or truck. In town I helped them too. Bishop Isaac was a top man and is now retired. They don't have to do all the study that we have to do.

In speaking about his Bereina Diocese, Bishop Benedict often gave credit to the French Priests many of whom toiled for years in difficult circumstances but they were dying out now and being replaced by local priests.

A plaque on Fr Leon Bourjade's grave in the Yule Island Cemetery.

A famous French priest who only spent two years on the mission was Fr Leon Bourjade, MSC. According to his tombstone on Yule Island, he was born in France on 25 May 1889. He was a student with the Missionaries of the Sacred

Heart in Switzerland when the First World War broke out. Even though he was in a seminary, he had to return to France for military training. During the war, he made a name for himself as an ace pilot shooting down 4 enemy aircraft and 24 observation balloons between December 1917 and November 1918. He was awarded many honours including the D' Officer de La Legion of Honour, the Croix de Guerre with 14 palms and the Grand Gold medal of the Aero Club of France. When flying into battle he carried a Sacred Heart pennant. He carried on a correspondence with St Therese of Lisieux declaring his desire to follow the sanctity of "littleness" by being a missionary. He died on Yule Island 22 October 1924. After his death, more than one French warship came to Yule Island to pay their respects and add a plaque in his memory (Waldersee 1995: 272). While he was on the mission station Bourjade dreamt that one day planes would be used to transport people between stations. He for one would have been a flying missionary but it was not to be in his lifetime.

By the 1960s, plane travel in the Bereina diocese was commonplace. The diocese incorporates Yule Island and spreads up into the mountains as far the border with the Northern Province. It also covers part of the Central Province within its territory, including the Goilalas. Benedict travelled by plane to mission stations everywhere. While he was Bishop, the mission lost two planes. In the first crash, some lay missionaries got badly burnt but fortunately there were no deaths. When a Brother pilot died in a further crash Bishop Benedict stopped the mission planes.

> The Brother pilot was supposed to take me but I missed the plane, otherwise I would be dead too. Later a government pilot flew in to get the body. After that I bought no more planes. There were many third level airlines so we used them. [But the airstrips were maintained and new ones built].

Here are some of the places Bishop Benedict remembered and the work he did. Tribes and language groups divide this Diocese:

The Roro people live in a few mainland villages as well as on Yule Island. Bishop Benedict did the groundwork of moving the High School, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, from Yule Island to Mainohana on the mainland and, together with the De La Salle High, it now forms a co-educational High School. As Benedict said, "Everything is in full swing now. We had to shift from Yule Island, as there was a transportation problem. The students used to sit and wait for the high tide for the canoes to take them over to the school. Furthermore the new Hiritano Highway bypasses the road to Yule Island".

Another Roro Village is Agevairu on the road to Yule Island. Here Benedict built a church, store and a priest's house, and blessed the new Church. Waima, another Roro Village, is on the highway bordering the Port Moresby Diocese. Bereina, the district headquarters, is also in the Roro area. And, during the 1980s, it was also the seat of Bishop Benedict. His administrator was Fr Evan Duggan.

The Mekeo people have two main Catholic centres: Inawaia was first visited by Fathers Verius and Couppé in 1886. Over the years the mission has grown with a substantial

church and school; Veifa'a, the other main station, was started in 1894. It is a large station with St Gerard's Hospital and nursing home and school. The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart have been in this parish from the beginning and Benedict carried out much renovation work here in the centennial year. Veifa'a was the parish in which he was consecrated bishop in 1980. It was also the birthplace of Bishop Vangeke, the first local priest and bishop in Papua.

The Kuni people have two main stations: Bakoiudu started in 1900 by the French MSC order. The station is one hour's drive up in the hills on an all weather gravel road. Bishop Vangeke did a lot of work in this parish and blessed the new church in 1979. It is a beautiful church with a large stained glass window. There is also a large rubber factory nearby. Kubuna, started in 1976 is on the way to the Highlands. It was the home place of the Handmaids of Our Lord until they shifted to Nazareth in Port Moresby in 1956.

The Fujuge people have four main stations: Fane, Ononge, Woitape and Yongai. Bishop Benedict was of the opinion that these mountain people of the Goilala area do not value education. If there is a feast with pigs and dancing, the parents would take their children out of school for days to go to the feasts. The people here are well known artists and musicians. They love singing and talking more than working. Bishop Benedict poured money into projects into this area to encourage the people to live a better life.

The Ononge Parish of St Joan of Arc was started 1913 and is famous for its large cross, the highest in the southern hemisphere. The weather is always raining and misty. It is a very difficult place to fly into with updrafts and down drafts and planes veer one way or another. Previously, the Ononge people went to the Woitape health centre and mission school. The road was muddy and slippery and it took ages to travel along it. Bishop Benedict organised a bulldozer to be brought into the mountains by Caribou. "We bulldozed the road and another airstrip. But it is still very dangerous."

The Parish of Our Lady of Fatima, Woitape, is a big Centre and the government put in an airstrip in 1956. The school is run by the mission and was improved.

Yongai opened in 1947 is on the border with the Northern Province and is very cold. When Benedict went there, he experienced a nosebleed. The airstrip is near the mountain and the cliff and the pilots have to be careful again because of the winds.

The Tauade people also have four main stations: Kerau, Tapini, Kosipe, and Kamulai.

Kerau is on the border with Morobe and has a dangerous airstrip and sometimes Bishop Benedict could not get out for weeks when he called in for a visit. French missionaries, Fr Francis Guivarch and Andre Wendling established the station in September 1938. They worked on translating the Bible into the local language, set up schools and wrote hymns: the sort of work that was carried on in all the mission stations.

Tapini, started in 1967, has a large High School. The standards were low, in fact the lowest in Papua New Guinea, before Benedict invited the Brigidine Sisters to come and they are upgrading the standards. He said, "Sister Morris and other Sisters came so the people could learn English. Brother Philip and another Pallotine brother came in as well and now the standards are improving. The priest there is doing fine work". As it is a major government centre, Tapini has a an airstrip, but, as in many other places in PNG, it is dangerous to use. Earlier, an Australian pilot crashed a Caribou into the mountain during army operations.

At Kosipe, in the Goilala area, is the Parish of St Martin de Porres, opened in 1958, and Benedict upgraded many of its buildings during his tenure in Bereina.

Kamulai is also in the Goilala area. The airstrip, built into a cliff, was very dangerous, so Benedict organized another one near the government station so that third level airlines can land.

The people of the Goilala area were once all Catholics, but now other denominations are starting to encroach, disturbing the previous harmony.

Bishop Benedict was most concerned about these people:

> The Goilala people rarely finished school. When they get a bit of education, they leave school and become *raskels*. The Nuncio often went up there and told them: "No one else has given the Goilala a bad name – it is you and you alone." I said the same to them. "We are pouring money into roads and schools for you and it is up to you to get a better name." I tried to help them; I stayed in their homes and ate with them and chewed betelnut just like at home. During my time four Tolai priests lived there. The Sisters from Rabaul were teaching and nursing as well. I was able to ordain two Goilala men. One was Fr Thaddeus, a bright lad who studied in Fiji. He

The Yule Island Cathedral built early in the century and enlarged by Bishop Benedict for the centenary celebrations in 1985.

was the first to be ordained from the Kuni tribe but he has died already. A pity. The Goilala people are really from a small area around Tapini but the term Goilala now covers the whole area.

In the 1980s, the Bereina Diocese had a population of 80,000 people of whom 62,000 were Catholics. The remainder consisted of adherents of other missions; on the other side of the ridge up in the bush there are Methodists on the border between the Central and Morobe Provinces.

On Yule Island, although the High School moved, there is still the Community school. The headmistress sometimes invited Bishop Benedict across to see the projects of the students. He was interested to know about the design of the Papua New Guinea flag, which was created in Sister Joseph Mary's art class there. In the early 1970s, she saw the various possible designs for the new flag and thought them a bit insipid in green, white and gold. She copied them and gave them to the girls in her art class.

Sister Joseph described how the PNG flag came to be:

> We discussed what the girls considered to be Papua New Guinea's national colours and came up with yellow, red and black. And so the girls went to work on the designs they had been given in the three stripes. One of the students was Susan Karike.
>
> I said to her. "Susan, I'm tired of seeing stripes, draw a line across it diagonally, from corner to corner, and fill it in."
>
> Susan got her ruler and said 'I can't do it from corner to corner as I'll cut part of the stars or the bird off".
>
> I said, "Well put it along a little bit so it can be exactly diagonal". The students coloured their designs and we showed them to the school. They liked Susan's best. I had taught Susan to sign everything she did, so she signed this design of the flag and when the Constitutional Committee came to Yule Island, the design was presented to them. Within a few days it was accepted by the Parliament. Apparently there was a very hot debate on it. I understand that when the votes were counted, the House was divided with exactly the same number on either side of the House. Sir John Guise had the casting vote and he voted in favour of accepting this design for the flag. Some of the French Sisters pointed out that the diagonal stripe from top left to bottom right was not seen as appropriate. In Europe it is seen as a bit sinister. They wrote to the government with their concerns but Sir John Guise said, "Well we're not in Europe so it doesn't matter!"

During Independence Day celebrations in 1975 when Susan Karike raised the new flag, Sister Joseph Mary proudly looked on. Each morning, when the flag was raised on the flagpole she remembered the other occasion in the art class and the part her Yule Island School took in it.

Our family visited a few times to Yule Island for holidays. The cemetery there is full of French Priests, Brothers and Sisters. I remember visiting the convent where a few of the old French Sisters lived. They were a lively group and in their recreation they loved to play cards. Five Hundred was the favourite and they were as quick as winks with dealing and sorting. I was asked to join them and found to my dismay that they used a French pack of cards. So the Jack was V for Valet; the Queen was D for Dame; and the King was R for Roi. It was very confusing trying to work out your hand. Of course they won easily. I was just getting the hang of it and we were half way through a game when a distant bell sounded. The Sisters immediately dropped their cards and put them back into the packet. "Time for prayers", they said and off they scuttled down the corridor. That's obedience for you! During that visit, I realised how international the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had become since Fr Jules Chevalier established the order in 1854 in Issoudun in France. He also started the Order of Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH).

Archbishop To Paivu's Last Days

The Bereina Parish was under the jurisdiction of Port Moresby so Archbishop To Paivu had every reason to visit the new bishop there and Bishop Benedict was happy to accommodate him; two old friends who had the interests of the people and the culture at heart; two Tolai Bigmen who now held two top jobs in the Catholic Church. Together, they allowed the Tolai to have their *tubuan* figureheads back again. Neither of them could see any objections to having them at feasts so long as the bad connotations were eradicated. They were figures that were characteristic of the Tolai culture and good for dances. The initiation ceremony and training could also incorporate rules for living in society, a thing that was sadly missing in modern society.

Benedict teased To Paivu about getting him to become Bishop of Bereina. "You were the trouble maker. You wanted to get me into Bereina, so you could come down and get all your betelnut and *daka* from here." To Paivu just laughed. "*Maski*! We Tolais must stick together". However neither of them realised that within the year To Paivu would be dead. Sorely missed by all his friends, particularly Benedict To Varpin.

Archbishop To Paivu died on 12 February 1981 while recuperating from flu in Rabaul. He had had a heart attack. His death was a great shock to his many friends. Messages of condolence were sent from Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan and Opposition leader Mr Somare. They saw To Paivu as an inspiring, ecumenical and pastoral worker who would ride PMV's around Moresby to get near his flock. It was a great loss for the nation.

Tarcissius Bola wrote that, "the church has been left the poorer with the death of Archbishop To Paivu for though he was deeply spiritual and ready for death at any time; he was one of the church community's valuable ecumenical leaders with many years of invaluable experience as a pastoral worker". (Post Courier 17 February, 1981). He also promoted the local culture into the local church. "He suffused the church with Papua New Guinean culture in the five years of his pontificate (sic) which began in January 1976."

The man who helped To Paivu was his friend and fellow Bishop, Benedict To Varpin. Together they insisted that decisions on the Church way of life should come from the people instead of being imposed by the church. To Paivu was an initiated member of the secret *Tubuan* Society of his Tolai heritage and he introduced the local culture into the liturgy of the church. In the week before his death To Paivu re-visited the place where he had attended the seminary from 1947 to 1953. This was in Torokina in the Bougainville area, now overgrown with thick jungle. It brought back many memories and the blessings he had received and his achievements as Archbishop of Port Moresby, the highest position of a prelate in the land. Not bad for a man whom the Bishop hesitated to ordain in 1953 because he was too old. Realising the Bishop was hesitating, he begged, "My Lord if I can say but one Mass after my ordination it would have been worth it." When he died on 12 February 1981, To Paivu had been a priest for 27 years and a bishop for over six years. During the years of service he gave to the Church, he said many thousands of Masses, not just the one promised to the Bishop.

The Pope visits Papua New Guinea, 1984

Pope John Paul II visited Seoul on 3 to 6 May 1984 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the introduction of Christianity into Korea. A million people welcomed the Pope who canonized 103 martyrs, In this long list there were priests, missionaries and lay people who died in persecutions in 1839, 1846 and 1867. On Monday 7 May 1984, the Alitalia DC-10 arrived in Port Moresby from Korea with the Pope on board. Pope John Paul II descended from the plane and knelt and kissed the tarmac. He was officially greeted by the Governor General, Sir Kingsford Dibela, and the Prime Minister, Mr Michael Somare, who knelt for the Pope's blessing.

The Pope was then driven to the Sir Hubert Murray Stadium for an open air Mass. The Mekeo people from Bishop Benedict's area were all dressed splendidly in their bird of paradise feathers. The Pope had learnt some Motu phrases and addressed them in their language so they were delighted. The case containing the Pope's vestments had been mistakenly left on the plane so he used Archbishop To Paivu's vestments. The Carmelite Sisters at Bomana were particularly thrilled at this, as they had made these vestments for To Paivu some years earlier. During his address, it started to rain heavily but many remained including the hundreds of Mekeo dancers with their colourful headdresses, some ruined in the rain. The Pope thanked them for staying on.

Benedict To Varpin remembers the visit:

> I was in Bereina when the Pope visited Papua New Guinea in 1984. There was a lot of work to prepare for the visit and we all contributed to the project. Bishop Moore and I met the youth. I had to rehearse with them and pretend I was the Pope so they knew what to do. I could not go to Mt Hagen as I was preparing the youth to meet him on his return. The Pope went to Mt Hagen and it was a time of great celebration.
>
> We met the Pope in Port Moresby and we were asked to bring along any gifts for his Holiness so I came along with that famous book, *Hagen Saga*.

I said: “Here is a book for your Holiness.”

“Oh! A good book, “he replied, “how much is it?”

I said, “Oh no! Your Holiness, I give it to you.”

The Pope liked *Hagen Saga* about the first missionaries into the Highlands. It was the only thing I gave him. Others brought *bilums* and carvings but the book I thought was more important because it was the story of those early years of the church in Papua New Guinea.

The next morning, the Pope left for Mt Hagen where a crowd estimated at 250,000 people gathered, dressed in their long swaying fibre skirts and feathered headdress of every colour. Many groups came from distant villages carrying crosses. The Pope specially blessed a large cross, which the Chimbu people had carried from their area. It was a symbol of peace, being carried by previously warring tribes. The open air Mass began at 10am in the hot sun. The Pope concelebrated flanked by Bishop George Bernarding of Mt Hagen and Bishop Raymond Caesar of Goroka. The ceremony was conducted in *Tok Pisin* which the Pope spoke fluently. On his return to Port Moresby, the Pope had a ceremony of the Blessing of the Sick in the Boroko Church and then later he addressed a gathering in the Cathedral, walking up the hill so he could meet as many people as possible.

According the Carmelite Sisters who were there:

There was loud clapping, and in he came right down the centre aisle looking so tired yet giving himself so totally to the task in hand. In his address he spoke to each of the three groups, giving each of them their distinctive share in the mission of the Church and especially urging the priests never to create division through their activities which some understood as a recommendation to abstain from active involvement in the political sphere. At the end of his talk he smiled and started to chat with the group of nuns, but he was running well beyond time and was due at the Governor General’s residence, so the aides once again gently urged him on to the next task – the presentation of his gift of Chalice and Paten to the Archbishop of Port Moresby, Sir Peter Kurongku. This time he went first among the priests, then back through the rows of sisters and brothers, quite literally clutched from all directions.

Bishop Benedict met the Pope two years later in Australia during his visit to Brisbane. This time he was not involved with the preparations and was able to enjoy the prospect of concelebrating Mass with Pope John Paul II on the QE II Stadium on Tuesday 25 November 1986. He was asked to bring his own alb, cincture and white mitre to the Stadium. Following this celebration, he had been invited to join the Pope on 29 November in his trip to Alice Springs where the pontiff was due to address the Aboriginal people. It was all very exciting and he was really looking forward to it until disaster struck, back in his parish of Bereina.

On the previous Sunday, Benedict concelebrated Mass at St Dympna’s Church Aspley, in Brisbane with Fr Peter Luton. Afterwards one of the parishioners greeted him with the

news just announced that Sr Perpetua had been killed in Bereina on the previous Friday. Benedict was understandably upset, as he knew Sr Perpetua well. She had been his secretary for many years and was a gentle soul but also vibrant and enthusiastic. Suddenly there was a change of plan. He decided to attend the Mass at the QEII Stadium and meet the Pope there but he would have to explain that he must go back immediately afterwards to Bereina for the funeral of Sr Perpetua. There were several frantic phone calls to have the funeral delayed. His trip to Alice Springs had to be cancelled and the reason explained to the Pope.

Sadly, Bishop Benedict took his place on the large altar at the QEII Stadium in front of a full congregation of hundreds of thousands of people. Benedict put on a happy face for the day and took his place with the rows of bishops and priests with the Pope leading the celebration. There was a procession of gifts brought by members of various communities.

When addressing the Aborigines in Alice Springs, the Pope said:

> Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. Do you perhaps remember those words that Paul VI spoke to the aboriginal people during his visit to them in 1970? On that occasion he said: "We know that you have a life style proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce. Society itself is enriched by the presence of different cultural and ethnic elements. For us, you and the values you represent are precious. We deeply respect your dignity and reiterate our deep affection for you."

The Pope's message about culture was significant to Benedict. He realised that the Pope would have supported him and his friend To Paivu in their struggle to bring more of the culture into the liturgy. Soon it was happening all over Papua New Guinea.

Funeral of Sister Perpetua

But right now he must hurry back to Papua for the funeral of his dear friend. Sister Perpetua Allchin joined the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Bowral as a young girl and was anxious to be a missionary in Papua New Guinea. This she did 1945 just after the war and she had spent most of her life in the Bereina Diocese where she was well known in education circles. The day she was killed she had spent time in the Education Office and then went to the markets to sell second-hand clothes. She earned a little money and was returning to the mission station at Waima. Apparently some *raskels*, knowing about the money, threw rocks at the car and one of them hit Sister Perpetua. She fell over the steering wheel and collapsed, never regaining consciousness. Her companion, Imelda, a young local girl bravely stayed in the car with her. In the end she went for help and Sister was transferred to the hospital in Bereina where Father Evan Duggan gave her the last

The chapel that marks the site of the first Mass on Yule Island. On 4 July 1985, the day celebrating the centenary, Bishop Benedict celebrated an open air Mass here with thousands of decorated Mekeos and Oros in procession.

rites. Unfortunately she died before the end of the day. Back at Waima, the people were so distressed and angry at what had happened that they threatened to kill the perpetrators. The two *raskels* had to be placed under police guard.

Back at Bereina, Bishop Benedict found that the people had prepared a beautiful bier for Sr Perpetua, decorated with flowers and rich bird of paradise feathers. The men, dressed in traditional costume, drummed the coffin into the church where Bishop Benedict was waiting but he was too distraught to carry out the ceremony. Instead Fr Peter Miria of Waima said the Mass in the Waima language and the children sang their traditional songs and also hymns for the lovely Sister Perpetua who had helped their families so much. One of the Waima chiefs then stood up and begged the sisters to stay in Waima and promised to protect them from further harm. The women then wailed in the traditional deep sobbing.

Later her coffin was transferred to a large canoe and carried over to Yule Island where the whole population was waiting on the pier to accompany her body to the church. Bishop Benedict officiated in another liturgy to farewell her with the Yule Island community. She was buried in the Yule Island Cemetery alongside many other missionaries who had given their lives to God.

The Centenary of the Church in Papua

While Benedict was in Bereina, the Church celebrated the centenary of the MSC's presence in Papua from 1885 to 1985. There was a great celebration on Yule Island on 4 July 1985. A new statue of Bishop Verius adorned the hill-top overlooking the Bay and the mountains of Poukama on the Papuan side. Bishop Verius was seen as the hero of the day. Thousands of Christian Papuans attended as well as visitors from overseas. A stream of colourfully decorated people from Mekeo and Roro meandered in procession ahead of the Bishop towards the hill-top chapel where open air Mass was celebrated in honour of Fr Verius and his companions a hundred years ago.

Afterwards there were singsings and feasts. Benedict invited friends from the Church and the government including his old friend John Kaputin who was now the Minister for Finance. "I introduced him to the people of Poukana on the mainland opposite Yule Island and we gave them money to look after our car while we were on the island."

Bishop Benedict wrote the forward note for the memorial volume. In part, it said:

> My dear people
>
> This is a golden opportunity for me to talk about something, which at this time is very important and very dear or precious to each and everyone of us. That is, our Centenary of the continual presence of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea. It was on 1 July 1885 that Father Henri Verius, with his companions, first landed on the shores of Yule Island about 100 kilometres from the present Capital City of Papua New Guinea. A few days later, on 4 July, the first Mass was said and so began their missionary work. We may wonder and ask many questions such as, "who was the first Bishop of this area now known as Bereina, or for that matter for the whole country known as Papua New Guinea?"
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> The first Bishop was Father André Navarre who became Vicar Apostolic of British New Guinea in 1887, while Father Louis Couppe became Bishop of German New Guinea in 1889. — While we look back to

A Mekeo dancer .

the goodness and mercy of our God in sending those missionaries to our country, we must look forward and face the challenge of making our Church – the Catholic Church – a true part of our lives. To do this there must be a change in our lives.

First of all, we must show our thanks and appreciation. "Thank you Lord for making us your people, your sons and daughters by Baptism." But we don't stop there. No! We must carry on by reminding ourselves of our Baptismal Promises. The best way to put the fire of the love of God in our hearts is to ask ourselves these questions: What is the place of Jesus in our lives after one hundred years of Christian Mission? What is the place of God's Word? Do we have a Bible or at least a New Testament in our home? Do we read it? Are we aware that the Lord is still speaking to us because He still loves us? Finally, may I exhort each and every one of you to move forward with gladness, joy and appreciation in celebrating the first Centenary of the Catholic Church in Papua. While we remember our pioneers and courageous missionaries, let us move forward to understand the words of the Holy Father, which were chosen as the theme of our celebration – "the family is the Church at home". May the Church of Bereina be enlightened by the faith of the families who make up the Church. And may the Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you all. Yours sincerely in Christ.

In 1979, people were wondering who would be the next Archbishop of Rabaul. Then Benedict found out it was Archbishop Albert Bundervoet a Belgian, consecrated in Rome:

I met Bishop Albert at Waigani in Port Moresby in a round about way when he first arrived. I was in Waigani to see the Commissioner about putting in a protest over the opening of a club. I was sitting there waiting for him when I saw some people having trouble over a visa. They asked for my help. I found out that the person without the proper visa was Bishop Albert Bundervoet, the new Archbishop of Rabaul! He had arrived on a three-month visa and when they asked him how long he would be staying in Papua New Guinea, he answered, "Forever" which had not gone down too well with the Immigration Officer.

There was an ex-seminarian in the Waigani office so I spoke *pidgin* to him and asked him if he remembered me. "Yes! You are Bishop of Bereina"

"Well let me tell you. This man here does not just need a three month visa. He has come here for life as the new Archbishop of Rabaul!."

"OK, Bishop" he said to me." We'll fix it for him."

They stamped all the right forms and Bishop Albert was really amazed, as they had been struggling for a few days to get the visa fixed. The people in Rome were wrong because they put him on a three-month visa only.

Bishop Albert was appointed to Rabaul on 6 March 1980 and consecrated 11 May the same year. He lived in the palace on Namanula Hill and used the big Mercedes

that had formerly belonged to John Hoehne. Bishop Albert died 29 March 1989 just after he had been to the Bainings for the anniversary of the martyrdom of the missionaries there.

Benedict had to return to Waigani about the club licence. He saw the Commissioner and had the licence refused. The Bereina people did not want it because they were afraid the men would get drunk and kill people on the road. Fr Vangeke was still alive and he advised Benedict to oppose it. "I worked for all the people not just for one or two. I would have allowed the club if it was well run but not if the people opposed it. In Kokopo, I have been to the club to have a drink. That is OK."

The Bereina Parish badly needed funds and one of Benedict's financial initiatives was to build a block of units in Port Moresby in three stages. Many opposed the idea and thought the money should be directly spent on projects within Bereina. While still Bishop of Bereina, he had organised the first two stages, but he needed more finance for the third stage. While on a visit to Rome after he became Archbishop of Madang, Bishop Benedict put a proposal to the Pontifical Mission Society for funds for the third stage. A loan of three million was given for this project, enabling final completion. His long-term vision meant that the apartments built in Port Moresby bring in a continual flow of money for Bereina. Furthermore the loan has been paid off.

Later he told me:

> Many were against me but I said, "build now because inflation will go up". Bishop Lucas was happy to have this money after I left. I did not have any money, initially, but I got some from overseas and used it for these buildings.

After Bishop Benedict, the next Bishop was Lucas Paul Matlatarea MSC who was Bishop from 1988 to 1998. He was from Pomio and had been Ben's classmate in the Seminary. They were ordained together in 1971. Lucas was very pleased with all the money from the units that flowed into Bereina. When Lucas died of a heart attack, Gerard-Joseph Deschamps SMM, a French Canadian, held the post from 1999 to 2002. He was followed by Benedict's cousin, Bishop John To Ribat MSC, who has been there since 2002.

Sister Perpetua of the Bereina Diocese, with a Waima chief and his wife .

Chapter 16

Fr Bernard Franke: A Priest is not his own

Fr Franke once wrote:

> When you come to Matupit and enter my small house, there you will find on the one of the walls in big letters the words, "The Priest is not his Own". How true these words are: how well they define the meaning of Priesthood. Yes, in that moment when in Ordination the Bishop lays his hands upon the Deacon's head to ordain him a Priest, this young man ceases to be himself anymore, he is not his own any more, he belongs to everybody during his whole life, just giving himself entirely to all who come his way. He is their priest!

He had an inborn kindness, understanding and a charitable attitude to everybody that made him very approachable. He followed the example and charity of the lovable Pope John XXlll who took the whole world in one stride and, by his personality, helped to break down the barriers. This was the Pope who had organised Vatican II, which brought so many changes to the Catholic world.

In 1978, Fr Franke, on the recommendation of the Papua New Guinea Government, was honoured by the Queen with the award of the Commander of the British Empire, CBE, in recognition of his labours in Papua New Guinea. It was his due reward for the years he had laboured there from 1929, 60 years of love and care. The following year he celebrated his 80th birthday in Rabaul with his many friends from the Chinese, European, Mixed-race and local communities. He was very happy to see everyone.

One of his guests came up to greet him.

> "Tell me Father about your new award?"
>
> He smiled shyly, "Yes I was awarded the CMB".
>
> "The CMB?" queried his guest. "Surely not. That's the Copra Marketing Board!"

The group laughed and Fr Franke was embarrassed, but he could see the funny side. He gave his little smile, "See me. I'm a bear with very little brain, but I keep smiling anyway!"

Not true, really. Not about the very little brain. Fr Franke was an intelligent man who knew the importance of simplicity in all things. Simple love, simple faith and simple prayers – they were the things that got him through his life. It takes a great man to understand this.

In 1979, Sir Julius Chan talked about Fr Franke:

> When Fr Franke got the CBE from the Queen because of his work, he was recognised by the Queen and the government. He rushed up to see me and was almost shaking,

Extended Chow family outside the St Francis Xavier Cathedral in Rabaul at the Ordination of Fr Raphael Chow.

> he was excited about it. He wanted to know if it would be proper for him as a priest to accept the title. He put his priesthood first and the title second. CBE: Commander of the British Empire. He wanted to know what he should wear for the investiture ceremony and when he would be going to Port Moresby. Then he said, "I'll just go as I am in my white soutane in the manner I always dress".

Sir Julius attended his investiture and Fr Franke was very excited to get the medal from the Governor General. Fr Franke spoke about the honour and that he accepted it for all the priests. After a few months he came back to Sir Julius with an official form from the Grand Master in England. "I had to fill it in for him. I told him that from now on the Queen's title takes precedence, Fr Franke CBE MSC. He was so flabbergasted Julius had to fill the papers."

Sir Julius said:

> The people regarded Fr Franke as their personal best friend. He radiated joy and rejoiced with them over the good times and comforted and had soothing words at times of sorrow. All the people accepted him as a personal friend at special occasions. The Chinese have a month's rejoicing after the birth of a child and they would invite him along. It was very comforting for people to see him at the hospital each evening and if someone died he always accompanied families to the cemetery. Most conversations we have are centralised about our families. He would tell me, "You must have a rest. Don't worry everything will be all right, keep smiling". He never worried about himself.
>
> When we left government who should be at the airport to greet me but Fr Franke. He is supposed to be non-political and never has taken sides. Never talked about those

matters. He turned up at the airport, smiling and radiating confidence and made me feel that what we did was right. “The time is not right. I’m glad and you should be glad that things turned out the way they did.”

It was a time that Sir Julius had made some big decisions. Fr Franke had heard it all on the news and he was at the airport to give his support. He was a person to say the right things and to be in the right place at the right time. A few years later when Sir Julius Chan became Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Fr Franke was one of the first to congratulate him.

Fr Franke noted,

> So my life has gone on during all the years I have been in Rabaul. As it is such a small place, we are all brought together as one big community, meeting each other so often in public and at semi official gatherings, in sports and other activities. With goodwill and with the right attitude in the Christian spirit we have grown more and more together, becoming friends and living up to the beautiful words:

A bell is no bell till you ring it,
A song is no song till you sing it,
And love in your heart,
Was not put there to stay,
Love is not love till you give it away.

As a young boy Bernard Franke dreamed of becoming a priest. In kindergarten, when he was in a play and he was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. He got on a chair and announced to the assembly, “I want and will become a priest”. This goal had kept him going through the difficult years at the seminary.

He remembered back to his mission work in Valoka where he arrived in 1929. He had extended the mission area to Vaisisi Village, 3 hours inland and then at Sakelarama village, high up in the mountains, twelve to thirteen hours’ walk from Valoka. “Where once I was alone there are now four priests and six thousand Nakanai Catholics.” He lived to see these changes and realised he was known as the pioneer missionary in these areas.

During the war, when the Japanese arrived at his mission station, Fr Franke was cruelly threatened with bayonets to his neck and gave himself up for dead. Somehow he got through the court martial and was imprisoned with the other missionaries. He survived the war and spent the rest of his life in Rabaul devoted to the Tolai, Chinese, European and Mixed-Race people.

One thing about Fr Franke was not just his visits to the hospital but his home visits as well. It did not matter if he was expected or not, he was like a member of the family. He just accepted you the way he found you and he always got a welcome. Our children loved Fr Franke. He would often call in to our house for a beer in the afternoons and young

John Bernard, as soon as he heard "Hellooo, Fr Franke here", would rush off to the refrigerator for the regulatory bottle of beer. We would then all sit around discussing our day and he would tell us about Matupit or his hospital visits. During Sunday Mass, our sons John Bernard and Paul sometimes got noisy when Father was in the middle of the service. One day, one of the older Sisters complained to me about the noisy children in church. Perhaps she meant our children? So I said, "Well look Sister, next Sunday we'll sit in front of you and you can poke them in the back as soon as they step out of line." Well true enough, we did that and after a couple of well-placed little pokes, John and Paul took one look at Sister's face and were quiet as mice for the rest of Mass! I thanked her afterwards for doing such a good job. Fr Franke did not seem to notice the noise. He just placidly plodded on.

During his Rabaul years he had a special affection for the Chinese community and vice versa. Europeans in Rabaul tended to come and go after a few years but for the Chinese population, Rabaul was home town.

James Woo who is a member of the PNG Chinese Community in Sydney has very fond memories of Fr Franke who began the Children of Mary and encouraged four young Chinese girls to become Sisters, Paulita Choi, Betty Szeto, Theresa Chue and Mary Chan, all of whom joined the Daughters of the Sacred Heart. Fr Franke was often invited to banquets in the Parish Hall and there might be up to 500 people in attendance. He often gave a talk at these gatherings and liked to quote from his favourite poem, *A bell is no bell until you ring it. A song is no song til you sing it. And love in your heart is not there to stay. Love in your heart is to be given away*.

James Woo lived and worked at the Cocoa and Copra Processing Factory. Here they bought copra from the local people and processed it.

> Fr Franke often visited us there for dinner and we used to give him cigarettes. As he was leaving, he would ask for something for his "horse" meaning his driver. When he came to our house he called my sister, "May Sui" which means beautiful smile. She loved the name and it has stuck with her as a pet name until today.

Andrew Lui's wedding in Rabaul. Cathy and Agatha Lui were bridesmaids

Chinese children away at boarding school returned to Rabaul on their holidays and often got jobs there. One such person was Cathy Lui, interviewed in 2007. She had many good memories of Fr Franke and he always

encouraged people to “Keep smiling”. Cathy’s sister, Agatha, first met Fr Franke when she was a young girl at school. She treated Fr Franke as a father and he felt part of her family. When she was looking for a job after finishing school, he helped her with an office job at Gabriel Achun’s soft drink factory where she worked for many years before setting up her own business. He used to go the hospital and visit everyone. She remembered how he loved his cigarettes and a group of her friends bought him his cigarettes each week. They call themselves “the cigarette club”.

Agatha belonged to the Legion of Mary, and Fr Franke was wonderful at keeping it going all the time he was there. There would be between 10 and 20 members at a meeting. Fr Franke would give the *elucutio* talk.

In 1980, when Agatha and Cathy Lui went overseas on a pilgrimage with Fr Church, Fr Franke met them off the plane at Cologne airport and told the Custom’s Officer, “These are my children” and he let them through without having their bags searched. Fr Franke knew some of the people in the broadcasting station and arranged for Fr Church and Agatha to give a talk in Chinese which was broadcast live. The people there said this had not been done before in Chinese. Four members of the group managed to have an audience with the Pope who gave a general blessing for all New Guinea people.

Until 1980, Fr Franke would visit the Lui family sometimes for meals and afterwards, as always, ask for some food for his driver who would have to drive him home to Matupit Island where he could get a good night’s sleep.

Meanwhile, in Rabaul, Fr Franke was getting more and more frail. In his letters, he described how he was getting around with a stick and his eyesight was getting worse. He was flown to Sydney for medical reasons and there met up with his many Chinese friends who were his former parishioners.

Through all his life Fr Franke had a great devotion to St Therese of Lisieux, the patroness of missionaries. When he went overseas, he visited Lisieux and two years before he died he wrote a note to her:

> Dear Therese
>
> You know I am now 80 years young and have been on the missions for 50 years I can no longer walk as quickly as previously. I need a cane in the darkness because I am no longer sure of my legs, but I can still do my priestly work in Rabaul, on the island of Matupit and every evening in the huge government hospital. May I say that through meditation, through prayer, through reading, through reflection on your life and writing, you are for me a living Bible, by which I understand so many things better. I have such a colossal trust in the mercy of God and your intercessions that I no longer have any worries. Be with me when it “will be evening” (Campbell, 1982).

When he was taken to Sydney for an operation on his eyes, he wrote to his friends in Brisbane, sorry that he had missed out on seeing them. The letter dated 8th August 1984

was addressed to the Lui family including Cathy and Agatha Lui. At this stage in 1984 he was nearly blind and dying.

Dear Agatha, dear Mum, dear all of you,

Yes it is Fr Franke to thank you all for your welcome gift. I know it is a gift of love. I am resting and still half blind. I will have an operation in St. Vincent Hospital 20.8.84 by Dr. Chock followed by other serious operations. And then I hope I can come to you all in Brisbane to see you all.

I am staying in Kensington where I arrived on the 1 June in the evening. A wheel chair brought me to be greeted so cordially by Fr Bob Mitchell, Sr. Betty, Sr. Theresa, Kati (Cathy Lui), Eulalie and Tessie Chan. (Sr Mary). Dear Agatha, I feel I have to stop writing as my eyes are playing up. You see I cannot read what I write well. I am sure Kati (Cathy) told you about all the parties on Saturday night with holy Mass and getting together. They all are so good to me. Sometimes I could not stop crying.

Fr Mitchell, what a wonderful work he has done and is doing always with our Chinese people here in Sydney. They all love him. A few times I was in Chatswood on Saturday nights for Holy Mass and meetings. How good he is to me. Every day doing his best for me - a real friend and looking after me like a guardian angel. In 2 weeks time (20 August) I will have my eye operation in St. Vincent's Hospital by Dr. Chock and two months later the Real operation. Dear Agatha only these few words of thanks with love Fr B. Franke, MSC. [It was the last letter she received from him as he died a week later].

Fr Franke arrives in Sydney, greeted by Fr Bob Mitchell and a Chinese Sister.

The fact that the Chinese Community were permanent residents in Rabaul gave them a chance to get to know Fr Franke well and vice versa. Some did leave after Independence but others stayed on running businesses and doing well under the new government. This continued until he left the town for the last time. In the *Kundu News* of September–December 1984, there was an article from the PNG Chinese Community of Australia chronicling the last days of Fr Franke:

We remember him as being always cheerful and kind-hearted, befriending everyone he met. He had a great devotion to Our Lady and special novenas were always held during October in the St Francis Xavier Cathedral. The people of Rabaul came to know and love him dearly. In 1978 by unanimous vote, he received the CBE award as recognition of his labour. Unwillingly, but because of deteriorating health, he left

Reception at the Papua New Guinea Chinese Community.

Rabaul and arrived in Sydney on 1 June 1984. No doubt it was of comfort to him to see so many of his friends in Sydney. Shortly after his arrival, he celebrated his 81st birthday with the New Guinea Chinese community. He also attended a number of our Community Masses and functions, including Fr Robert Mitchell's Silver Jubilee Mass and Dinner.

Fr Mitchell cared for Fr Franke in his last days at Kensington. They talked of their days in Rabaul in the 1960s when Fr Franke had helped Fr Mitchell as a young priest. Now the roles were reversed and Fr Mitchell was able to help the venerable old missionary. Fr Franke died on 13 August 1984 with Fr Mitchell at his side.

James Woo who was then President of the Rabaul Parish Council gave a Eulogy at the funeral Mass held on 16 August 1984. As Archbishop Bundervoet and the Vicar General, Fr Vogt, were unable to be present Mr. Woo also represented them.

Some weeks ago, just before Fr Franke was to leave his beloved Rabaul for ever he came into my office to say "good-bye".There were tears in his eyes when we said our farewell. The very words he said to me were: "James this is our last good-bye. I am convinced I will never be back home again". Somehow, he knew then that the Lord had at long last decided to call him to tender his stewardship and he did, in the early hours of Monday morning, the 13 day of August 1984.

The human side of him was reluctant to give up the things so familiar to him. The flock he ministered to for some fifty years, the Island of New Britain he knew and loved so well, the warmth of the sun, the scent of the frangipani and the beauty of the bougainvillea in full bloom. But it was the people, his people the Tolais, and you and I whom he insisted on calling his children and grandchildren that he missed most.

That was why I feel that he made this last trip to Sydney to meet up with you once more. Fr Franke's work in the islands is legendary; his compassion for the sick; his cheerful salutation and parting remarks of, "Keep smiling" and his daily visits to the hospital were eagerly looked forward to by the patients. His work in New Guinea was fully recognised by the Government six years ago when Fr Franke was honoured by the Queen with the CBE. Today we come to pray for the soul of our dearly beloved friend; however we must not be saddened by this passing from our midst for we as Christians know that he has gone to a place infinitely more beautiful than the world he has recently departed from, for he is now in God's keeping. We console ourselves too that we were privileged to have known Fr Franke, because we now have a personal friend in the Lord's embrace. We know he will pray for us in Heaven, until the day we too, will be called into the Kingdom of God.

After his death there was much discussion about where Fr Franke would be buried: should he be buried amongst his beloved people on Matupit Island in the cemetery he did so much to beautify and where many of the people buried there were his ex-parishioners; or should he be buried, as the clergy thought, in the Vunapope Cemetery. In the end he was buried in Douglas Park, which is about 60 kilometres from the Kensington monastery. It is in a large estate surrounded by paddocks and an old coach house belonging originally to Major Thomas Mitchell. The chapel alongside the cemetery dates back to 1905 and the cemetery itself is the major cemetery for religious from the Sacred Heart Missionaries in the Australian Vicariate. Other buildings in the estate are the Novitiate and Retreat Centre.

The cemetery is a beautiful area with gardens and flowers and farmlands - a fitting place for missionaries to Rest in Peace.

Fr Franke may have died but he had not been forgotten by his people, particularly the Chinese, Europeans and local people. Archbishop Benedict To Varpin remembered Fr Franke as his best friend. He had always been encouraging, knowing the difficulties a young local priest faced in the 1970s. Patiently, he had encouraged Benedict into the workings of a parish and passed on to him the importance of visiting parishioners whether it be in their homes or in the hospital.

Benedict was at the Kensington Monastery, on his way home from a meeting with the World Council of Churches in 1988. He was booked to say Mass for teachers and Sisters from Rabaul but was running out of time. He really wanted to visit Fr Franke's grave at Douglas Park. When the teachers asked if he was coming he explained the problem.

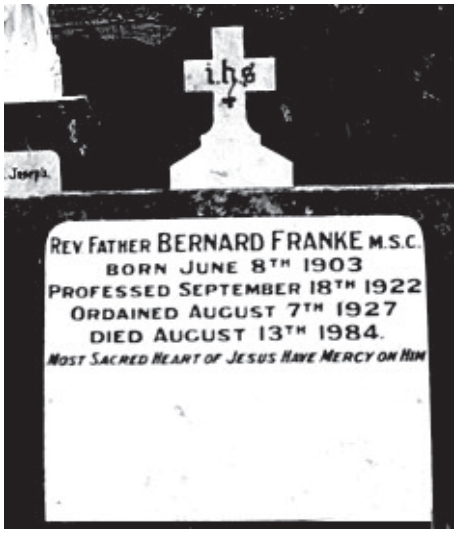
"I'm short of time, I want to visit Fr Franke's grave. He was my best friend."

'Well why don't we all go?"

"Can I say Mass there?"

"Yes there's a chapel next to the cemetery."

It turned into a big outing with teachers, sisters and priests and friends of Fr Franke all making the trip to the cemetery with Benedict. They drove the 60 kms to Douglas Park and visited Fr Franke's grave, singing his favourite hymns at the cemetery and also during the Mass in the nearby chapel. In his prayers, Benedict thanked Fr Franke for his part in making his vocation possible but also requested prayers for the job he was doing in Madang.




BISMARCK SEA
Madang Area
WEWAK
Boram
Marienberg
Angoram
Timbunke
SEPIK RIVER
Kayan
Bogia
Banara
Malala
Ulingan
ADELBERT RANGE
Mirap
Josephstal
Megiar
Mugil
Annaberg
Saruga
Rempi
Maiwara
Nake
Holopa
Sek
Alexishaven
Utu
Riwo
Nobanob
MADANG
Amele
Atemble
Bogadjim
Aiyau
Youla
Mt Wilhelm
Guyebi
Bunani
Bundi
Denglagu
RAMU RIVER RANGE
Goglme
Kerowagi
Nondugl
Banz
Minj
Kup
Mingende
Kundiawa
GOROKA
Bena Bena
Keman
Sari
Kompiem
Wabag
Ruina
Pina
Pompobus
Karap
Kumdi
Mun
Kuli
Toboba
MT HAGEN
Rebiamul
Wilya
Warup
Kiripia
Ulga
Tabuga
MENDI
Maramuni R.
BISMARCK

Chapter 17

Archbishop of Madang, 1987 to 2001

The Builder Bishop

When Benedict became Archbishop of Madang in 1987, he was returning to the place where he had attended the Kap Seminary in the 1960s. A lot had happened since then: his ordination in 1971; his years working in West New Britain; working in the Rabaul parish as Vicar General; and then seven years as Bishop of Bereina. All this had been training and experience for his new job. He found Madang as pretty as ever with its deep lagoons and island studded harbour. The Mission centre was near the coast and not far from the Memorial Lighthouse and the trees full of thousands of squawking flying foxes. He met up with former seminarians and other Tolais working for the public service.

Benedict was appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Madang in January 1987 and succeeded Archbishop Arkfeld in December the same year. Bishop George To Bata and Archbishop Albert Bundervoet came from Rabaul along with ten other bishops from around the country. His Consecration as Archbishop in the Cathedral was followed by *singsings* and great rejoicing amongst the local people because as they said, "he is one of us".

Consecration as Archbishop of Madang.

Benedict remembered:

> My brother came from Goroka for the ceremony and my mother and family from Rabaul. Bishops were accommodated in town and the priests in Alexishafen. After the celebrations there were dancers from Manus, Rabaul, West New Britain and from Madang too. I was not regarded as a local there in Madang. In spite of this I did my job. When I returned home to Toliap, near Rabaul, there was a big feast with *tubuan* to celebrate my becoming Archbishop. In Volavolo, the Sisters cut a coconut over me to renew me in the church.

When he became Archbishop, he was one of four archbishops in Papua New Guinea. The others were Michael Meier SVD, Archbishop of Mt Hagen; Peter Kurongku, Archbishop of Port Moresby and Albert Bundervoet MSC, Archbishop of Rabaul. Benedict took as his motto, *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, "Thy will be Done", taken from the Lord's Prayer. In order to be completely dedicated to the service of God and his Church one has to submit fully to the Will of God. On his mitre is a Tolai design signifying origins.

For his coat of arms he chose the following symbols:

Spears: Used in the past by the Papua New Guinea people to defend themselves during tribal fights and for hunting. The Word of God is sharper than spears for it penetrates the hearts and minds of all.

Betel nut: Chewing betel nut is common to most of the people of PNG. Whenever there is need to settle a fight or disagreement among peoples, both sides have to exchange betel nut as a sign of peace. The Word of God is for Peace and life.

Conch shell: Used to call the people together for important occasions and functions, and it is now used to call people to church to hear the Word of God.

Waves: Papua New Guinea has many islands and rivers. In order to reach the people, the Bishop has to travel through the waves of the ocean and the ripples of rivers to preach the Word of God and give the Sacraments.

Benedict was the fifth Bishop of Madang and the first national. He was also the first Bishop who did not belong to the Divine Word Order (SVD). In a way, this told against his legacy in Madang. The only mention Bishop Benedict gets in the official history of the SVD and SSPS mission in the area was the fact that he sold off the planes of the DWA

Design on the Archbishop's mitre above and his coat of arms right.

(Divine Word Airways) and closed down the business (Mihalic, 1999). Archbishop Ben argued that it was too expensive and the missionaries could easily travel by the other small airlines. Another consideration was accidents that could lead to a legal minefield. In his previous mission area in Bereina, there had been accidents with the mission planes although few fatalities.[1] The SVD's are so proud of their flying Bishop Arkfeld that closing the small airline was difficult to accept. It must be remembered that there had previously been financial woes with it as early as 1979 (ibid: 232) and the Wewak's mission airstrips were phased out by 1985 (ibid: 79). It was only a matter of time before the same happened in Madang. An arrangement was made for Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) to take over the service after the mission sold all its equipment in 1990.

Bishop Benedict said:

> At first the mission used boats as a means of communication. Then Bishop Leo concentrated his efforts on planes because that was the area of need. Then you have emphasis on cars and vehicles because there are more roads open now providing access to missions.

Personally, Bishop Benedict appreciated the help the Divine Word Order gave him, particularly on his trips to Australia for medical reasons. They accommodated him at the Hamilton Parish in Brisbane and Brother Hermann Hempen gave him every assistance. When in Sydney, he stayed at the Divine Word Mother House at Epping while attending Bishop meetings. Overall the missionaries of the order appreciated his organising ability, his building programs, his honesty and his spiritual prowess. The fact that he was a Papua New Guinean drew many national people to the Madang church for colourful services. He believed in bringing the traditional culture into the services as much as possible. The Divine Word Order prided itself in its attitude to the local culture. As much as possible

they drew on the local culture for the designs in churches, vestments, altar cloths, chalices, candlesticks and tabernacles and seminarians did courses in Ethnology and Anthropology (ibid:78). "They are by training keen on localisation, acculturation, and adaptation. No one aided and abetted this characteristic more than Bishop Arkfeld". (ibid) However most of them would have drawn the line at having a *singsing* group lead the procession into church accompanied by the beating of drums, for ordinations and confirmations as Benedict did. An old German priest, asked about permitting this, said, "Those dirty feathers in Church, no".

The first Bishop in Madang was Bishop Wolf who was appointed in 1922 and died during the war when he was travelling on the *Dorish Maru* which was strafed by American planes. His successor was Bishop Stephen Apelhans of the United States who died in an airplane crash near Lae in 1951. Bishop Noser followed him and became the first Archbishop of Madang until his retirement in 1975. In retirement, he liked to get around Alexishafen on his bicycle. He was a very spiritual man. According to *Readings in PNG Mission History*, "To him, faithfulness to duty at all costs was high virtue. He lived that conviction and expected his missionaries to do the same" (Mihalic, 1999: 21). Bishop Noser founded a local order of Sisters, called the Sisters of St Therese after his favourite saint. Coincidentally, he was ordained on the same day she was canonised in 1925. Sister Arsenia Wild SSPS was the first Superior of the new order. Bishop Noser often cycled to their convent and had "a deep personal concern in directing them. In 1993 they numbered 37 professed Sisters, 11 novices and 3 postulants" (ibid:35). Bishop Noser died in 1981.

Bishop Leo Arkfeld was known as "a kind, considerate, tolerant, forgiving, patient, relaxed, gentle, generous, approachable man with a vision and boundless faith in God and people" and, as well as all that, he was a very competent pilot. The main aim of his flying was to keep in touch with the many missions that had been established throughout the Wewak and Madang areas. He flew for nearly 42 years and accumulated 8,615 flying hours with 20,446 flights over the difficult terrain. "In those flights he had but two accidents with no casualties and both planes flew again. All that is a very good record! - - Bishop Leo was a better priest than pilot and he put his trust in God!" (Fincutter, 1999: 95). On 13 July 1985, Archbishop Arkfeld celebrated fifty years of mission flying when he blessed a new helicopter in the Madang Divine Word Airways hangar.

Alexishafen was established by Fr Limbrock of the Divine Word Order in 1906 and became much larger than Madang Township, with its workshops, sawmill, schools and hospital. The brothers had all been trained as carpenters, cobblers, farmers, mechanics or cooks while the priests were often anthropologists, philosophers and linguists. By 1930, the figures for the Catholic mission were 18,000 Catholics, 29 priests, 29 brothers and 53 sisters. This mission complex was similar to that of Vunapope near Rabaul.

This large, mainly German, complex at Alexishafen did not endear itself to the Australian run government in Madang in the 1920s and Fr Ross, the first American SVD priest to arrive, tried to counter the anti-German and anti-mission feeling permeating the Australian government office. As well, he was a great explorer and was instrumental in opening

stations in Sigu and then Badimhok. Within a few years there were many converts in both places and great festivities were held on the church feastdays. Later he went on a 40-day trek into Mount Hagen to establish the first Mission Station there, which remained under the Madang jurisdiction for a long time (See Mennis 1982).

As was the case in Rabaul under the early German Administration, Madang had spheres of influence between the Catholics and the Protestants. In this area, the Protestants were mainly the Lutheran missionaries. The original line of demarcation was from the coast inland beginning at about Riwo Village north of Madang. These spheres were adhered to for quite some time, but after the Mandate was established, religious freedom of the people was one of the conditions imposed and the Australian officials had to honour this. However, once missions had established their boundaries they tended to stay that way in many places. Indeed, if you drive along the North Coast Road you can almost see the line of demarcation just past Nagada Plantation.

Relations between the Catholics and Lutherans improved with the arrival of a young American doctor in 1930. Dr Braun worked at the Lutheran hospital but he attended to all missionaries at Amele and later Yagaum Hospitals. Bishop Wolf was one of his patients and the two enjoyed many convivial evenings together. During the war, when missionaries were strafed on board the *Dorish Maru* and Bishop Wolf was fatally wounded, Dr Braun attended to him in his last hours. After the war, Dr. Braun returned to the Yagaum Hospital and worked there for the next thirty years.

Dr Braun was still there in 1965 and helped the young Benedict To Varpin when he was attending the seminary at Kap. At that stage Benedict had been training in running for the South Pacific Games but, on the advice of Dr Braun, he gave the training up as it was causing a build-up of fluid in his knees.

In 1987, Bishop Benedict had spent the last eight years in the Bereina mission, which was French in history and outlook. Now, as Archbishop in Madang, he had to contend with a different Order – the Society of Divine Word. Missionaries in that province came from America, Poland, Korea, Ireland, Germany and many locals from around Papua New Guinea. All previous and subsequent archbishops of Madang were SVDs. If Benedict had belonged to the MSC Order, it is doubtful he would have got the position in Madang at all.

Mary Taylor Huber writing about the earlier bishops in the Madang and Sepik areas concluded that whereas Fr Limbrock, who opened the mission at Alexishafen in September 1906, appeared to concentrate on boats, and building piers to support them, Bishop Arkfeld concentrated on planes and setting up airstrips. Fr Limbrock's letters listed the physical demands of the mission stations. Huber concluded: "Clearly, Limbrock was losing control over the critical relation between spiritual and material work that defined his mission as a religious enterprise and gave it specific denominational and spiritual form" (1988: 201). She was not being critical but more sympathetic to Limbrock who was bemoaning the fact that he had come to New Guinea as a missionary and found he was building piers and boats etc. You could not have a strong mission unless you had the infrastructure.

She concluded:

> The heroic period for these missionaries, then, was not one of spiritual prowess unencumbered by material concerns but one of unprecedented material upbuilding, which resulted in a base of plantations, workshops, and stations that served the mission well until it was destroyed in World War II (ibid: 201).

In writing about Bishop Leo Arkfeld, she noted his emphasis on planes and flying rather than on boats as in Fr Limbrock's time although the latter were still important. "The planes, radios, roads made internal communication more frequent and reliable than had been possible before the war" (ibid 207).

Another problem raised by Huber while doing her fieldwork in 1976, was the paucity of indigenous priests in the Wewak Diocese. There were only two there: one having just been ordained and the other on leave pursuing a political career. The picture looked grim for relying on indigenous clergy "to articulate Catholic spirituality with Melanesian culture" (ibid: 208). When Bishop Benedict arrived in Madang in 1987, ten years later, there were few local priests let alone bishops and now he was appointed Archbishop! It must have been a surprise for a lot of people and yet also seen as a great boost to the local spirituality and the local clergy. Full of energy and enthusiasm, he threw himself into the job and put the emphasis in building up the physical structure of the churches, schools, top-up schools and high schools, knowing that for the church to develop it needed the material structures to support it.

While former bishops may be known for providing boats and wharves, as in Limbrock's time, and planes and airstrips as in Archbishop Arkfeld's time, To Varpin concentrated on buildings as he had done in Bereina, upgrading those already there or building new ones. He knew that without the necessary churches, schools, convents, conference centres and houses for priests and workers, the mission could not function at its maximum potential. He probably has few regrets at the amount of time and money and effort this cost him. In the end he wore himself out suffering with stress and physical deterioration. It was a matter of "Thy Will Be Done".

One last point Huber raised was: "The final irony of which many missionaries themselves were aware in the mid-1970s, is that while their project had clearly been shaped in a progress of interaction with the region, it did not yet exhibit much of the spirit of the indigenous people to whom it had been dedicated for over eighty years" (ibid 210). This is where Benedict To Varpin excelled. He was able to exhibit the "spirit of the indigenous people" as he was a local man. He was a part of the culture looking out at the church whereas many missionaries were expatriates looking into the local culture from their own perspectives. Although not a local Madang man, he was a Papua New Guinean and thus able to achieve exactly what Huber said had previously been missing. He brought as much of the local culture of the local people into the liturgy as he could. Before each ceremony in the church he dressed up splendidly in his crimson robes with the tall Bishop's mitre, the church was festooned with colourful archways decorated from bush fruits and palm fronds, the local *singsing* group was bedecked in grass skirts and feathers and to the

beating of the drums they all processed into the church and it was wonderful the way the people have brought their culture into the church. It brought crowds of people to the Church, which seems to be flourishing. The people liked Archbishop Benedict To Varpin because "he is one of us".

As the new Archbishop, Benedict tackled the finances early in his time:

> Fr Anthony Patik was the Vicar General in Madang when I arrived and was also the bursar and manager. When he retired in 1990, he was followed by Brother Theo Becker who became the new manager. Brother Theo and I worked together for ten years to fulfill our dreams. We got Madang to where it is now. We bulldozed along. Some people were against us at the start and criticised us for our plans but in the end we won them over and they said, "You two guys did a good job while you were there". You can't always make everyone happy with your efforts but the small people in the bush were happy with us as they could see what we were trying to do. Some big shots in town just wanted us to stay there and preach but we went out to parishes, health centres and schools. Many were there already and we upgraded them. We had a Board of Trustees to look after properties and any building that had to be done.

As Archbishop of Madang, Archbishop Benedict became known as a great builder. He, himself, gives much of the credit to Brother Theo, "He is smart man and organises things well. There is a saying, 'The Germans live to work but the Americans work to live' and that is true of Brother Theo who is a German". Together they made a good pair of workers.

Children in the Megiar Parish school.

Archbishop Benedict with novices of Sisters of St Therese.

Together they got busy with new buildings, fixing up old Church buildings as well as setting up new services. The main centre at Alexishafen acquired a new health centre and the Conference Centre was upgraded to a high standard; Gusap, near the Ramu sugar factory, run by a German priest, Fr Hans Dapper SVD needed some repairs; Kwanga Station which had a big health centre now has a new permanent church; Megiar started in 1909, is quite a large station with accommodation and catechist training centre run by Sister Dominique; here the buildings were repaired and painted ; at Mugil, a big Catholic health centre was developed to look after people all the way to Bogia; down at Saidor on the Rai Coast, the church has four outstations which Bishop Benedict visited by car in the dry season; Banara has a big church built by Bishop Noser and a big school; in Utu the Health Centre was upgraded as well as the nurses quarters; the mission on Manam Island was established in 1925 and repairs were done on the church, health centre and school; Annaberg and Kwanga, distant places near Chimbu were upgraded; the Parish of Ariangon, inland from Bogia was started in 1962 and, in Benedict's time, much money was spent on a new church, presbytery, new health centre and houses for the teachers and nurses as well as new classrooms.

Malala High was opened in 1956 as a primary school but it grew into a High School. Bishop Noser wanted it as an English-speaking school. Many of the teachers are VSOs from overseas. The first SSPS principal was Sister Jane Frances, an American, and by 1994 she had been there for 27 years. After the School gained National status it took "top honours over all the National High Schools in PNG. Of its first-ever grade 12 graduating class of 61 students, 25 were accepted by the University of Papua New Guinea and 27 by the University of Technology in Lae" (Mihakic, 1999: 26).

Bishop Benedict said of Malala High School:

> This school produces good students with teachers from India, Indonesia, New Zealand and other places. They get the best results. We put in a science block and Sister Jane is always trying to improve the school.

Initially, the Bogia High School began as an offshoot of Malala until 1989 when it became an independent school called the Holy Spirit High School with Mr Konaka as the headmaster. More buildings were being constructed. "In 1990 Brother Werner Jansing's building team plus a Rotary Club group of volunteers from Australia built an urgently needed dormitory plus two houses for teachers" (ibid:27).

The story of how Brother Theo and Bishop Benedict built the Holy Spirit High school is one example of their achievements:

> I got my council together to discuss it and they said have you got two million to start this? No one believed it possible. But we went ahead for the people and set up a board and began clearing the land. We asked the Premier for some money and got K33,000. I began construction in 1988 and in 1989 the plan was laid out. The stores at Alexishafen were full of cement and building materials. I had started working on it before Brother Theo came but he got into the swing of it and ordered timber from Rabaul. He was able to get more money from somewhere. When it was built we acquired local teachers and some Sisters from all around the world - Germany, India and Indonesia. Now there are four or five hundred students there and they go to grade 10 and then either go to Malala or they can go to St Benedict's Agricultural Training Centre.
>
> Now the critics who said it was too far from Madang are happy about this school. It isn't too far as there is a bitumen road all the way and another thing you keep the kids in the rural area. That was my big thing.
>
> Another favourite project was the St Benedict's Agriculture Centre at Danup. The motto is *Orare et Laborare* (to pray and to work). There the students learn pottery, piggery, coconuts and agriculture so they can learn to cultivate their land. The mission obtained a large loan from the bank and over the years managed to pay it back. The School is named after St Benedict, a great saint for the youth.

Bishop Benedict's concern for the youth led to the top-up schools: [2]

> There are too many students who want to go on and do their studies so we began the top-up and there is now this top-up system in many primary schools. We pioneered this development. We thought that children should be able to grow up in their own village. Leo Arkfeld, my predecessor, wanted this to happen; he had the idea, but we put it into practice.

In 1994, Benedict blessed a new double classroom for the Holy Spirit Community School in Madang. Many parents were very excited as they had helped with the project. Brother Wilhelm was the carpenter. The school classrooms meant that the grade 7 children can stay on at school - part of the top-up system. Mention was made that the Madang Diocese now has 67 Catholic Community schools with 14 being top-up schools. Bishop Benedict was particularly keen about the top-up system as it meant that many children who would not qualify for High School can do two extra years at their primary schools (*Tanget* newspaper for the Madang Archdiocese Yia 18, no 2 1994).

Archbishop Benedict said:

> The church owns a lot of land near Sek, Alexishafen. We sold some of it to the government to be leased for a fish cannery. The people were demanding the land back and wanting compensation. We tell them now to go to the government or to the Fish Cannery with their complaints. The fish cannery is a mult-million dollar investment providing jobs for many people. A Filipino company now owns the cannery.

Benedict could be tough on his own people if he thought they were taking advantage of church facilities. If priests leave the priesthood they can no longer expect to use the mission accommodation and facilities and yet some of them do so. "In Madang, if I see them using my phone and food I get wild. Once they have they have left the church, they should not use our facilities."

The old Mission Centre at Alexishafen never really recovered from the war. A smaller church had replaced the large cathedral destroyed at that time. Bishop Benedict and Brother Theo organised the big conference centre, renovating already existing buildings and building new ones. Sir Peter Barter thinks it is the best in the South Seas. People come from everywhere to meet there, Lutherans, Catholics as well as politicians. So long as they pay their money! There are about six girls there and a Brother manager.

Alongside the conference centre were the old workshops and, in one of them, Brother Ignatius DiSanto had his small corner in the electrical workshop. A wonderful old man with simple ways, he epitomised the Brothers who have done so much work for the mission over the years. When we called in 1994, he proudly talked about the old days when he had learnt his trade in the U.S. Navy as an apprentice electrician, gaining knowledge which would stand him in good stead for the nearly 50 years he would spend in PNG, where he arrived in 1948 not long after the war. His skills were needed to get power on for the mission then emerging out of the trauma of death and devastation of the war.

In the major centres like Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen, the breakdown of law and order discourages tourism, which could bring a lot of money into the country. The *raskels* in Madang were not as bad. On one occasion, Benedict was trying to have a siesta in the afternoon and some *raskels* were breaking down the neighbour's doors. He went out and told them, "Look the Bishop is trying to sleep. Stop making so much noise. Go somewhere else". The *raskels* slunk off and the Bishop got his rest.

Bad things do happen. Brother Volters was attacked at the Divine Word University in Madang. He was just across the road from where he lives. The *raskel* slashed his arm and demanded K1,000 from him and said if he did not give him the money he would cut his arm off. Brother Volters had a lot of stitches put in his arm. Brother Cassius, a builder and a carpenter, ran the store at the Bogia Mission among other things. He used to come to town every week and followed a very close schedule. The *raskels* knew what his schedule was and they stabbed him a few times before stealing the takings he was bringing to Madang to bank.

One of the worst cases was when Bishop Leo Arkfeld was on his way to the dentist at the hospital in Wewak. The dentist wasn't there and on his way out a fellow noticed that he had some money in his shirt pocket so he knocked him down, stole the money and ran off. When the parents of the boy found out what had happened they collected some money and came and apologised to the bishop and made the kid apologise. Bishop Leo was refunded about K80 from what he had lost. Wewak is pretty bad because the missionaries often have to go through *raskel* areas and some had to be taken to Australia to recuperate after they were attacked.

Bishop Benedict was once attacked in Port Moresby while returning to his living quarters. He was at the gates of the compound where there was usually a security man on duty. This time there was no one there and he was very vulnerable. He left the keys in the ignition and the engine running while he went to open the gates. *Raskels*, hiding nearby, noticed his car left unattended and stole everything: his wallet, keys and licence. He only had his rosary beads left. They wanted the car and Benedict said, "No you can't have the car". (It was an Avis rental car). He heard them say, "Fight him. Kill him." One spoke in Chimbu "Kill him." Then they stoned the car. Another yelled, "Don't kill him. He's the bishop". Then they fled.

Benedict supported the weak in his vicariate of Madang, and he led the march against the introduction of poker machines into the country. He could see that it would lead to poverty for many families already having trouble financially and the people did not understand poker machines. Many thousands of people marched against their introduction. There was the story of a man in Lae who fed hundreds of *kina* into a poker machine expecting a return and when he got none he took to the machine with a tomahawk, "*Yu no harim tok* eh. Take this" and he smashed the machine for not listening to him and giving him money.

In his dealings with government officials, Benedict always trod carefully. He encouraged them and by his example showed that having integrity and honesty was the best way to live. Benedict tried to help the Premier of Madang, who was having difficulty relating to the people:

> I tried to be friends so I could change him. I once sent him up to see a road that needed fixing. The people there were angry and sent him away. So I went up and told them off, "We need the money to be spent on roads and he has lots of money". We sent a selected committee to him saying, "We respect you as our leader but we expect something more from you". He became a changed man and now believes in prayer. Later he came to the opening of the St Vincent de Paul building which is now the headquarters for PNG. It started off as a rundown building but they got money to do it up. Bernard Narakobi came and represented the National Parliament.

When interviewed in 1988 during a visit to Brisbane, Archbishop Benedict said the Church was already flourishing when he arrived in Madang. Out of 300,000 people, there were 100,000 Catholics. One of the most encouraging signs of growth were the congregations full of young people at every Mass. The 30 parishes in the Province each had up to 10

outstations. Not all parishes had priests, and parishioners were being encouraged to take a more active part in the Church through the Movement for a Better World. The Church has long had a stabilising effect in Papua New Guinea and proved a pivot for the lives of the people. Culturally, the Catholic Church includes *singsings* in the church liturgy so that Confirmations and Ordinations were very big occasions. There are 60 community schools as well as eight health centres. There are three Congregations of Sisters: the Holy Spirit Sisters in Madang, Manam, Mugil, Megiar and Bogia to name but a few and they now have many local vocations; the Order of Sisters of St Therese, started by Bishop Noser for local girls, has many members; and the Missionaries of Charity who have a convent in town.

On 10 March 1994, Archbishop Benedict welcomed to Madang four members of the Missionaries of Charity. Their order, established by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, had now more than 3,000 members around the world and is still growing in India, the Philippines, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Rome. The four sisters who arrived were Sr. M. Christopher, the superior who had worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta and had also worked in Port Moresby; Sister M Joita who joined the order in 1979 in India and had worked in Hanuabada, Sr. M. Samantha who joined in 1977 and worked in Kerema and Port Moresby and Sr M. Allan who had worked in Mekeo as well as Port Moresby. They have a convent near the Yomba Church. Two of them Sisters Christopher and Joita, worked

Meeting with the four Missionaries of Charity, who had recently arrived in Madang.

with the little children in the squatter villages. They knew the poor and the lonely living on their own and their cheerful disposition spills over into the village as their white saris and blue stripes become sullied in the mud. A few years later the government bulldozed all these squatter settlements in an effort to reduce the crime rate in town. People were encouraged to return to their own Provinces or villages.

On Friday 25 March 1994, Archbishop Benedict stayed at the Halopa Mission Centre for a confirmation ceremony and students came from many of the outstations for the service. The *singsing* group beat the *kundu* drums. The sponsors and the children were all dressed in traditional dress to welcome the Holy Spirit. The packed church was beautifully decorated for the ceremony. The grade 6 children put on a dance when bringing the wine and bread to the altar. Afterwards the students who had been confirmed lined up in procession behind the Archbishop and went to the Father's house where they were presented with a crown of leaves. Fr Krause was thanked for his part in the ceremony. Everywhere during the confirmation ceremonies these processions and dancing were part of the day and they drew large crowds. Benedict realised that this is what the people wanted. In fact he, himself grew to expect it. If he was due for a confirmation ceremony and there was no preparation, archways or decorations he would ask why. It was not for him but for the Holy Spirit that he wanted this to happen.

Life in Madang was a very busy one for Bishop Benedict but he did his work with gusto. He made sure he balanced his life with prayer, exercise, good food and work. He could swim in Peter Barter's pool at the Madang Resort Hotel in the afternoons; meals were provided by the cheerful kitchen staff in the central dining room; secretaries did his paper work and Brother Theo had a well organised office for planning and financial affairs. For security reasons, a high security fence and manned security gates surround the Madang mission compound. Inside are blocks of buildings - for accommodation, offices, kitchen and laundry. Some priests on nearby outside stations preferred to live in the mission compound for safety and for the accommodation. In the evenings the Bishop walked the perimeter of the mission on the inside for exercise while thumbing through his rosary. It was a fitting end to busy days.

Overall the Church throughout Papua New Guinea is a well-run organisation showing that things done efficiently and money spent wisely bring results. Well run offices, machines that work and a communication network to the out stations means that morale is usually high and the atmosphere pleasant. The Church has not been through the trauma of corruption that the National Government has been through and, in times of crisis, the government has come to rely on its services. The church plays an important role in the social as well as religious aspect of the people. It has a stabilising effect and has proved a pivot for the lives of the people.

Archbishop Benedict:

> The people in the church use *singsings* and traditional cultural ideas in the church services. It is happening everywhere in Papua New Guinea - it is called adaptation, using traditions in the ceremonies. It makes the church more meaningful to their

lives. At Riwo the people planned a big celebration for Corpus Christi with a procession in the canoes to be filmed by a T.V. crew. This year (1994) for the first time we had two ordinations to the diaconate in the last few months. Next year they will be ordained as priests. They have to learn to care for the people because up to now the people have been carrying them.

The local people need leadership. They will survive as they always have on fish and coconuts. Cargo cults are part of the problem and we don't encourage them, but you have to take it easy. Otherwise they will rebel. I tell them they have to work with betel nuts and chooks. It comes from the ground up. Asking the bishop or the priest for money is not the answer but hard work. You can't get things sitting around. The ground is there and you must work it. In Bereina the people worked and got nice houses and had their own generators just through hard work. But it is a dream world in the eyes of many people. The people could even fix the roads by getting a truck and buying gravel. My work is to bring the good news and of course all the building projects - the high schools and hospitals.

Our society is subsistence farming and it will continue that way for a long time to come. That is life you can't change it. Of course, their life is hard. I would like to establish a Don Bosco or technical school where the students could finish their grade ten and learn to be carpenter and build nice houses. You could target the drop-outs everywhere and the purpose would be to bring them back to the village where they could set up their own business.

In 1995, while Benedict To Varpin was Archbishop of Madang, the Pope came to Papua New Guinea to beatify Peter to Rot, a Tolai, who had been killed in the war by the Japanese for ministering to the Catholic people. He was a true martyr for the faith. "Air Niugini pilots brought the Pope from Manila where four million had met him. I met him in the Nunciate in Port Moresby and we dined with him the following day. After the beatification of Peter To Rot, the Pope was taken to Australia for the beatification of Mother Mary McKillop. There was something wrong with the plane and all the bishops blessed it before it left for Australia."

When the Madang Cathedral celebrated its 25th anniversary, it was cleaned and re-painted. People from the Lutheran, Anglican and United Church came with their choirs. The Church in Madang as in other parts of Papua New Guinea is ecumenical with meetings, prayer services and celebrations being held with members of other churches.

In 1996, the Madang Mission celebrated its centenary 1896 to 1996. Benedict wrote: "We are to celebrate 100 years of the Catholic Church on mainland New Guinea on 11 August. A lot of people are coming into Madang for our big Mass and celebrations, even people coming from overseas – Fr Henry Barlage, SVD, Superior General, from Rome, and Fr Jim Knight, SVD from Sydney." Having been Bishop in Bereina for the Papuan Centenary 1885 to 1985 he was now Archbishop of Madang for the celebrations. It seemed fitting because it was his grandfather, To Momulue who gave the land for the first ever mission in Papua New Guinea at Volavolo in New Britain.

Footnotes:

[1] In Madang, three missionaries and two others died near the Alexishafen airstrip on 6 August 1939.

[2] At top-up schools, students can do an extra two years study in their primary schools.

Celebration in the Utu Church.

Archbishop Benedict To Varpin in 1994.

Chapter 18

Around the Madang Province

"Quick Bishop, Look at the news."

'What's happened?"

"It's Rabaul. There's been an eruption!"

The television showed few images. They could hear talking but not many pictures.

"Poor, poor Rabaul!"

"My poor mother! My family!! We must contact them." Bishop Benedict was distraught.

Communication was difficult. Telephone lines were broken or engaged. Even the news bulletins on the radio were brief. They all said the same thing. There was a big eruption in Rabaul. Not just big, massive, and it looked as if the beautiful town of Rabaul, the jewel of the South Pacific was no more.

It was Monday, 19 September 1994, when both Tavurvur and Vulcan volcanoes erupted spewing tons of dust and ash on the town and it was big news around the world. Millions watched their TV screens as footage of the volcanic clouds rising over the town was shown. Then followed footage of the devastation of the town with its gardens, tree-lined streets, shops and trade stores. Thousands of people fled from their homes in the town, travelling anyway they could by foot, truck or boat. The village people cowered in their houses, which began to sag under the weight of the ash. When it got worse, some sought refuge in the Church, and others were rescued by ships along the coast near Nodup and taken to Kokopo to relative safety. Many were cared for and sheltered by the Vunapope mission where people gathered in the Cathedral praying fervently. It was like the eruption in 1937 all over again.

Bishop Benedict wanted to go to Rabaul immediately. "I contacted my doctor because I am an asthmatic but he said, 'You might try to save your mother but you will kill yourself'. So at first I did not go". Although there were many displaced Tolai communities after the eruption, the Tolais felt that Rabaul should not be abandoned as the beautiful town was always part of their identity. It was their spiritual place. The premier at the time, Sinai Brown, was sad at the loss of his provincial home. Similarly, the destruction caused by the natural phenomenon would have broken the heart and spirit of the Tolai, particularly the most immediately afflicted and displaced communities. In town most of the buildings along Mango Avenue and down to Chinatown were destroyed completely and covered in ash. One hotel proprietor saved his hotel by brushing the ash off the roof. The cathedral was damaged but not destroyed. Each evening, if communication was possible, Benedict contacted his family. He found out that Volavolo was all right although most of his family's

small plantation had been in the path of the ash and the trees hung limp like closed umbrellas. The new house he had built was the only one left undamaged in the village. It had withstood the weight of the ash.

Benedict caught a plane to Kavieng and from there went to Rabaul, taking clothes and other essential items for Archbishop Hesse. He found his village nearly deserted. There were *raskels* everywhere and they would have robbed the village houses but his relatives stayed. He found out that, when the eruption began, people packed the Volavolo Catholic Church, Lutherans Jehovahs and Catholic, just like in 1937 after the big eruption.

Benedict:

> The Catholics were in the Volavolo church saying the rosary. When the young Tolais saw the Protestants, they told them to get out, "We are praying the rosary to Mary our Mother. Christ gave her to us". These Catholics were proud of their religion. In this bad time people from every religion ran to the Catholic Church and said the rosary. In the good times they criticize Catholics for saying prayers to Mary. If they had gone to the Malaguna Church, they would have been destroyed as it was squashed flat but the Volavolo Church was not destroyed. Many houses were saved as they were far enough away from the eruption.

Sir Peter Barter went in his helicopter and rescued people from Matupit Island. The Vunapope Mission and hospital stepped in and provided the much-needed relief for the people. Benedict was interested to learn that the Bishop's palace on Namanula Hill had been destroyed. He was pleased it was gone as it was too ostentatious for a bishop in independent Papua New Guinea. Archbishop Vanderbilt had lived in it but when Fr Kiessler was the administrator, he did not live there. It had been rented out to some lawyers before the eruption and everything had been stolen. Now the buildings were gone as well.

During the week after the eruption, clouds of ash rose many miles into the atmosphere and were blown by the winds over the Madang coast. One result was bright red sunsets every night. Sir Peter returned in his helicopter with first hand news of the eruption. Peter To Rot, nephew of the famous Blessed Peter To Rot, along with the Churches and the Madang community sent many boats loaded with food and equipment for the victims of the eruption. Unfortunately, ten tonnes of aid was stolen in Rabaul and did not go to the care centres. Later the army was called in and took control in Rabaul and stopped the looting by the *raskels*.

After his short visit to Rabaul, Benedict bravely continued with his schedule in Madang. On Sunday 25 September, a week after the eruption, he said Sunday Mass as usual in the Cathedral and prayers were said for Rabaul. It was quite a moving occasion with much hymn singing in *Tok Pisin*. Many Tolai people came to the Mass the women wearing their colourful *meri* blouses with embroidered sleeves.

The launching of the new Barge, MV Ramu Ranger, was scheduled for later that day at the Madang Resort Hotel. The barge was to provide health services all around Madang,

the Ramu River and the Sepik. There were many members of parliament and councilors from different areas. Sir Peter Barter, the Member for Madang and Minister for Health was the host for the launching. The Malabo Theatre Group and Siar Dance group, which he sponsors, performed in a dance group as did the Bilia string band. Among guests to give speeches was the Administrator Wep Kanawi. The barge is a symbol of progress for the Madang Province. When Bishop Benedict blessed the barge, he sprinkled Holy Water all around, causing the photographers to fear for the cameras. The traditional bottle of champagne was smashed against the barge while it was clearing the wharf for its maiden cruise.

Maria Ziegler who has worked for the Catholic Mission for many years opened the mobile clinic. She headed the commissions in Peace and Justice, Women and Youth as well as representing the church on the hospital board. As she was soon to return to Germany, Bishop Benedict localised her jobs one at a time. He appointed Petronella Sampain to take over Peace and Justice and Women and Sister Bineta took over the Family Commission.

Bishop Benedict was very supportive of many other groups such as the Better World Movement, the Legion of Mary, Couples for Christ, St Vincent de Paul Centre and Antioch. Many of these groups wear their own colours sponsored by business people.

Visit to Bundi, September 1994

After the eruption in Rabaul, thick clouds continued to be blown towards the Madang Coast and the inland region. Even Bundi at the foothills of the Bismarck Range was not untouched. Bundi was Bishop Benedict's next point of call where he was ordaining Joseph Poga as a deacon. As I [the author] was still staying at the Mission Headquarters in Madang, I was invited to attend the ceremony.

It was interesting to see the extent of the Madang Province from the lowlands near the sea to the lower reaches of the Bismark Ranges. The Bundi airstrip was just visible through the thickening ash-clouds from the Rabaul eruption, but we managed a safe landing. The airstrip is one of the most dangerous in Papua New Guinea and was built in the 1950s using bullocks to flatten an area on the top of a ridge. Because other higher ridges surround it, the approach to the airstrip was difficult and the pilot had to land uphill. Because it was one-way strip, the plane was then turned for take off.

A crowd of school children were at the airstrip to greet their Archbishop. We were escorted to the vehicles with children singing their rain song, "We need rain to wash ourselves. Our gardens need water to grow". The area was experiencing a long drought.

Although the ash clouds marred the view during our visit, the mountain air was fresh and invigorating. Each afternoon, mist and cloud come up the valleys starkly silhouetting the trees along the edge of the station. Everywhere people walked down to collect water from the streams, returning up their village tracks with bamboo poles filled with water, their short stocky legs growing strong from the constant walking. The subsistence economy sustained them well and was supplemented with trade store food.

Joseph Poga flanked by his parents at the diaconate ceremony.

The Bundi Mission Station had been established in 1933 by Fr Schaefer, Fr Cranssen and Brother Antonius, and had now grown to a flourishing centre. Fr Ross and his party passed through Bundi in 1934 on their way to Mt Hagen, and I was keen to talk to the oldest people to see if they remembered this occasion. I saw an old man at the edge of the verandah with his head down and chatted to him for a while. Then I asked him eagerly, "Did you see Father Ross go past here when you were little?" He turned sightless eyes towards me, "*No missus, No, mi no lukim, ai belong mi I fas*" The poor man had been blind all his life, and I felt foolish for having asked him if he had seen anybody. He just sits on the verandah at the mission centre and Fr John helps him. Eventually, Rudolph Gandine Katekis, who was a small boy when Fr Ross and party passed through Bundi, was able to give some information about them. Many people thought they were spirits of dead ancestors.

The mission station is well ordered. Fr John, the Parish Priest has done a wonderful job there. The buildings are spaced around a central oval, used for ball games and plays put on for visitors, and we were no exception. Sadly parents were no longer revered as the protectors or curators of the culture. Sometimes they brought this on themselves by their behaviour. Sometimes the youth rebelled; their heads filled with new ideas of the modern world. There was a certain amount of breakdown in law and order. Not all people stay with the church and there is growing concern about smaller denominations which have

In Bundi for the diaconate ordination of Joseph Poga.

come into the area, fragmenting the parish and undermining the work of the mainline churches.

Before the diaconate service on the Sunday morning, the dancers' feet thumped the ground, with grass skirts and headdresses swaying to the beat of the drums. Yes, it was time to dance and sing, as another local Bundi man became a deacon. Then the Parish Priest and the Archbishop with his tall mitre joined in the procession with rows of altar boys dressed in red. They were preceded by two rows of the dancers who led the procession into the church and stood near the altar providing a very colourful background to the ceremony. Joseph Poga had a special seat built for himself on a litter and was carried into the church like a big chief. The Archbishop had reservations about this, but Joseph, flanked by his parents, looked very happy on this his special day. As a result of bringing the culture into the ceremony, hundreds of local people were attracted to it. That evening there was a very colourful *singsing* in the school hall followed by a great feast.

While we were in Bundi for those few days, the clouds and ash from the Rabaul volcanoes continued to billow into the sky and were carried across mainland New Guinea by the winds. By the time we were ready to leave there was a thick build up of clouds and ash over the airstrip and we began to worry. The pilot flew over but could not see the airstrip and he returned to Madang. Later he tried again and managed to land. As we were taking off Bishop Benedict blessed the plane and us. There were many dangerous moments as

the plane taxied along the airstrip and took off into the clouded valley: enshrouded ridges and mountains surrounded us. At any moment we could have crashed. The pilot climbed as high as possible and as quickly as possible and we were able to return safely to Madang. Thereafter, Bundi airstrip was closed to further traffic for many weeks.

Benedict:

> The government got millions from the European Union to build the road from Chimbu to Bundi but they have not started it yet. It is a slow process. They are sealing the road from north coast to Bogia depending on the money. There was a budget last year but they are waiting for the money. I go by plane to Josephstal. Once I took my car inland and got stuck and Peter Barter came and picked me up. There are plenty of roads but no money to maintain them. (Later on my car was brought back to Madang). They are grading the road from Walium to Madang. I was urging them on. I had the money for a new health centre and a big church and I had a truck to carry the materials so I was urging them to build the roads and airstrips.

Malala High School was the next appointment on Benedict's schedule for the sacrament of Confirmation. He invited his secretary and me to go with him. We drove along the Bogia Road, which was a wonderful stretch of highway recently finished with large overseas grants. On the way we called in to the convent at Alexishafen and the local sisters greeted us warmly and provided refreshments. They always enjoy visits from their Bishop.

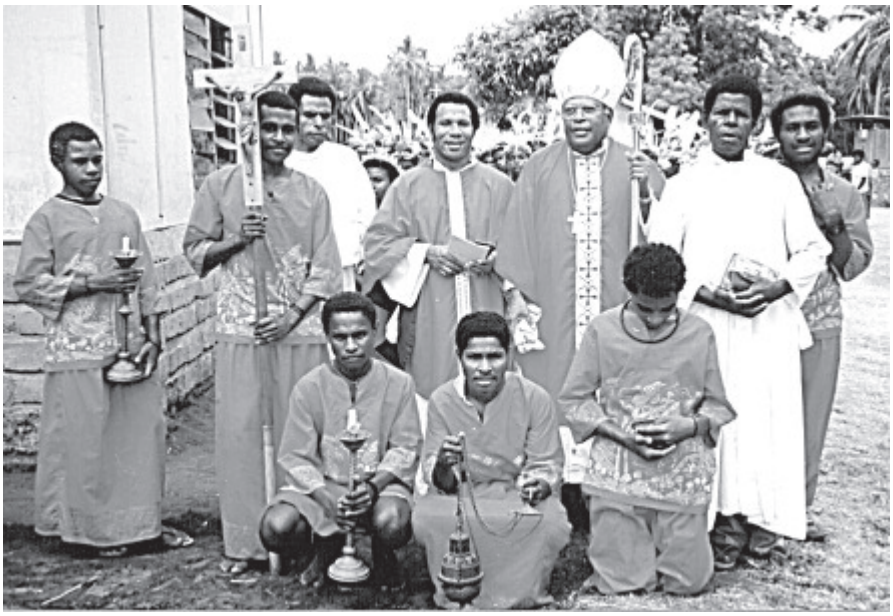
Moving on, Benedict visited some cousins living in a fine native house overlooking the bay. At last we arrived at Malala to be greeted by Sister Jane Frances, long-time teacher at and principal of the school. Her work in the education field was legendary and she was

Confirmation class at Ulangan, 1990s.

one of the main movers to introduce co-education to the High School. There were 580 boarders by 1993. The school often takes high honours for its results in the Grade 12 exams with many students going on to Universities in Madang, Lae or Port Moresby.

Those accompanying Bishop Benedict had no idea of the anguish that he was experiencing after the eruption. His mind had been in turmoil. He had been trying so hard to put on a brave face but that afternoon he broke down from all the stress and worry about his people, his family and the volcano. “I have tried so hard to smile and be happy but my heart is in turmoil.” He cried, “My poor mother, my poor family”. For a long time that afternoon, a group of us talked him through his grief and listened to his story over a beer. He was due to meet Sister Jane and other members of the staff for dinner and we were worried if he would make it. But it appeared as if the temporary emotional breakdown and talk had benefited him. That evening he acted as if nothing was wrong and the next day at the confirmation service he strode into the church looking regal all through the ceremony as he confirmed the students one by one. We could only admire the strength of the man as he carried out his duties. And he would be saying to himself, “Thy will be Done”.

On Saturday afternoon, 15 October 1994, we drove out to Utu Village with Archbishop Benedict. The road was long and dusty and full of potholes but I had a great feeling of expectation. I had never been to Utu and once again I was not prepared for the reception. There was a dance group to meet their Bishop.



Church group at Utu.

The dancers massed around Bishop Benedict and accompanied him to his house. Later, during the speeches, the Bishop introduced me as part of his family - only I was the wrong colour. He went into all the details of how I had taught him Latin and helped him. The crowd clapped and clapped and about two hundred of them wanted to shake my hand. I felt like the queen and solemnly shook each hand. We talked and talked about their culture that was being lost and the languages too that were dying out because of inter marriage. We talked until it grew dark and then went to have a meal. The house which two lay missionaries, Claire and Elizabeth, share is quite a comfortable cottage complete with cat and flower garden. That night the cows and pigs made an unholy row snuffling and chewing the grass. Of course the grass near the mission is a nice green and soft to eat at night. I thought it was only pigs until one of them mooed.

The confirmation ceremony was held in the church which was beautifully decorated for the occasion. Pawpaws had strands of flowers stuck into them and the red and yellow fruits from the bush were twined in garlands and looped over archways because today was the day to celebrate. Their Archbishop had come to confirm their children. Again there were the *singsing* groups and the procession into the church.

Chris, the principal of the Utu School, mentioned that the local languages were dying out and that if you said a word in *Tok Pisin* and asked the children to say it in their own language often they cannot. They used to carve the *garamut* and *kundu* drums here but, in the time that he had been there, he had not seen a *garamut*. Culture in Utu is not dead, but there is no encouragement.

Kayan, on the Ramu

Our next trip was to Kayan Parish on the Ramu River on 20 to 24 October 1994. The Ramu River had always sounded fascinating. The culture was similar to that of the Sepik River people and there were trading connections between them going back hundreds of years. These river people were famous carvers and artists and often came to Madang to sell their products at the market. Again I had the privilege of accompanying the Archbishop and his party to a large confirmation ceremony. I was to learn that the people really appreciate the church these days and use cultural items in the ceremonies. The vessels used on the altar were carved wooden chalices. This had been the trend for a long time in churches everywhere. Fr Franke's church on Matupit was full of symbols made from the local culture.

The day we set out for the Ramu River, we left Madang at 9.30am and finally arrived at our destination, the Kayan Mission Centre, at 6.00pm. We drove along the North Coast Road under the coconuts, past Malala and Bogia and then turned off down a very bumpy track edged with high grasses as high as the roof of the 4WD vehicle, a real cowboy road. The bushes were quite high in the middle of the track which was itself edged with thick impenetrable kunai grass. Fr Joe Yakava was in the vehicle ahead so he could guide us as well as protect us against *raskel* attack.

At one stage, there was this little dog trotting along the track in front. Ben beeped his horn, but the dog did not move out of the way just kept trotting along his track, finding it too difficult to diverge into the thick kunai grass. Again there were toots, louder and longer. Then a final big blast. This time Father Joe and his friends stopped their car and came running back. They thought *raskels* were attacking us.

"What's wrong, what's wrong?"they asked.

"Oh! Only that blooming dog. It won't get off the road."

Just a little bit further down, Fr Joe had his turn with a mother hen and her chickens. We got to Damur Village and what a welcome! The people met us with garlands, which they put around our necks and a band welcomed us. Then it was on to Gamai Village where again we had more garlands and decorated archways and we were escorted into the village where there was a feast set out for us. I was the only European within miles but at no stage did I feel intimidated. The people were caring and cheerful and all wanted to shake hands with us.

Six of us sat around a table in the middle of the village square and ate fish with rice and gravy over the top. Of course there was the inevitable *yams* and *kaukau*, which were good in small quantities. The sights and sounds of the day were extraordinary, and the people were so excited that their Archbishop had come and he was one of them. Many people gathered in a *hausboi* nearby dangling their legs, playing guitars and singing. Ben introduced me as his sister or half sister/wrong colour and spoke of our close family ties again. They wanted to shake hands with us all and we obliged, having never had such a fuss made of us. We left the car at Gamai

We were then sung down to two canoes tied together for stability. Planks laid across provided support for the Bishop's chair garlanded with more shredded fronds. The Ramu canoes are very swift with pointed wooden crocodile heads and no outrigger. While we were gliding along a single canoe passed us. With fast strokes the paddler steered through the water standing up with great poise. As it was passing us I called out "let's have a race" and all our paddlers got into action and we flew fast ahead for a while, but our heavier load soon told and we slacked off. Then I heard about a group of sisters on a canoe which had turned over at that very spot. There were probably crocodiles lurking beneath us.

Our double canoe was paddled past many lagoons and inlets. I sat towards the front and the bags were stacked around only inches above the water. When we arrived at the village, a choir was waiting at the top of the riverbank and sang a song of welcome to their Archbishop with more garlands, more speeches and more hand shaking. Then the string band played and suddenly down the track came another *singsing* group surrounding us with their swirling skirts, stomping feet and bobbing chest decorations.

The Bishop's chair was moved to the truck and tied on there. I sat in the front next to the driver. Bishop Benedict was feted with the *singsing* group all the way through the village. It was growing dark by now and the drumming, the dust and the darkness could have been

Choir group greet the Archbishop at Kayan.

scary, what with the tall dark village houses now appearing on either side of the truck and the hundreds of people streaming past, and peering in. But it was all great fun, one to be remembered for a long time.

Next day, I attended the confirmation ceremony in the village church. I noticed how the people enjoy the pomp and ceremony of the *singsing* and the procession into church and then how Archbishop Benedict did his part with his red robes, his shepherd's crook and his red mitre, which towered over the people. The ceremonies show how the church has developed since Independence with processions of *singsing* groups preceding the altar boys and the Bishop into the Church.

Afterwards, in the presbytery there were serious discussions about issues in the church and problems faced. There were other religions creeping in, leading sometimes to divisions between villages. Not everyone supported the church and there is a breakdown of law and order. These talks are a chance to bring things out in the open and discuss them. The results of these discussions will be mulled over in the village for weeks to come. Kayan has about 800 people in its parish and Bosman, across the river, has about 1,800.

Much to my embarrassment, the parish priest moved out to the catechist's house so I could use his room in the priest's house but it has been such a wonderful experience I

wouldn't have swapped it for anything. The sights and sounds of today were extraordinary; garlands for their Archbishop, archways of garlands of flowers and drapes of shredded fronds. There were five girls from the Legion of Mary from Bosman so that group must be found in many of the villages.

I got up early and went for a walk to the beach. From there, there is a distant view of Manam Island. So even though we had travelled a long way north towards Bogia and taken an inland road and travelled along a river, we end up on the beach further around the coast. Afterwards, I went for a walk to the village and met Caroline who introduced me around and took me to her house. She gave me pawpaws and bananas and I gave her buns from Madang. There is a long house in the village for extended families with an enormous drum in the shelter at one end (Mennis, 2006: 288).

This lower Ramu area has a lot going for it. The scenery is superb and there are endless lagoons to paddle around in. The water is clear and smooth and full of fish. There are mangrove trees with large roots fingering into the mud. Most areas are too low and swampy for houses and gardens so villages are few and far between. The people live by fishing, gardening, coconut plantations and they raise pigs and fowls.

Evidence of their culture is still everywhere from the fishing traps to their large *garamut* drums which are colourfully decorated. As they are near the sea, the Kayan people have the advantages of swimming in the sea and being able to paddle canoes and fish in the lagoons. However, there are crocodiles everywhere in all PNG rivers and stories abound of crocodiles taking dogs and other animals.

Sing sing *group at Halopa Village.*

Pope John Paul ll with Archbishop Benedict during an Ad Limina *visit*.

Chapter 19

Overseas Visits by Benedict To Varpin

Benedict to Varpin was dressed in the black and scarlet robes of an Archbishop, standing in the crowd in St Peter's Square in Rome, surrounded by the grand columns, the semi-circular walls of the Square on top of which were statues of great men of the church. They were waiting for Pope John Paul II to arrive. Archbishop Benedict joined some people at the ropes and excitedly began a conversation with those nearest him. He would have been quite happy to stay there but his vestments gave him away. Seeing his Archbishop's robes the people encouraged him to go up. One said in English, "Go on Bishop. You belong with them. Quick the Pope is coming soon".

Who was he to take his place amongst these prelates?

He remembered the barefoot village boy he had once been in Papua New Guinea: playing marbles with his friends in the village; fishing with his uncles in canoes, or trudging behind his parents on their way to the market in Rabaul. His mother carrying a large bilum from her head bent over under the load of vegetables. His people were the Tolai. Handsome people with round faces, white teeth and frizzy curly hair. They were quick to laugh and just as quickly could be roused to fight, coming as they did from a long line of warriors. In 1883, his grandfather had seen first Sacred Heart Missionaries arrive at Volavolo. After an initial confrontation, the Tolai people had welcomed them and cared for them. Now over a century later, Benedict had risen through the ranks of being priest in 1971, then Bishop of Bereina in 1980 and now Archbishop of Madang. It had been worth all his years of study, his years on isolated mission stations fulfilling his duties as a parish priest helping people and now he was able to help them at this high level. He felt a great feeling of elation.

In Rome just that morning he had been talking with Fr Karl-Maria Brand whom he had known in West New Britain.

"Bishop Ben you must go and see the Pope!" Fr Karl-Maria insisted.

"Oh, no! I have no time."

"Oh yes you have! Get dressed up in your robes. You can get a taxi", he argued.

"But my clothes aren't ready!"

"Give them here I'll have them ironed!"

So Benedict had put on his Archbishop's robes and the taxi took him to the Vatican. He got the taxi number so he could ring it again. No good to be lost in this big city. Here he was now in the crowd waiting and wondering what to do. And they were urging him to go up and wait on the seats allotted for the bishops and archbishops. At this moment, a Swiss

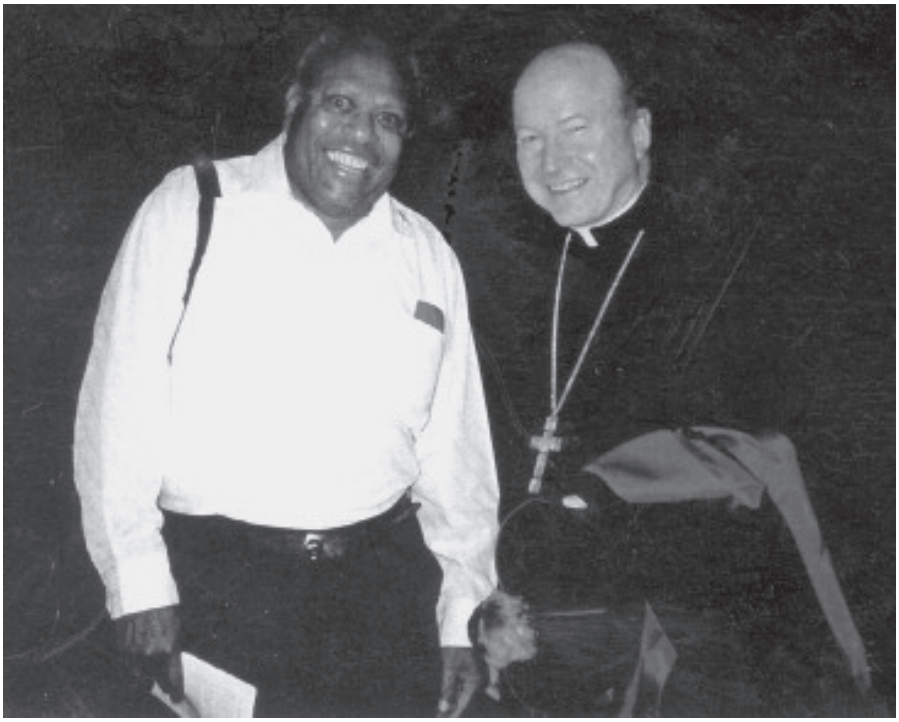
Guard approached him with his colourful striped uniform and feathered headdress and motioned him to follow. Nervously he got under the rope and started to climb the stairs. There were rows of empty seats for the bishops and cardinals. He sat by himself until another bishop came in an hour before the Pope was due. They had no language in common except a little Latin and broken English. Then some bishops from Iraq came and they knew English so he talked to them. About this time many others arrived: bishops, archbishops and cardinals dressed in various flowing robes fluttering in the breeze. He watched the faces of the bishops around him, they too were excited to be here at St Peters at the Vatican, the Mother House for all Catholics on earth. Then Pope John Paul II arrived to the roars of the thousands of people. It was a moving experience to be so near the Pope and to concelebrate Mass with him. Bishop Benedict had met him before in Papua New Guinea but now he was seeing him in his own Church, St Peter's, the largest Church in the world. Afterwards, Benedict spoke to the other bishops and then rang his friend, the taxi driver, to take him back to his lodging. He was glad he had found time to go to the Vatican.

Before being at the Vatican, Benedict had attended a meeting of the World Council of Churches at Geneva near the United Nations building. This was the main purpose of his overseas trip. He was only an observer as the Catholic Church was still not a full member. Because he had been involved with ecumenism in Papua New Guinea, he was seen as the right man for the job.

Benedict recalled 1988:

> A United Church Minister and I went from Papua New Guinea to the meeting of the World Council of Churches. They have a big building there with a dome similar to St Peter's. There were representatives from many Christian churches around the world including Lutheran, Anglican and United Churches.
>
> I said Mass early in the Hotel and ate breakfast in my room at 6.30. There were many meetings discussing fraternity and cooperation for the common good and not fighting as in the past. I spent a lot of time with the United Church pastor I had come with.
>
> After being in Geneva, I wanted to go to Rome to get more money for the apartments for the Bereina Mission. I flew to Paris and visited the Cure D'Ars Church. Then I went to the MSC Provincial Office in France and asked if they could organise a visa for me to go to Rome as I wanted to see some of the PNG students there. They were able to assist me and I took a train to Rome where I saw the students and, of course, the Pope.

While in Italy, he was keen to find out about his namesake, St Benedict, a 6th century monk, who had studied in Rome. He then lived as a hermit at Subiaco in a cave above the River Anio. St. Benedict became renowned for his holiness and founded a community of monks. After a time he moved to Monte Cassino, where he started the first Benedictine monastery. Bishop Benedict said, "Near Rome I visited Subiaco and climbed up the steep stairs. I already had a problem with my knees so it was painful. On another occasion I



Two Archbishops, Benedict To Varpin and John Bathersby, in Brisbane.

took a bus to Monte Cassino also started by St Benedict. I wanted to see it for myself, as he was my namesake". This devotion to St Benedict had an effect on his ministry in Madang. St Benedict had used the motto *laborare et orare* which means to work and pray or even to work is to pray. Bishop Benedict used this same motto for an agricultural school he opened and named St Benedict's Agricultural School.

At the MSC Generalate in Rome, Fr Cuskelly encouraged Bishop Benedict to approach the Pontifical Mission Society for more financial support. Benedict put his proposal to buy another lot of real estate as an investment for the Bereina mission. He got no money while he was there but, when he returned to Papua New Guinea, he got a loan of three million from the bank. His dream of building the third stage of units in Port Moresby as an ongoing source of revenue for the Bereina Diocese was now possible. These units continue to bring in a continual flow of money for the Bereina diocese. Furthermore the loan was soon paid off.

In 1987, Benedict had gone to Fiji to prepare the program for a Bishops conference where they met Cardinal Thom from Wellington, New Zealand, and two other bishops. He remembered, "Afterwards we visited the Island of Futuna (New Hebrides) where St Peter

Benedict meets up with Brother Jim Gorman, who once taught him at Vuvu School in Rabaul.

Chanel was murdered. A lady came up and spoke in *pidgin* to me and said, quite wrongly, "You are from Vanuatu. Here is a *lei* for you", as she put it around my neck. It was interesting for Benedict to learn about St Peter Chanel, priest and Martyr of the South Seas. Peter was born in 1803 in France and, after his ordination, he was appointed to a poor parish and completely revitalized it. However, he wanted to be a missionary and joined the Marists who sent him to the newly acquired mission field of New Hebrides. Here Peter fell out with the chief when the chief's son wanted to convert to Christianity. Peter was clubbed to death on 28 April 1841. Within five months the whole population was converted. Like Peter To Rot, Peter Chanel had given his life for the people.

Another country Bishop Benedict visited several times was Korea where the SVD fathers looked after him. Amazingly, Korea was probably the only country not converted to Christianity by foreign missionaries and now has 4.5 million Catholics. Some Korean literati read and studied books on Catholicism and tried to practice it by themselves 200 years ago. One of them, Yi Seung-Hun, went to Beijing to be baptized and on his return to Korea he founded a Christian community. The newly born Church, seeking communion with the universal Church, was in contact with the Vicar Apostolic of Beijing. During the persecutions that followed, about 10,000 of the faithful died as martyrs. Among them were the 103 martyrs whom the Pope canonized on 6 May 1984. This was the highest number of people to be canonized outside of the Vatican in Church history.

There were several Korean missionaries in the Madang Province and Benedict had a high opinion of them as they were strong priests. Furthermore, the Korean people are very generous, helping financially with buildings, vehicles and seminaries to train local priests. Once a Korean Bishop came to Madang to visit the Korean priests and meet with Archbishop Benedict. It was a very formal occasion. They went to dinner at the hotel and Benedict had to be very polite the whole time. Who should come in but his friend, Sir Peter Barter, with some guests? Normally, Benedict would have been happy to join them but he had to restrain himself and be polite. He found it a bit difficult and realised that being an Archbishop was not always easy.

Over the years, Bishop Benedict made several visits to Australia for health reasons. In 1991, he had an operation for a thyroid problem. Although he recovered well enough, these problems posed an ongoing problem:

> I was in the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Sydney when I had to have an operation and a Jesuit priest came along and gave me the last rites. He said, "Bishop, don't worry. This is a regulation. This will help you recover". This was the first time I had been given the last rites. If I hadn't come down that time I would have been finished. My thyroid was bad. They renewed my visa so I was there for six months altogether. The operation took about 12 hours.
>
> The doctor said, "Bishop, do you know how to pray?"
>
> "Yes I do."
>
> "Well you better pray now because out of every one hundred patients, two can die from this operation."
>
> Everybody was praying for me: in Rabaul, in my former parish at Bereina and in Madang. I was so thin.

In 1994, Bishop Benedict attended the Fatima Crusade in Mexico. There was opposition to the group because they believed, among other things, that the secrets of Fatima had not been revealed altogether. There was pressure on him not to attend it but he could see the good it was doing. Attending these conferences was one of the most controversial things he did. But if he thought it was right he would go ahead whatever the opposition. He had done it before so why not now? Benedict was only an observer, but he saw it as an opportunity to pray particularly to Our Lady of Fatima.

When questioned about going to Mexico he replied:

> Two years ago, in 1992, there was a big meeting in Fatima, but I was unable to go. I told them we had troubles and could not afford the sponsorship - there was a landslide, drought and volcanic eruption on Manam Island. When in Bereina, I used to receive a pamphlet from Canada about World Peace. I prayed with them but did nothing. When I came to Madang, I made up my mind to join them. The first time was when I went to Mexico in 1994. Patricia, my former secretary, saw me in California and I met up with retired bishops and African bishops, but no Mexican bishops. There was a big meeting and praying in an expensive hotel. There are five million adherents around the world and it has a powerful media.

In 1996, Archbishop Benedict opened the Fatima Congress in Rome. There was further opposition to his attending this congress, but he prayed and decided it was the right thing to do. He addressed a large gathering of bishops, priests, sisters and laity:

> The theme of our Congress *Fatima 2000* is World Peace and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. First of all, I would like to welcome you all. I joined the group two years ago,

during that lovely week in Mexico. It was my first time to be in Mexico in 1994, but I have been in Rome quite a few times. It is my fifth time now in Rome.

We have been talking about the Immaculate Heart of Mary for a number of years since I joined this association. You know from history that Our Lady appeared to three innocent children in Fatima, and I hope to go there one day. The Mother of God reminds us that she raised a family: a family called the Holy Family; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and it is her concern that we must form our life according to the Holy Family.

I would like to say something about my country, because, in talking with a number of you, you don't know where Papua New Guinea is. If you look at the map you'd be surprised to see a big island lying above Australia to the North. It is a big island cut into two halves, almost equal in size, and taken together it is more than 800,000 square kilometres. These two halves form the second largest island in the world. Half of the island has been taken over by Indonesia and the other half is the independent State of Papua New Guinea, which is where I come from.

And you can be sure that I love my country, in spite of many problems, like anywhere in the world; there is corruption and bribery. Some government ministers do not have the best interests of their country at heart. With you, I pray for my country and for your country. According to recent statistics, the population of my country is about 4,000,000. And there are over 800 languages. Imagine that, and I only know a few of these languages. Going back to the theme of this conference, *Fatima 2000*, World Peace and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I want you to know that I am with you in heart and spirit in spite of my many difficulties trying to get here.

We are here to pray for peace. We come from many different countries - bishops, priests, brothers, sisters and our very dear people, the lay people. They are the ones we are here to serve and that is why I became a priest and bishop: to serve the people and families. The family is the basic structure of any society in the world today. And that is my motto, as a priest and a bishop of families. They are the ones we are working for. For peace in the world, including the country of Papua New Guinea.

It is only through the intercession of Our Lady that peace can be obtained and maintained and consolidated in this broken world. Whether you agree with me or not, I have been travelling around the world and I can tell you the world is going down, towards I don't know where. Somebody said yesterday, "don't be afraid of death, but be afraid of hell". Plainly there is no secret about it. So we are now on a journey towards 2000, into the 21st century.

This morning, we started the conference with the Rosary which is the work of Our Lady. She has appeared in many places and asked us to pray the Rosary every day. We must also make sacrifices and do penance because Christ said to drive away evil and evil influences in the world, can be done only by prayer, penance and sacrifices. In conclusion, it is the very foundation of the gathering here to pray for peace and the means to overcome all the difficulties we are facing in the world today. We are only

the instruments. God and Our Lady are using us so we can bring peace to the world and to make the world a better world to live in. May this *Fatima 2000* in Rome be an instrument in creating peace in the world, in conjunction with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, May God bless you all.

Benedict To Varpin wrote to me about this conference in a letter dated 9 January 1997:

Dear Mary,

I was in Europe and the U.S. for five weeks. I left here on the 15 November 1996 to my destination, Rome. We had this Conference *Fatima 2000*. There was a big group this time, 300 participants, bishops, priests, brothers, sisters and lay people coming from all corners of the world. We rented a hotel and used it for a week. I met all my friends again. One day, there was a general audience with the Pope, where some bishops, many priests, sisters, thousands packed the hall, listening to the Pope speaking to them in their own language (6 or 7 languages). After this, the bishops were able to talk to the Pope for at least 3 or 4 minutes. I had my turn talking to his Holiness, conveying greetings from the people of the Archdiocese of Madang. And in turn he gave back his blessing and greetings to the people of Madang. I was happy to meet my boss in the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II.

After the Conference, I went to spend a few day in the mother house of the Divine Word missionaries, their Generalate, to give them the season's greetings, and to talk about projects, problems which you know about, as well as I do. I was able to contact two religious orders in the Generalate, the Holy Spirit sisters and the Holy Family fathers. I also met the Salesians and invited them to work in the Archdiocese of Madang. From there, I went to Germany, staying there for five days, meeting many missionaries and lay missionaries. Then on to US for two weeks. I had a real holiday, nice warm weather; Europe was cold with ice and snow. California is nice even in winter. I visited the Cardinal in Los Angeles, in his office, some other bishops, priests and lay missionaries who previously worked in PNG, especially Madang and Rabaul. Finally from there I touched down in Tokyo for a few hours and then home to Madang.

Sincerely Yours,

Benedict To Varpin.

While overseas, Archbishop Benedict visited old missionaries from many countries, including Germany, Holland, Italy and the United States, expressing his gratitude for their years of hard work in Papua New Guinea. At Techny, near Chicago, many retired missionaries from Madang, in their turn, expressed delight in meeting him as the first local man to take the Bishop's seat in their old area.

Every few years, bishops make *ad limina* visits to Rome. These visits vary in tone from business meetings to deeply symbolic prayers emphasizing the bishops' unity with the Pope who liked to remind the bishops that in coming to Rome they were coming to the tombs of the Apostles and he greeted them as "successors of the Apostles".

Benedict met the Pope on several of these occasions and they had enjoyed many a talk together. Bishop Benedict was not overawed by the Pope who was pleased to talk to someone who treated him as an ordinary person. In fact, the first time he was ushered in Benedict was so taken with the artwork on the walls that the photographer had to bring his attention back so that he could get a photograph of him looking at the Pope. "Oh sorry, sorry", he said, "The paintings are so beautiful!" They both laughed at the situation and got down to serious discussion. Each bishop was given time alone with the Pope to discuss the situation of his own diocese. Then, a few other bishops would join the Pope for a meal and informal discussion.

At one of these meetings with the Bishops of Oceania, concerns were raised about increasing violence and division in their societies. The Pope responded that violence, "makes it difficult to shape a society based on the notion and practice of the common good". The effect of corruption in society was also mentioned as another type of violence, "spiritual violence in the divisiveness found in the religious sects which flourish in times of hardship and which feed off people's expectations and fears".

The Pope also referred to a breakdown in family life as the cause a lot of disintegration in society. Then he concluded that, "What Christ wants for Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands is true strength and true victory, the victory of grace over sin". As part of the solution, the Pope said what was needed were: a strong education system with good teachers; good preparation for marriage; the institutions of the Catholic school and parish remain fundamental; the importance of the family as the basis of a strong society and the source of more vocations for the Church.

For the training of priests, he stressed the importance of a good education in seminaries to prepare local priests to take over from the dwindling numbers of expatriate priests. He noted, "It is especially required where elements in popular culture make it more difficult to sustain a lifelong commitment to the celibate life". This last point was made because, according to Bishop Benedict in the lead up to this *ad limina* visit, there had been many questions made by the bishops about celibacy as seen in the Pacific Islands. One of the points was that, to be a man of any importance there, he had to be the head of a family. It was difficult for the local priest to remain celibate in a village where marriage was so important in the culture. The Pope, while appreciating their point of view, reiterated the church's stand on celibacy.

Archbishop Benedict made a visit to Brisbane in October 1996 on his way home from this *Ad Limina* visit to Rome. On Sunday, during his visit he experienced a very multi-racial day. It began when he celebrated an International Day Mass at St Dympna's, Aspley with Father Peter Luton. In the evening, he attended an open air concert with dances performed from places all around the world. It was great to see colourful attire and hear the different music. As he left the concert at the River Stage, there were throngs of people and suddenly a young girl in the crowd called excitedly, "Uncle Bishop! Uncle Bishop! Remember me?". "Yes, of course", smiled Archbishop Benedict, "Your family helped me in Bereina". The young girl's family had often cooked meals for him at the weekend over the years he had been there. In 1996, he also visited the Third Order of Franciscans at Kedron whose

Seminarians at Kap with Archbishop Benedict in the 1990s.

members send regular donations to the PNG Church. Benedict had lunch with the friars at the Kedron Franciscan Friary and many of those he lunched with had been to the Aitape mission stations and were able to talk and joke in *Tok Pisin.*

Bishop Benedict always liked a good joke. He recalled his friend, John Chaney, a car mechanic in Rabaul. He was a mixed race man who lived near the Rabaul Cathedral and, whenever he called at the presbytery to fix the cars, he would invite Fr Benedict down to the pub. "Ok, time for a beer now." They would sit there quite relaxed while John poured out all his worries to his priest friend. It was like a confession in the pub really. Benedict often had to leave early, as he had to prepare his sermons. He hadn't seen John for years but ran into him in Brisbane one day at the Hamilton Parish during the PNG Mass with Father Liam. "I was happy to see him again. We were shouting with laughter so loudly about all those old times that Fr Liam came to see what the noise was about."

Back home in Madang, Archbishop Benedict carried on his work for another four years but after this he knew he would soon have to retire. He could feel it in his bones, when he had to drive over rough roads or even squeeze into a helicopter. He would be 65 in 2001 and he had already told the Pope he would like to retire for health reasons. At first, the Pope had chided him gently, "You are younger than me!" but Pope John Paul knew the stress of the job was getting to Benedict. His asthma had not improved and other health problems loomed.

Benedict went one last time to Halopa where his good friend Fr Joe was now the Parish Priest. Halopa is just near Alexishafen but up a steep hill. The road had been good but now it was shocking because of lack of maintenance and only 4WD cars could make it.

He complained:

> That is a problem everywhere in Papua New Guinea. The politicians got money for roads, which they build, but there is no maintenance. Even bitumen roads are not kept up. In Halopa there is a nice school with a view looking over the ocean. I used to go there often but now the road is wrecked. I asked Peter Barter if he could take me up by helicopter but I was squashed in the helicopter. When I saw the doctor about my health problems he told me to forget about rough roads and helicopters and speedboats. It was at this time that I was thinking of retiring.

One of the last places Benedict visited before leaving Madang was his old Alma Mater, the Seminary at Kap where he had done his minor seminary studies, when the SVDs ran it. Over his years as Archbishop, he had attended many ceremonies there including confirmations and special feast days of St Francis. When he was retiring they had a special Mass and dinner for him.

Recent news of the Kap Junior Seminary in 2007 is very heartening. It celebrated its 40th year as a minor seminary educating men in the final years of High School as well as the early years of seminary training. It is now a Preparatory Seminary and from now on will only take students who have completed Grade 12 to prepare them for the major seminaries in Port Moresby.

Men come from 12 dioceses in the mainland of PNG to Kap. The first year of the new program focuses on English and religious studies, while the second year is a spiritual year, helping the students to deepen their relationship with God. In 2007, there were 29 students in the Spiritual Year and 12 students in the first year. Vocations to the Church are still strong.

Archbishop Benedict retired on 24 July 2001 on his 65th birthday and returned to New Britain. The next Archbishop of Madang was Archbishop William Kurtz, a Polish Bishop previously in the Kundiawa Diocese. Originally from Upper Silesia, which is now part of Poland, he arrived in Papua New Guinea in 1967 and was Parish Priest of Mai for thirteen years and then pastor of Koge as well as being Bishop Caesar's vicar general in the Simbu.

Bishop Benedict said of his job as Archbishop of Madang:

> Being a bishop has been enjoyable but painful too. I think I've expected too much because we are all sinners. I expect them to be good people and on the reverse side they expect too much from me. Instead of being independent they expect the bishop to build them schools etc. Some young priests leave and marry but I tell them that I really like my job because I have thousands of sons and daughters but you have only two or three and now you have to educate them. Where will you get the money to sponsor them in schools? As a priest or a bishop you could have done more for your people, That is what I tell them.

Benedict was Archbishop of Madang from 1987 until 2001. He worked in the diocese for 14 years and deserves the title of "Builder Bishop", which the people gave him. He was a

builder of schools like St Benedict's and Bogia High as well as top-up schools. He also built up the standards in schools and health centres but was also very grateful for the work they did.

Benedict To Varpin's Family

His mother died in 2001, the year he retired. It was a pity that just when he was returning to Rabaul and could have devoted more time to her she passed away; he was heartbroken.

Ben likes the *Memorare* as his mother said it after Mass: that and the rosary.

> At home we said our prayers in *Kuanua* and my mother led the way. In spite of her age and all the children she had, she was the leader in the prayers after the evening meal when the plates had been cleared away. I was taught the *Memorare* when I was a little boy. We said it at Mass after the last blessing. I always say the rosary in English now and I falter if I say it in *Kuanua*. When I go home again, I will be fluent.

When his mother became increasingly weaker, Benedict gave her the last rites. He knew that after he left, his relatives would get the *tena papait*, the traditional healer, to help her. It was a guessing business, "Who made you sick and we must make the right magic to make you better".

Family group in Volavolo. Sister, mother, nephews, Brother-in-law and Benedict.

Celebrating his mother's 85th birthday. From left: brother-in-law; niece, Benedicta; mother, Angela; brother, Anton; and Benedict.

> My mother suffered a lot in her old age. She told me she would suffer to strengthen me and the young priests and sisters. They used to come and visit her because they knew she cared for them. When she died there was a big funeral.

His mother was 89 years old which was a good age. He remembered how she had taught him the faith. At the time of her requiem Mass and the burial there were only two priests there, Father Thom and himself. The missionaries were all at a big meeting at Vunapope. But afterwards many priests and sisters came to the gathering at the village. It was at his mother's burial that Benedict heard about his grandfather To Momulue who met the first missionaries and was ready to attack them but, when they sang the *Te Deum*, he was so attracted to their singing that he wanted them to stay. It had all happened at Volavolo, the parish which his family had been attached to for so many generations. His mother and father were both dead now. He was now the oldest in the family and was ready to shoulder his new responsibilities.

Some of his family still have the old beliefs in sorcery. When his nephew smashed up Benedict's car, he said the *tena agar* caused it because he was jealous. "You have a nice car and a nice house." Benedict doesn't believe in all these things but the people still do. Even some catechists believe in the *iniet*. They say, "You must believe in it to be a real Tolai otherwise you are a Sepik".

He remembered:

> Even To Paivu said he believed in it. He and Joseph wrote the Tolai dictionary and prayer book and missal. If you compare it with the Latin, it is full of old Tolai beliefs. Morning prayer should be "the marrow of your bones", if you say it in Tolai whereas I used to say it in English. To Paivu was a very holy man and had a philosophical approach. He said that the Germans think one way and we think this other way. The Tolai prayers are a bit like that. I do not believe in magic but some of the people do. There is a lot of mix-up in this. A *tena papait* makes healing medicine from roots and leaves. They are always asking the *tena papait* who killed that man? Or perhaps a woman is sick and she goes to the *tena papait* and he gives her some serenity. She feels someone is looking after her. She says, "they can rub my back or my legs with the leaves and I get some satisfaction".
>
> The Tolai people really support the church and collected the money themselves for the church. My mother used to charge people money for the cup-teas etc. Our people gave 800 kina to help repair the church. Fr Holz used the money to fix the new church at Volavolo. It was damaged during the 1994 eruption but the people collected money to repair it.

The *tena papait* uses natural healing with the right leaves and medicine which would be the equivalent of natural remedies in modern societies. There is the overtone of finding out "who caused the illness" as if it were a witch hunt. However modern science would agree that negative attitudes to a person, gossiping and slander might cause them to get stressed and sick. If this is remedied, the person may feel better. This would be the equivalent of a psychologist offering counselling. A *tena papait* may give serenity to their patient using some of these ancient remedies.

Whatever of these traditional beliefs they retained, the Tolai people continue to support the Church.

St Francis Xavier Cathedral survived the eruptions in 1994.The steep roof enabled the ash to fall off easily.

Chapter 20

Bernard and Ben: Two of God's Men

For their work for the people of Papua New Guinea, both these men were recognised by the government of Papua New Guinea and by the Queen. Reverend Fr Bernard Franke and Most Reverend Benedict To Varpin were both made Commanders of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE). Fr Franke received his award in the Queens' Birthday Honours List of 1978 and Benedict To Varpin in 2004, also in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. It was a high honour for both of them and well deserved.

Fr Bernard Franke and Archbishop Benedict To Varpin were both enthusiastic missionaries and devoted their lives to this end. Although each of them represented a different time in the church's history, their lives on the New Britain missions overlapped enough to be able to dovetail their stories together. Fr Franke, an expatriate, viewed the people and their culture from the outside looking in and Benedict To Varpin, a Tolai, viewed the culture from the inside looking out.

Born in June 1903, Fr Franke came from a large family, one of six children. The family was a unit unto themselves, meeting occasionally with relatives and part of the larger culture of their town of Warendorf in Germany. This was a traditional German family and his parents and siblings meant the world to young Bernard Franke. To give it all up and travel to the other side of the world was a big sacrifice. It was something he had to bear all his life. Another sacrifice he made was in the war time when he could have been evacuated but he stayed with his people of West New Britain. So often he thought he would die and he bravely prepared himself for this possibility. J.K. McCarthy concluded, "Fr Bernard Franke was ever a man to suffer in silence" (McCarthy, 1963: 210). It was a sacrifice he was prepared to make as a missionary. Unknown to him his mother was dying back in Germany at this time. So in a way the two biggest sacrifices he made came together at this time. He later returned to Germany on several occasions to visit his family but, in the end, he regarded Rabaul as home.

Bishop Benedict, born into a family in a New Guinea village, was part of a much larger social structure from birth. His uncles played a big part in his life and he was free to visit and live with them for extended periods of time. His uncle even enrolled him at school, unbeknown to his parents. Children in villages tended to play all day with other children their own age, returning home when they were hungry. He was initiated into the *Tubuan* Society at early age, and learnt all the rituals of the Tolai tribe and the responsibilities inherent in his initiation. In his own words, "I learnt what it was to be a man". These associations with relatives have been important and ongoing all through his life. His family lived near Volavolo and he was always in constant touch with them.

Both priests had some shared experiences. Both had worked in West New Britain where they had experienced the cargo cults in their outstations. Fr Franke had been in West New Britain from 1929 until the war; Benedict was there forty years later. Some things had

changed because of the World War in the interim but some things remained the same. Conversations in the Rabaul presbytery in the 1970s would have ranged over many subjects including the cargo cults, which were strong over that whole time. Fr Franke had experienced Batari first hand, having met him at Talasea in 1941; Fr Benedict had first hand experience in Malmal with Michael Koriam who was collecting money to bring the Americans out to build a bridge across Jacquinot Bay. Benedict agreed with Fr Franke that their ideas were absurd. But he tried to understand the cargo cultists, "They would see someone wearing nice clothes and wonder how come they got these things and we have not". In contrast, Benedict would tell his people: "The only way to get what you want is hard work. Dig the soil and grow your crops. That way you can live and if you do well you can afford to buy more things." He cited the Mekeos who had made a good life for themselves and built nice houses just through hard work.

In the 1960s and 70s, Fr Franke was worried about the Mataungans and was trying to calm them down. He would have seen the heart of the problem and would have prayed more than anything else: through his sermons and public speeches he would have imparted his feelings to the people. It could have made them more responsible in their approach as he lived in the thick of Mataungan territory at Matupit Island. His life could have been in danger on occasions and the police made raids on the island looking for suspects. Benedict, on the other hand, knew some of the leaders of the Mataungan Association and he had discussed their ideas at length with them. Although he didn't necessarily agree with them, he could see they had a few points. They were a nationalistic group ahead of their time with wanting independence. But ends don't always justify the means and in their effort to get attention, they did things that were unacceptable.

In the 1970s, Fr Benedict became Archbishop Hoehne's right-hand man as Vicar General and, as such, fought for the hospital at Vunapope, where both he and Fr Franke were at one time or another hospitalized:

> Bishop Hoehne rang me and said, "Some nasty people are trying to downgrade our Vunapope hospital and you must come and be a witness for me". I rushed to Vunapope and together we fought for the hospital. It was not downgraded. During the eruptions this hospital was used for victims of the eruptions. Whenever I got sick in Bereina or in Madang, I used to always go to Rabaul to Vunapope and the Sisters would look after me there. The care they give you in a mission hospital is very good. Of course, the government hospitals are good too but the missionaries are especially caring. The Vunapope Mission hospital is now a high quality hospital and I can get the best care there so there is no need for me to go to Australia any more. When the government was planning to downgrade it, it would have meant fewer grants and not the top quality staff they had previously had. But the hospital is being upgraded and is now a major hospital in Papua New Guinea.

Missionaries are still being sent to outstations in West New Britain, most of them being staffed these days by local priests. Communication by telephones and computers makes for closer contacts with the central station. Even so, they still have to make certain sacrifices if they are absent from friends and families for any length of time, but nowhere as great as

were the sacrifices that were demanded of missionaries in the past. The lives of Bernard and Benedict are not supposed to tell a story of hard life that is never experienced by anyone these days. However, their lives are part of the early history of these mission stations and should be of interest to present day missionaries.

Vatican II

Vatican II occurred in the middle of the 1960s causing widespread innovations and changes. Fr Franke spent most of his mission life in the pre-Vatican II era. The emphasis was on a traditional liturgy handed down for hundreds of years in the church. From when Bernard Franke was a young boy serving at Mass, the priest had his back to the people through most of the service and the language of the liturgy was Latin. At the Hiltrup seminary he attended, there was the general attitude to position in the hierarchy: everyone knew their position from the Rector down even to the seating in the chapel and the refectory. Bishops were addressed as "My Lord Bishop". The early German missionaries brought these attitudes with them to Papua New Guinea. Old missionaries on outstations expected special deference from the younger priests and, when confronted with local priests, the situation was even more difficult on both sides. Few local priests realised that the treatment they received was the same as any young priest whatever their background. Over the years, Fr Benedict worked with older German missionaries in New Britain; later he spent a long time counselling young local priests who were having trouble in this regard. They would gather at his house in Volavolo and his mother, Angela, was particularly good at counselling and praying for them.

This is where Fr Franke excelled. Although he had been brought up in the pre-Vatican ll era, he was able to surmount these obstacles in his humility and give the same deference to a local priest who might have been promoted over him in the time of Independence. Yes, Fr Franke was able to take Fr Benedict under his wing as an equal in 1971 and then as his superior when Benedict became Vicar General of Rabaul in 1977. The younger priest had been on remote outstations for six years and had no experience of parish work. "What they needed was an administrator", he said. However he had a friend in Fr Franke and also in Fr Vogt who taught him the ropes of parish work in a major town as distinct from a "bush" parish.

It was a two-way street: Fr Benedict taught Fr Franke about the local culture, which after Vatican II was taking a more prominent role in the liturgy. Benedict had been trained in the language of the Church post-Vatican II, which was quite different to the pre-Vatican II. Benedict did not start his serious training until the middle of Vatican Il and he saw the changes like Latin being superseded by the local vernacular at Mass. He once said rather wistfully, "If I was at the seminary now I wouldn't have had to bother with Latin". It was the bugbear of his life. Even as a Bishop, he still received letters from the Vatican in Latin, which he had to decipher.

After Vatican II, Masses were allowed to be said in the evenings on both Saturday and Sunday. Fr Franke bemoaned this at first as being the end of the parish community. He was right in a way: whereas previously most people went to the Sunday morning Mass

and got to see all the other parishioners, now they might decide only to go the afternoon Mass and did not see those who only went in the mornings. Fr Franke worried about this but Benedict would just say "no worries" and say whatever time Mass he was allocated.

Fr Franke loved the services like *novenas* on Thursday night to Our Lady and also the celebration of Benediction. In the time when the new Vatican II rules were being implemented, there was confusion about these once popular services. From now on, there was more emphasis on the Liturgy. When the information about Vatican II percolated down to Rabaul, the then Parish Priest, Fr Reischl, decided that Benediction should be put on hold for a while until the situation was clarified.

One day my friend, Moira O'Sullivan, was looking for Fr Franke at the Rabaul presbytery not long after all the changes of Vatican II were introduced.

"Is Fr Franke here?" she asked Fr Reischl.

"Sorry, no. He's not here!" Father sounded cross.

"Where is he?"

"He's out at Matupit saying Benediction!"

"What's wrong with that?"

"Since Vatican II it's fallen out of use. We don't know if it's approved any more."

Here we have another side of Fr Franke's nature. For years he was faithful to his devotions and now with Vatican II, the changes nearly broke his heart. He spent hours in front of the tabernacle in his Matupit Church trying to come to grips with the situation. He just loved the old liturgy and services. So if he couldn't celebrate Benediction in the Cathedral, he was off to his Church at Matupit to celebrate it. There it was his church and he was the Parish Priest. But another German Priest in town had found out and he was not amused. Fr Reischl was a great musician and had been a conductor in Austria giving that up to be a missionary. He too would have missed the beautiful Latin hymn singing that was associated with pre-Vatican II.

Both Bernard and Benedict had visited parishes in distant villages in West New Britain in the first years of their apostolate. They had climbed muddy slopes, trekked across rivers or travelled by boat along the coast to bring the Good News to the people. Later in Rabaul, Fr Franke gained a name for himself with his home and hospital visits. When he was too sick to carry out his work, Benedict took his place until he was appointed Bishop of Bereina. He had a good teacher in charity in Fr Franke. Later, Benedict continued to visit his people and bring them the sacraments whether it was in the deepest jungles of the Ramu River, along the coast or in the mountains of Bundi. He braved the elements and the terrain to get there and his people expressed their gratitude with welcoming arches, choirs and dances. Thousands came to the colourful church services rich with ritual, using traditional customs where possible. As Bishop, he was in charge of all the parishes in the

Benedict blessing his new house in his village near Volavolo

Province and used his position to improve the mission stations. He became known for his integrity and honesty in his work.

Both of them were known for their ecumenical spirit as we have seen in several chapters of their lives. Fr Franke befriended Rev Lutton of the United Church in Rabaul and Bishop Benedict rose to be in charge of the Ecumenical Movement in Papua New Guinea for several years and represented combined churches at conferences.

When Fr Franke died in 1984, Bishop Benedict did not forget his "best friend" and made a special trip to the cemetery to say Mass for him at Douglas Park in Sydney. Fr Franke had been his mentor alongside Archbishop John Hoehne, Archbishop To Paivu and Fr O'Hanlon. These are the men who helped him the most in his on-going vocation in life.

When he retired in 2001, Benedict thought to live in the house he had built in his village but Archbishop Hesse kindly provided him with accommodation at Vunapope. He has a unit close to the Church and Hospital which is near enough to Volavolo so he was able to maintain contact with his family and village life.

He said:

> My next job is with the youth in my village. I tell the youngsters to study hard because it is your life. If you don't do well go back to your land and do well. Forget about the volcano and the destruction it has caused. We must make the best of it.

In retirement Bishop Benedict struggles on and is enjoying his stress free time. He wanted to retire at 65 because so many of his confreres Archbishop To Paivu, Bishop Caesar, Bishop To Bata and many others had died while still in office. Benedict has some medical problems, which led to his retirement much earlier than expected:

> I was supposed to continue [as Archbishop] for another ten years. But I was travelling on rough roads and I told my manager that I could no longer do the work because my health was breaking down. He said I should get an auxiliary to help me but I said, "No. It is better that I leave". I spoke to the Nuncio who is a good friend of mine and explained to him that the stress was getting to me and the rough roads were affecting my health: always running around trying to find money for projects. I wrote a letter to the Pope [about retiring]. Then two years ago [1999] it was accepted and they found a coadjutor to take my place. He is a Polish man. I was able to hand over to him and retired on my birthday when I turned 65 in 2001. In Rome they realised that many Papua New Guineans were dying while they were still in office and so it was decided I could leave early. I told the Pope about it.

Tubuan in Benedict's village.

Benedict carries on the traditions of his people including collecting shell money for the ceremonies after his death. He said the *tubuan* are also present at funerals and the breaking of the shell money is an important part of the culture. Some years ago, Benedict was worried because the shell money he should have inherited had been frittered away by his uncles and he found there was only a little left. He decided that, if he was to have any standing in the village after his death, never mind that he had once been an Archbishop, he would need to have many coils of *tabu* to be broken in the ceremony held after his funeral to prove that he was a Tolai Big Man. It was very important for him to be seen as such amongst his own people:

> When I went back to Rabaul in 1993, I bought a little pig of my own so I could have my own bank account. I bought it as a little one and it got big and I was there when they cooked it before the eruption. They cut the pig and people contributed shell money. So I'm not a Tolai *nating*. When I die they will cut that betel nut and they will price the *tubuan*. I will have five hundred fathoms and so my family will have something.

Even today, wheels of *tabu,* shell money, belonging to the dead person are distributed to relatives as well as to the *tubuan*. Previously women were not supposed to see the *tubuan* but things have changed and now the *tubuan* are seen as part of the Tolai culture for display. With the growth of Christian churches, the bad side of their nature has been discarded and now they are a colourful symbol of the traditional culture. The *tabu*, is still used for bride price, for initiation ceremonies, or in land transactions.

As Fr Bob Mitchell said, "Often when being converted people may toss all their culture and beliefs out but then they realise that they are losing a sense of their own history and identity. In the next generation people have a more balanced view. The religion is in their bones and they can then view their culture and enrich their lives by incorporating elements of it into their lives if not into the liturgy of the church".

Inculturation.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II wrote an Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*. In this, he had a sense of urgency about inculturation, which means "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures". In other words, the Church must use as much of the local culture as humanly and divinely possible to integrate people into the Church. It was seen as difficult but necessary "for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity

of the Christian faith". The Pope had a particular message for missionaries who came from other lands bringing the Gospel as so many had in the past century to Papua New Guinea:

> Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture and discover its values through direct experience. Only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cf. Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:5) in a credible and fruitful way. It is not, of course, a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working, and therefore of equipping themselves to communicate effectively with it, adopting a manner of living which is a sign of gospel witness and of solidarity with the people.

In this way, the new evangelised communities will be able to "express their Christian experience in original ways and forms that are consistent with their own cultural traditions, provided that those traditions are in harmony with the objective requirements of the faith itself".

> Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.
>
> Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation.

Pope John Paul spoke of the two principles that were involved: Firstly: "compatibility with the gospel" and secondly, "communion with the universal Church". It is interesting that the Pope looks to her bishops in the Church to influence the inculturation of the church. "Bishops, as guardians of the 'deposit of faith,' will take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment, for which a deeply balanced approach is required." Bishops To Varpin and To Paivu were able to view the culture from the inside and they were well placed to carry out the Pope's wishes. Furthermore, they were interested in doing it and were, in fact, were well in advance of the Encyclical. To Paivu translated a lot of gospels and the daily prayers for Tolai people. In doing this he was able to insert Tolai values and attitudes into these translations so that the Tolais felt ownership of them and were more in tune with the culture of the Church. As the Pope said, "inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of".

Bishop Benedict was aware that his own culture had great artistic value and colour which could be incorporated into the lives of the local church to make it richer. He wanted to take it further than Vatican ll even, and allow things like the *tubuan* again. Not as part of a church service but as an allowable dance. It had been banned completely from the village scene by Bishop Scharmach. Traditionally, even though there were bad aspects to it, it had provided colour and character in Tolai villages. During his time, he and To Paivu was so successful in this endeavour that *tubuan* are now seen everywhere.

An article appeared in the Vincentians web site:

> There is no denying that Catholic and Protestant missionaries have contributed much for the good of the country, especially in evangelizing, pacifying hostile tribes, and providing the much needed services in health and education. At the same time, however, the efforts of missionaries have also uprooted many Papua New Guineans from their own culture. Some fostered a paternalistic and superior kind of attitude, and did little to contextualize the Gospel (*Vincentians in Papua New Guinea,* Vincentian's web site, 2 August 2004).

This is not true of Rabaul. Not any more, the church there has bent over backwards to "contextualize" the gospel to make it more alive for the people. In 2005, St Mary's High School at Vuvu, where Benedict went to school fifty years earlier, has its own *tubuan* named Ia Vuvu and was the first school to have such a traditional custom. The school Principal Br Andrew Kiaplai said the school decided to have its own *tubuan* to promote educational reforms which encourage culture and self-reliance. Bishop Benedict is proud of a school that can promote the Tolai culture like this. Ia Vuvu means wind and was acquired from Rabagi No.2 Village. It features in the schools cultural show and recently the *tubuan* led all the new graduates into their places for the ceremony.

Archbishop To Paivu's father discarded all his beliefs and the old customs when he became a Catholic. To Paivu was proud that he was able to do this but To Paivu himself harked back to his culture. He thought his people were missing out on their history and sense of identity and part of his life's work was the inculturation of the liturgy in New Britain.

Ongoing eruptions of Tarvurvur.

After the 1994 eruption, Rabaul became a ghost town with whole areas devastated by layers of ash and dust from the two volcanoes. The whole place is now an eerie relic of what it was before. Mango Avenue to Malaytown has been devastated – shops, picture theatre, many churches, school, and the houses we once lived in are gone forever. Office buildings and hotels and even the swimming pool have vanished. However the Hamamas Hotel survived because the manager braved the falling ash and continually brushed it off the roof at the time of the eruption.

The wharf still functions, as Rabaul Harbour is still the best and deepest in the South Pacific. Around the wharf, some stores have opened and a few businesses dealing with shipping. Will Rabaul ever be a town again? The decision has been made to shift it to

One of the Rabaul Churches destroyed during the eruption.

Kokopo. Kokopo is now a thriving town with hospital, businesses and clubs. Kokopo, which is strung along the edge of Blanche Bay has a busy market, selling fresh produce, local cigars and betel nut. Nearby is Tokua Airport, about an hour from Rabaul along the narrow coast road.

The Cathedral of St Francis Xavier was able to withstand the ash falls with its steep roof, and the Sacred Heart School alongside is still functioning. Bishop Benedict has kept us up to date with the situation in Rabaul: the Archbishop had started saying Mass again in the Cathedral in spite of the dust but there was no priest stationed there. There is a national school and an international one for the some of the local children as well as for Chinese and Mixed Race children; the old presbytery and the convent are used by the teachers at the schools; the new presbytery is used for meetings.

Benedict noted that the Volavolo Church is still going strong. It was damaged during the eruption but the church, made of steel and galvanized iron, survived the eruption although it needed a few thousand kina to be repaired.

From the Google earth satellite imagery, Rabaul's devastation is clearly seen. There is a shadow across the town showing the line of destruction. Eruptions are almost a daily or even an hourly occurrence.

In March 2007, there was another big rumble and rocks and ash again spewed forth more violently than normal. The force of the winds carried the ash towards Kokopo.

Shortly after, I spoke to Bishop Benedict on the phone and he found it very hard to hear me. He had just got my letter requesting a copy of a photograph of him baptising a baby. He recognised my voice and began to tell me about the photograph.

> "Yes Mary today I drove from Vunapope to Volavolo to find the photograph but was unable to find it."
>
> "O. That is all right", I said.
>
> "Well Tavurvur Volcano erupted and there was ash all over Rabaul. I had to return home because of my asthma. They had to close the airport at Tokua. Bishop Hesse is very sick and they tried to fly him out to Germany today but there was a big eruption and the ash fell all over the tarmac."
>
> "That sounds bad", I put in, but he could not hear me.
>
> "Sorry Mary, I didn't get the photo. I had to go home to Vunapope."
>
> "That's OK Ben, don't worry about it."
>
> "What was that you said?"
>
> I said, "don't worry about it?"
>
> "You want me to go back tomorrow?"
>
> "No! No! Ben not tomorrow. Don't worry".
>
> "What did you say? Well, Ok I'll go back tomorrow to look for the photo."

That's what happens when you have a bad connection at one end and a person with hearing difficulties at the other. However this conversation was not altogether wasted. I found out that Benedict was still able to get around, although he now uses a stick. I also found that Archbishop Hesse was ill which many of the MSC priests in Brisbane were unaware of.

I was concerned for him for the next few days as I knew that, to get from his unit at Vunapope to his village near Volavolo, he would have had to drive around the coast on the narrow road which winds around the base of the cliff past Raluana Village. The road has views across the harbour and to Tavurvur volcano. While it was no longer erupting violently and ejecting large quantities of ash, smaller eruptions are a continual occurence.

Later, he found the photograph and it appears on page 162.

Every day the ash must be cleared off houses in the town and in the villages but the Tolai still muddle along and the frangipani and bougainvillea still bloom as they did in 1994.

> Flowers around temporary houses and tarpaulin-decked shelters were elsewhere a sign of Tolai having made a home, even if the return to their own *gunan* had to be postponed. Planting flowers was a demonstrative act. It announced one's return home or declared that one was not to be beaten by the volcano - particularly in care centres where every little bit of land had to be used to plant vegetables and where flower beds were a luxury (Neumann, 1996: 111).

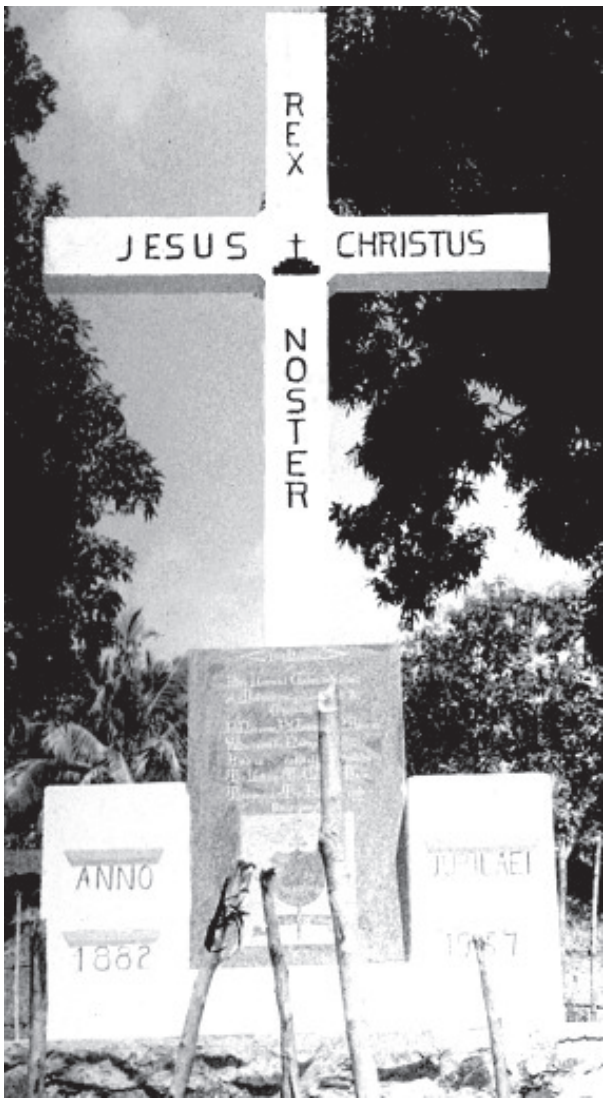
In Rabaul, the Sacred Heart school continues to operate alongside the Cathedral. This school was originally known as the Yang-Ching school. Ex-students are planning a reunion on Saturday 30 June 2007 in Brisbane. Fr White, who is now 88, is hoping to be able to attend. Many of the Chinese Sisters and other teachers from the school are all planning to be there as well as many ex-students. They all have fond memories of Fr Franke. Archbishop Benedict mentioned that he had received an invitation to the reunion, but he was too ill to travel to Australia.

Archbishop Benedict told us that his cousin, Bishop John To Ribat MSC of Bereina, also from Volavolo, has now been appointed Coadjutor Archbishop to the present Archbishop of Port Moresby, Brian Barnes OFM. So, another of his descendents will show To Momulue's legacy and foresight in allowing the first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fr Navarre, Fr Fromm, and Fr Cramaille, to land at Volavolo 125 years ago.

Arriving in New Britain in 1928, Fr Franke followed in the footsteps of these first missionaries and became Parish Priest of Matupit Island where they had first arrived on 29 September 1882. Just as they did, he left his family, friends and country to travel to Papua New Guinea to bring the Good News to the people of New Britain.

The lives of Fr Bernard Franke and Archbishop Benedict To Varpin provide an interesting and informative glimpse of the mission history in the twentieth century. May all missionaries, both local and expatriate, who laboured in those days share in the memories evoked in these pages.

Te Deum Laudamus



Monument in front of the Nodup Church in memory of the first missionaries, who arrived in the area in 1882.

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