

PART ONE

Chapter I

Introduction

The year 2012 is a holy year. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves these questions:

1. What has happened in these hundred years?
2. Where are we at this moment?
3. What direction do we follow for the future?

In response to the first question we recall all the missionaries who came here and gave their lives that we may live.

- All the work done by our founder Bishop Louis Couppe.
 - All the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart who came to PNG,
 - Those who came to Papua and those who came to Rabaul and gave their lives that we might live.
 - The Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart who also came to Rabaul and gave their lives.
 - We recall the martyrdom of the ten missionaries at St. Paul's Baining, who shed their blood so we may have life.
 - We also recall our pioneer sisters, their heroic endurance of the torture by the Japanese during the Second World War, their life, their togetherness as a community, the support they gave to the other missionaries who were interned at Ramale camp – carrying food on their backs and walking through bush tracks to reach the prison camp to give food to the starving missionaries; risking their lives in order to keep the missionaries alive.
- Therefore our first point:

1. **We must be aware of the wonderful things that the Lord has done with and for us in the past hundred years to give glory and praise to God and to build up confidence as we recall that past with the Lord.**

We have a lot to be grateful for, for all that the missionaries did point to the one who inspired, assisted, sent and protected them all. Therefore, these hundred years is the history of God's faithfulness to us, a history of salvation.

Reflecting on the guiding hand of God supporting the missionaries and our sisters in the past we become conscious that we too are involved in living and making that history of salvation together with our sisters and brothers in the Lord. What we see are only

outward appearance which are the signs of the great reality, the mystery between Christ and the souls of women and men.

2. Where are we now?

The Gospel must fit into the reality of life – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We must read the signs of the times – to discover the will of God here and now. *Deepening the faith* is the programme of the whole year of the centenary; bringing the faith into the concrete reality of our lives, with our sins and weaknesses appealing for God's mercy; the Father of the lost son.

What we believe in is not only a series of truth –

3. We believe in a person and that person is Jesus Christ.

After a hundred years we must ask ourselves the question:

Jesus Christ, who is he for us?

Jesus is asking the question, as we saw in (Mt. 16:15)

“Who do you say I am?”

He is keen to receive the response of each one of us.

It is a central question for our centenary. A process of change and growth is going on, and with respect and perseverance we will have to carry on in the light of the Holy Spirit. In this time of renewal we must reflect more deeply on the question: **Who is Christ for me? Jesus declares himself as:**

- I am the Way the Truth and the Life.
- I am the Good Shepherd.
- I am the resurrection and the life.
- I am the bread of life.
- I am meek and humble of heart.
- I am the Alpha and the Omega.
- I am the Vine, you the branches.

A related question is:

4. Why am I in religious life?

Have I found who/what I was looking for when I first entered?

We must reflect on our pioneer Sisters, their lives, and their sacrifices;

How they endured the tortures from the Japanese in the Second World War;

How they worked and prayed together as a united community.

We must also reflect on the problems we have encountered in the Congregation and the blessings we enjoyed.

When we put all these together then we have all the reasons to celebrate.

This Jubilee Year, the year the Lord has given us to commemorate the Lord's blessings in our lives, by deepening their content, by examining their impact on our lives, and by asking ourselves what could be the will of God for our Congregation now.

5. Where are we going?

Christ's message must become our rule of life. The Gospel is not only something to be preached in the Church on Sundays, but something that must be lived everyday in the real life of every sister, as a community and as a Congregation. The three key words that can help us to learn are:

1. **See** what is happening in the community;
2. **Judge** it in the light of God's word and
3. **Act** according to the light of God's word.

We reflect on Mary Immaculate, the great role she played in the history of salvation. In the light of our Charism we must be prepared to receive Jesus from the hands of Mary. We must also renew our commitment to bring Jesus alive to our people at this time and place.

As we prepare for the celebration, can we have some common points to reflect on?

We have to discover the weak points in our lives as FMI Sisters. In order for our celebration to be genuine, are we prepared to acknowledge our weaknesses, to be sorry for them and to reconcile not only with God but also with each other and with our sisters and brothers with whom we live and work?

Chapter II

The Life of the People in the Islands

Some aspects of life in the islands, before the coming of the Europeans and the missionaries

The Locals

According to Fr. Bermard Bley when the Missionaries arrived in the islands of Oceania, the people were wild. They were involved in head-hunting and cannibalism, storing the bones of the victims in their houses. They carved statues of stone or wood and worshiped them. Believing that the devils lived in these statues, they offered gifts to them to appease their anger. For the healing of the sick they used sorcery and magic to chase away the evil spirits from the sick people.

They knew little about the life of the soul. Some thought that the life of man finished with the death of the body, whereas others believed that the soul went into the sea or into the jungle or to the place of all the evil spirits. Therefore those who were alive worked hard to get plenty of *tabu* (shell money) to pay for all the wrongs they had done when they would come to the place of the departed spirits. Everywhere the people created fear and sadness by engaging in fighting, immorality, stealing and killing of infants. They were not free to move from place to place because of fear of being killed. They did not dare to walk outside in the dark because of the evil spirits and for fear being killed by their neighbours. Even in their own houses they feared the evil spirits and they were suspicious of the enemy putting poison into their food or on something that would poison them. Thus the Devil held the people in chains and was not happy about them following the light afterwards. (75 GY p.9)

The Tolais

Paivu, as quoted in *75 Glorious Years* explains that the Tolai people had religion. Those who belonged to the secret society called the *Iniat* made images from stone and wood. They also believed in various higher beings called the *Ingal*. The members of the secret societies were forbidden from eating pork. The chiefs worked hard to obtain as much *tabu* (shell money) as possible in order to become higher beings whereas the ordinary people were believed to become devils after death. For shell money they traded with taro and coconut as well as women given away in marriage. For sacrificial offering they placed cooked food in the bush to be eaten by the spirits of the dead. The German administration banned the secret societies. (75 GY p. 9)

The people had very little or no clothes on, but they had very strict moral code. The punishment for adultery was death and the same penalty may be used if a boy and a girl touched hands. Killing was forbidden but if killing was the result of war or due to immorality then the human flesh was cooked and eaten. (75 GY p. 10)

The social problems they had were discord, fighting and stealing. They were not free to move around. They could move from place to place only if they were assured of protection by their chief. The Tolais lived not in villages but in hamlets. Due to the fear of sorcery they did not live food scraps around; their cooking pots were kept hidden in their houses and their homes were

kept spotlessly clean. There was rivalry between the Tolais and the Bainings. One time the Tolais got together at Tapo and attacked the Bainings during the night and almost wiped them out completely. After that hostility continues within their own group. **(75 GY p. 10)**

Contact with the Outside World

The Wesleyan Missionaries

The protestant missionaries who were in New Guinea before the MSC Missionaries made use of teachers from Samoa, Fiji, Rorotonga and other Pacific islands who played the role of catechists. They were useful to the protestant missionaries for three main reasons:

- 1) Their numbers and their willingness to be employed as catechists; employment being their main source of income.
- 2) As native people of the South Pacific it was anticipated that they would be able to establish good rapport with the people of New Guinea.
- 3) They were accustomed to the climate and traditional way of life therefore, they would be able to cope better with the hardships of mission life.

The efforts of those Pacific Island teachers resulted in the conversion of a great number of savages, however, according to the observation of Fr. Navarre, as quoted by Waldersee, "They are not trained, and they differ little in morals or training from the savages among whom they live." (p.18)

Around 1875 the Australian Wesleyan Missionary Society established the first mission stations in the Duke of York Islands setting up Port Hunter as their main centre. Sometime later, George Brown extended their operations to the Gazelle; however, four Fijian teachers were massacred along the Nangananga Road on 6th April, 1878. The teachers would travel in two parties; one party would travel westward from Raluana while the other would travel southward from Kabakada. The four teachers had walked from Kabakada uphill until they reached the Rakunai-Navunaram junction and followed the turnoff towards Nangananga. On the way they passed the village leader Talili who seemed to be friendly with them, not knowing that he had sent messengers ahead to the village leaders to kill the foreigners. When the four teachers arrived they were attacked with clubs and three of them fell one after the other but one of them, Peni Luvu, a big man grabbed a club and fought his way and managed to run back until he reached Talili who gave him a drink of kulau (coconut water) and when he leaned back his head to drink Talili cut his throat. Therefore all the four bodies were cut up and shared among the villagers. The other three who had walked up the hills from Raluana noticed the behavior of the people and became suspicious so they turned around and returned to Raluana. That was how they escaped the carnage and soon they heard what happened to their companions.

Colonizers and Traders

New Britain was named by William Dampier, an English pirate who discovered it in 1700. Carteret landed in New Ireland at English Bay in 1766 and claimed it for England. The Gazelle Peninsula was named after the ship of Von Schleinitz who came over these waters in 1880.

After all these discoveries the islands remained as they were with no colonizers or traders taking possession of them. The first foreigners who came to the islands for trading purposes were Mr. Tom Farrell and Mrs Emma Forsayth, known today as Queen Emma. They came from Samoa and arrived at the Duke of York Islands, setting up a trading station at Mioko Island. They commuted between Mioko and Kokopo. When the M.S.C. Missionaries bought land at Kokopo there was opposition from Thomas Farrell. Therefore when the house of the Missionaries got burnt Thomas Farrell was the main suspect but the case could not be reported to police because they had no eye witness. Some years later Mrs Forsayth left Mr. Farrell and moved to Kokopo with her large family. Farrell was 20 years older than Emma; he suffered a lot from fevers, spear wounds and hard liquor; his lungs too were in bad shape. He was encouraged to go to Australia for medical checkup so he went for treatment and on return he announced that he had TB and must leave the country. He went to Australia and his condition became worse, therefore, he died.

All of Farrell property was transferred to Ralum where Emma had built a house called "Gunantabu". Emma Forsayth created an empire in New Britain because she had bought thousands of acres of land from the local land owners for very cheap price. She became a very successful business woman who enjoyed her social life and her wealth and luxury but she was not a church goer.

Emma Forsayth and Thomas Farrell had collected all the building materials that were dumped on the beach at Port Breton by the failed colonial adventure of Marcus de Rays. Among those materials was a beautiful altar that came with the materials for building a Cathedral; the altar eventually was brought to Gunantabu. Emma built a very large lounge and had the altar re-shaped and built into the lounge. The lounge became the very first cocktail bar in the Pacific Islands. That altar could have been put into good use by the Catholic Church, but Queen Emma did not get on well with the Catholic Church.

**** Then the German Government, deciding to claim the islands, set up a trading company in 1877. Godffroy and Son set up their business at Matupit Island. To top it all up, in November 1884 a trading ship the *Samoa* came to the region and claimed these islands for Germany. As a reinforcement of that claim, the New Guinea Trading Company was given a charter to rule and trade in these islands. Consequently a Resident Judge was appointed and set up in Kokopo. He occupied that chair from 1884-1896 when Germany took direct control of the administration.

They had set up their Capital on the New Guinea Mainland but due to loss of staff through fever, they moved to Kokopo. Seeing that the area surrounding Rabaul Harbour was well set and more convenient for multiple purposes, they moved the Capital to Rabaul in 1910. All the more fitting since Rabaul was known to be one of the most beautiful harbours in the world. (75 GY, p. 13)

This is the environment where the MSC Missionaries were sent. The explorers, colonizers, the traders and the German Government came to our shores not to help the people of the islands but for their own gains. The Missionaries came for the sake of the people, to spread the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Through all the hardships they encountered, through sickness, stormy seas, long delays at port of calls, the hardship of language, lack of nourishing food, lack of medical supplies, sickness and death, they braved it all for God's sake so that our people may have life. They lost their lives so that we may have life. What is our response?

A New Settlement Scheme

At this stage this description of the new settlement scheme is provided because it was during this time that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII asked the MSC Society to come to Melanesia. Even though the settlement scheme was a big failure in the end still God made use of that machinery to bring the missionaries to Melanesia and Micronesia. The pioneer missionaries set out and encountered difficulties, long delays, uncertainties and sickness, but they persevered and eventually they arrived here. God who is the author of life made use of the chaotic situation to bring His Good News of Life and Love to the people of these islands who were lost in paganism.

The Settlement Scheme was designed by a Frenchman by the name of Charles du Briel, better known as Marquis de Rays. The land where the settlement was to take place was called Port Praslin, located at the southern end of New Ireland on the western side. De Rays renamed the place New France and he promised that it was a land of continual sunshine and that the local inhabitants were friendly. He promised further that the land was prosperous, and that with very little cash to buy each person an acre would bring in abundant returns and that infrastructure was already taking place. Nothing could be more attractive, de Rays advertised his evil scheme on the local newspapers and since many people in France were affected by the war between France and Germany, they longed for a place where there was peace and harmony. De Rays attracted a lot of people who registered with him to travel to New France.

The first group of settlers, who travelled on the *Chandernagore*, arrived at Port Praslin but soon realized that there was absolutely nothing of all that was promised; instead they were abandoned to the mercy of the elements, to sickness, starvation and death. The survivors struggled to get away from the land of sorrow and hopelessness. They would rather risk death

at the hands of the cannibals than await the slow, sure death from Malaria and hunger. Some who tried to escape were killed in the bush and eaten. Others attempted escaping by sea; six of them got on a canoe and tried to go against the N.W. Monsoon winds to the Duke of York Islands but they had lost all energy and the wind drove them back and after three days they arrived on the shores of Buka where the local people received them enthusiastically. Five of them were killed and eaten on the same day but one by the name of Boero, remained. Boero wept helplessly and shook with sobs. He became the centre of attention and the local people came from far and wide to witness his weeping or laughing according to their whims. After some months he was discovered and bought by the Captain of a ship for two (2) axes and that was how he escaped death.

The Cruel Captain Rabardy

The **second ship** the *Genil* had the cruel Captain, Rabardy, who used torture during the voyage; therefore, the entire crew deserted the ship at Singapore. Out of fear of retaliation, the Captain ate his meals with a loaded revolver at his side. When the *Genil* arrived at Port Prasline the settlers met with the same negative results. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation the settlers wanted to move elsewhere but Rabardy would not hear of it. He was determined to dump the settlers on the shore and abandon them to their fate. He even signaled other ships that came near to keep away.

The **third ship**, the *India*, departed in July with 340 Italian intended settlers, but 100 people died during the long journey from Europe. The first Catholic priest, Pe're Lanuzel was on this ship. There will be more details about Fr. Lanuzel in the next section. If they had arrived in a different place perhaps the story would have been different. However, not knowing what was ahead of them, they came to the same place, Port Praslin, and their dreams were shattered. They met with nothing other than the graveyard, cannibalism and starvation.

The organizers of this evil scheme must have known that it was all going to be a failure and they must have planned their strategy so well that none had the clue that they were all being tricked. They all travelled from Europe with high hopes and arriving at the island they realized too late that all the promises were not true. At the same time the Marquis and Dr. De Groote announced in Europe the triumph of their scheme at New France.

The Last Voyage to Death

The **last ship**, the *Nouvelle Bretagne*, under Captain Henry carrying 200 Europeans and the second Catholic Priest, Abbe' Deny as well as Chinese and Malays, arrived at Manila from Barcelona. At Manila, Capt. Henry heard about the state of affairs at Port Praslin and he tried his best to persuade the passengers to abandon the voyage but he was not successful! So he

continued on to Port Praslin. On arrival they received no other news beside the shock at the starvation, sickness and death, cannibalism and madness. A local man dressed in an old waist coat greeted them with enthusiasm and offered the Captain a letter of introduction:

‘I am Maragano. I willingly accept everything and give nothing in return. I am a Stingy Papuan’ signed Rabardy.’

The old settlers had no good news to give the new arrivals except these words: “Poor people, whatever brings you here?” They surveyed the Promised Land but to their distress saw only sadness and desolation that had broken the hearts and spirits of so many who had arrived before them.

There were four ships that came in succession carrying the intended settlers to Port Praslin. The MSC Missionaries travelled on the fifth expedition, the *Barcelona* until they reached Manila where they had the great difficulty of getting from there to Port Praslin. More information on the MSC Missionaries will be given in the next chapter.

The Power of the Gun

There is an island in the Duke of York Islands, called, *Mioko-Na-ta* to distinguish it from *Mioko Pal-pal* which is the local name for Vunapope. Mr. Farrell who had a plantation and trading stores in the area learnt that the local people of the nearby Schwein Island, planned to kill him and rob his trade store in retaliation for the murder of a German Scientist near the present day plantation of Rakanda. Farrell teamed up with Rabardy as well as a Local Chief, To Litoro, to attack the locals who had prepared to attack from Schwein Island. The people were well trapped because Rabardy anchored his ship so that the cannon covered the passage of water towards Vunapope. Farrell and To Litoro fired into the people at Schwein Island. They tried to escape towards the direction of Kokopo, but the cannon of the “Genil” opened fire and the sea became the mass grave of bodies of the local people from Schwein Island. Therefore the local people feared the white man. To show his appreciation, To Litoro sent Rabardy the choicest part of a human body. (Reference?)

Retaliation from Bougainville

It was soon after this that a trader who had his store at Matupit, made a yearly trip to Bougainville to buy copra. The local people were not happy with the prices they were paid the previous year. When the “Pacific” came again the local people kept the copra in a well-hidden inlet. When the crew went to collect it, the people went after those still on board. Only the cabin boy was able to escape, but he was disgusted to see the people bind the cook and roast him on his galley stove and beheaded the Captain. The crew discovered this to their horror only when they returned to the ship. (REference?)

Concluding Remarks

Through the new settlement scheme hundreds of people lost their lives because the man who designed the scheme had not been to the place and the interested settlers left Europe full of dreams for better life; but alas they only met with disaster, disappointment; starvation, sickness and death. However, God in his boundless mercy designed that the Good News of God's Life and Love would reach our shores and eventually be implanted in the hearts of our Melanesian people because through the settlement scheme the M.S.C. Missionaries were sent and when the scheme failed they were re-directed to New Britain. Today, we are who we are because of God's boundless mercy and love; we are the fruits of their sacrifices, their labours, their pain, their sorrows, their suffering and death.

PART TWO

Chapter III

The Coming of the Missionaries

Introduction

In spite of the fact that colonizers and traders were in the region the people remained in their pagan ways, as warring tribes, practicing headhunting, cannibalism and sorcery. Those colonizers and traders used the local people for their own benefits, using them as slaves, servants and for other purposes that benefited the colonizers and traders but not the people themselves. In response the people made use of the traditional system of payback to defend themselves. The traders used local people, for example, Queen Emma and her brother in law, Parkinson, had plantations all over the Islands region and to be able to continue the management of those plantations they used the Buka Boys for protection. The Buka Boys were armed and were ready to attack once the people showed any hostility. There was no growth or change in the attitude and behaviour of the people. When there was retaliation from the local people the traders made use of the gun and this created fear in the local people. On the other hand the Missionaries came unarmed and through God's grace the people responded positively. Therefore, change began to take place when the Missionaries began to preach God's life and love. An exceptional case was what happened at St. Paul's, Baining with the slaying of the ten missionaries. (Reference?)

Fr. Lanuzel found his way to New Britain

Fr. R.M. Lanuzel, a diocesan priest, travelled as chaplain on the *India* for the new colony of Port Praslin. The *India* departed from Spain on the 6th January, 1880 and arrived in the colony on 14th October, 1880. On the 1st November, 1880, he celebrated Mass and renewed the consecration of the country to the Sacred Heart, as he had done first before leaving Barcelona. However, those who arrived before them were not ready to welcome the new comers. They had either died from hunger or sickness or been killed by the cannibals.

Fr. Lanuzel decided to go to Sydney to get some supplies for the starving colonists. Arriving back in February 1881 he found that the colony had vacated the place and gone to Noumea. He decided to cross the St. George's Channel and settled in New Britain. He went to Nodup and was welcomed by To Litur, the chief of the clan. He built a house and called it *Villa Maria* in honour of the Marists with whom he stayed in Sydney.

Fr. Lanuzel lived at Nodup from June to August 1881 associating himself with To Litur and his people. He associated so well with the people that they were motivated to ask for baptism. Due to their persistence he decided to baptise seventy-six children of four years of age and above. He had laid the foundation for the Church but he could not continue due to hostility generated by a European planter who stirred up the people against him. In this circumstance he acted quickly; he buried the Sacred Vessels and put on as many clothes as possible so that when he was shot at he was not hurt. He went to Volavolo where he stayed for a while then he went to Australia and from there he travelled back to Europe. He went to Rome and reported to Cardinal Simeon what he had done in Nodup. Then he went to Issoudun where he met Fr. Chevalier and also reported about Nodup. He visited the MSC Novitiate in Tilburg before returning to Australia.

From Australia Fr. Lanuzel returned to New Britain intending to work with the MSC Missionaries there. On arrival he went to meet the MSC Missionaries at Kiniginan. Then he went back to Nodup to continue his work among the people. Dupre, the trader who had a business at Volavolo offered to build him a house at Volavolo, therefore, he moved to Volavolo but he did not stay long. He encountered a problem with the local in the local community and the people were going after him. He got away on the first opportunity going by the same ship on which Fr. Navarre and Brother Fromm were travelling. From Sydney Fr. Lanuzel went to New Zealand and was given an appointment in Opotiki where he worked until his death in 1898 (Delbose p 47-49).

Foundation of the MSC by Fr. Jules Chevalier

Jules Chevalier was still a seminarian when he was boy God to start a group of missionary priests who would go out into the world to implement the following three guiding principles:

1. In some parts of France as well as the world, people lacked faith and were indifferent. Moral ills were the natural outcome.
2. The Gospel message of God's love and care for the people can be effectively spread through the doctrine and devotion to the Sacred Heart that may rouse up a religious response in human hearts, a response which would result in greater happiness and human goodness.
3. A band of fervent and spiritually well-formed missionary priests would enforce what he hoped for.

Jules Chevalier was ordained a diocesan priest on 14th June 1851. After three years work as a diocesan priest he took up the post as curate in Issoudun. In Issoudun he met another young curate, his friend from the major Seminary in Bourges, Fr. Maugenest. The two curates planned together and they informed the Parish Priest, Fr. Crozat, an elderly and experienced man, who approved of their intention for the foundation of the new Congregation. The next thing they needed to do was to get the approval of the Diocesan authority. They anticipated this would not be easy so they started a novena to Our Lady asking her for a sign. The novena ended on the 8th December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and on this day they received a donation of 20,000 gold francs. This was the sign and they were encouraged to go ahead. Since it was an important undertaking that would have serious consequences, the Cardinal-Archbishop of Bourges, welcomed the petition but he wanted to make sure that they had all the resources available for the undertaking. Another novena was offered and as a result the Parish Priest came to their rescue. A wealthy parishioner offered a yearly income of 1,000 gold francs for the new foundation. For this they were grateful and they decided to go ahead. They had to think what to do next. The first thing they did was to get the place organized. An old shack was renovated and they had it blessed by the Archbishop. It was a humble beginning and was not without struggle but God blessed the society and now it has expanded throughout the world. (Reference)

Spirituality of Fr. Chevalier

As a seminarian Jules Chevalier had developed a deep spirituality centred on Christ which is summarised in the following points by Fr. Cuskelly:

- a) He directed his natural qualities in the service of God.
- b) Through his fall down the cliff he reached the conviction of God's supremacy the total dependence of creatures.

- c) He renounced natural friendship and gave his heart freely to God.
- d) Through a special retreat he received the grace of strong supernatural dedication and was ready to respond completely to God's will.
- e) He learnt the spirituality of St. Sulpice making him Christ-centred, self forgetful and he was strengthened in his determination to live and work for the glory of God and the salvation souls.
- f) He was naturally and supernaturally concerned for people afflicted by the ills of modern society.
- g) When he discovered the devotion to the Sacred Heart it was the spark inflaming his life, transforming it and giving him unity and purpose. (Cuskelly p.109)

Mission

Fr. Chevalier had the wisdom to discover the truth that Jesus Christ is the first Missionary of His Heart. In his ministry he made known to people the love he had for them. Jesus was sent by the Father on the mission of sharing the love of God with human beings. Everywhere he went he was concerned about his mission of love. Fr. Chevalier discovered the compassionate Jesus and that he himself was powerless without Jesus. Therefore the missionaries needed to unite their efforts with Jesus so that with Him they may convert souls. (Reference?)

A New Mission in New Britain

On a letter dated 25th March, 1881, Pope Leo XIII invited the MSC Missionaries to travel to New Guinea to serve in the New France Colony. On 16th April, 1881, Father Founder answered the letter, accepting the Mission. The very first missionaries who were prepared to travel to New Guinea were Fr. Durin and his nephew Br. Durin, Fr. Navarre, Fr. Cramaille, Br. Fromm, a scholastic. They departed Barcelona on 1st of September, 1881 on their journey to New France and arrived in Manila on the 9th of October, 1881, intending to journey on to New France to serve in the Marcus de Rays' colony. (Reference?)

While the missionaries were looking for a ship, that would take them to Port Prasline, Captain Henry arrived from New Ireland on the *Nouvelle Bretagne* to get some supplies for the starving colonists. On the ship were a lot of frustrated, disheartened and disappointed colonists. From the colonists and Captain Henry the missionaries heard all about the failure of the Marcus de Rays colony. (Reference?)

Captain Henry loaded the ship with L6000 worth of cargo, but he could not pay for them because the money promised him from Europe had not been forwarded. The Spanish Government got the news that the Captain had not paid for the cargo so they took out the boilers and placed some policemen to keep a close guard. One night a cyclone blew up and Captain Henry slipped out to sea with some of the policemen on board. He left the policemen

off on an Island and continued on the journey till he reached Port Breton. However the missionaries were not on board. Having heard the report about the failure of the New France colony it became unclear in their minds regarding their destination. (Reference?)

According to Delbos (1984) the Superior, Fr. Durin told Fr. Navarre that he had decided to take the whole group back to France. Fr. Navarre strongly disagreed with him, saying that the whole of Melanesia and Micronesia had been entrusted to the Society by Rome and that their objective should not be limited to New France only. Fr. Navarre was determined to continue and to look for other destinations elsewhere. Since Fr. Durin and Fr. Navarre could not agree on whether to continue or to return to France, Fr. Durin and his nephew decided to return to Europe while Fr. Navarre, Fr. Cramaille and Br. Fromm waited in Batavia to hear from Rome and from Fr. Chevalier. After waiting for five months they received the long awaited letters. The letter from Fr. Chevalier was firm and encouraging. They must definitely go forward to New Britain under the leadership of Fr. Navarre to continue the little mission started by Fr. Lanuzel. (Reference?)

They found their way to Cooktown in Queensland where they received a telegram saying that a ship was going to New Ireland soon. They found their way to Sydney and were accommodated by the Marist Fathers while waiting for the passage to New Ireland. They discovered that the ship that was going to take them to their destination was none other than the “Chandernagore”, the very first ship to land settlers in New Ireland. This ship was on its way back to Europe and Captain Mercia was instructed to take the three missionaries to wherever they wanted to go before returning to Singapore and to Europe. They arrived at Port Praslin where they stayed for five days and Fr. Navarre celebrated Mass for the souls who died there. (Reference?)

The Fathers then set their minds on going to New Britain. They were so near their destination that it would have been a matter of a few more hours before they arrived at Matupit Island. However, the Northwest wind kept blowing the ship back, therefore, the Captain stated that if the wind didn’t stop he would sail back to Manila. This was not good news to the Missionaries who had spent 393 days on the voyage and did not want to turn around and go all the way back to Manila. With all their heart they prayed and the Lord was in their favour because next morning a gentle Southeast wind blew them to Matupit. This was the 29th September, 1882, the Feast of St. Michael. This date is celebrated every year to remember the arrival of the first MSC Missionaries in Matupit. (Reference?)

The three missionaries wanted to go to the place where Fr. Lanuzel had been the year before. They found their way to Nodup where they met To Litur and his people. They were welcomed by the people of Nodup. This was the place where Father Lanuzel had been and where he had baptized 76 children. On the same day they walked back to the ship anchored at Matupit.

Sometime later they hired a canoe, loaded all their cargo and sailed around the mountain to Nodup. For that reason the local people say that the missionaries arrived first in Nodup. (Reference?)

Life with the People at Nodup

When Fr. Lanuzel left Nodup he buried the sacred vessels in the ground. The MSC Missionaries had no idea about those vessels in the ground. However, they discovered the Monstrance and Chalice when they noticed that ant-holes in the ground were in the form of a monstrance. Naturally they were curious to find out what was buried in the ground. This is how God used the ants to reveal those sacred vessels. The first thing to do was to build a home and they offered to buy good building materials. The Fathers found this timber very easy to work. Unfortunately the building collapsed in two weeks. Not being familiar with what type of wood was suitable for building they were tricked to believe that pawpaw trunk was good timber. Therefore the people had sold them pawpaw trunks for the house. This must have been painful for the missionaries, but they did not give up. They were learning the ways of the people and how to deal with them. (Reference?)

They stayed at Nodup for six months. Nodup was not central enough since there was the three mountains on one side and the sea on the other side. Father Navarre considered the disadvantages of being at Nodup so he decided it was better to move to a more suitable location. Therefore he made a deal with the land owners and bought land at what was then called Kininigunan and today is known as Kokopo. Moving from Nodup to Kininigunan was not an easy transition because there was trouble looming around the corner. There was already Queen Emma and her associates who had settled there to promote their business interest. Therefore, the presence of the Missionaries caused some ill feelings on the part of those who were there earlier. (Reference?)

Fr. Navarre and his two companions built a permanent house in April, 1883 but it didn't last long because on the 27th June of the same year everything was destroyed by fire at the instigation of a Mr. Thomas Farrell, the de facto husband of Queen Emma. The missionaries lost all their property and they were not able to say Mass for the next twelve months. Even the Sacred Heart banner, blessed by Leo XIII, was destroyed and the Missionaries, caught in the building that evening, had difficulty in getting out alive. Mr. Mouton came to their aid providing accommodation for the homeless Missionaries. After two weeks they went to Malagunan where they bought a piece of land, built a temporary shelter and took shelter in it. From Malagunan Fr. Navarre decided to leave for Australia to get some help for a new building. Due to ill health, Br. Fromm also left with Fr. Navarre, leaving Fr. Cramaille behind. (Reference?)

Fr. Cramaille went to Volavolo where he stayed with the business man called Dupre. He did medical work among the people and at the same time he studied the language of the people and began a systematic collection of the Kuanua (Tolai) language. (Reference?)

New Arrivals

The explanation given in *75 Glorious Years* by Michael says that while in Sydney Fr. Navarre had the joy of meeting the new arrivals, Fr. Fernand Hartzer, Fr. Gaillard, Fr. Louis Vatan, and Br. Guiseppe de Santis who arrived in January 1884 and they travelled to New Britain with Fr. Navarre. So the number increased to five priests and one Lay Brother. Fr. Navarre assigned the new arrivals to their tasks in the mission. Fr. Vatan stayed with Fr. Cramaille at Volavolo while Fr. Gaillard was assigned at Malagunan to begin a new Mission. Then in September 1884, Pope Leo XIII asked the Fathers to begin a new Mission in Papua. The Priests had a meeting at Kininigunan and decided to send Fr. Navarre, Fr. Hartzer and Br. de Santis to Thursday Island. Michael goes on to say that in September of the same year Fr. Louis Couppe and Fr. Henry Verius together with the first five Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as well as three Italian Brothers travelled from France to Sydney arriving on the 31st of January, 1885. (*75 GY p.14*) More details about the journey is given in the next chapter. (Reference?)

Chapter IV

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

The Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was founded in 1882 by Fr. Jules Chevalier. Having founded the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Chevalier was moved by the Holy Spirit to start a Congregation of women who would become partners in spreading the motto: "May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved." Having a strong devotion to Our Lady he was led by the Spirit to honour her through the invocation: *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*. (Reference?)

The first attempt to found a community devoted to our Lady of the Sacred Heart failed, but he continued to pray and trust in Our Lady for the right moment to start again. Our Lady answered his prayer by sending him a person who would become leader and the co-foundress of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. This person was none other than Madame Marie Louise Hartzer, a young widow and a woman of deep faith whose only two sons had entered the seminary of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. When she met Fr. Chevalier, he immediately realized that she was the answer to his prayer that she would be the one to take charge of the small community of young women he had gathered at Issoudun. Therefore, she

joined the new community and even though she was only a novice she became the leader of the young Congregation and was responsible for its spread to other parts of the world including Papua New Guinea. By the time she died in 1908 the Congregation had been firmly established. Fr. Navarre, the first Bishop of Melanesia, realized that the work of the Missionaries would not be balanced without the work of the Sisters. Consequently, he asked for the Sisters to come to the mission. Mother Marie Louise with four other sisters took their first vows on the 9th September, 1884. Two more sisters took their first vows on 17th October of the same year. (Reference?)

The Sisters Travel to Mission

The first five sisters with Fr. Couppe and Fr. Verius as well as two MSC Brothers got ready to depart for mission on the 17th October, 1884. Fr. Verius became ill with typhoid fever and had to be in hospital in Marseilles, so the others left without him. On the way Fr. Couppe also became ill with the same dreaded disease. When they reached Bourbon Island Fr. Couppe was hospitalised so the Sisters and the Brothers had to wait for him. His health became worse so he asked for the Sacrament of the sick. The Sisters were alarmed so they prayed hard to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart for his recovery. The statue of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was enthroned in the Convent Chapel of the Daughters of Mary and every day the Sisters and the people took turns to pray before the statue. Our Lady heard their prayer and his health improved. (Reference?)

Another boat on which Fr. Verius had travelled arrived from France and he was surprised to see that his companions were still on the Island. Fr. Verius had a relapse of typhoid fever and had to be admitted to hospital again. When he recovered all the missionaries departed finally on the 7th January, 1885 with deep gratitude to the Holy Ghost Fathers and the Daughters of Mary who had been very hospitable to them for more than two months. The ship, the *Calendonia* bore the missionaries towards Australia, happy to be drawing closer to their destination which in their minds was Papua New Guinea, especially New Britain. Australia was intended to be just a port of call since their minds were focused on New Guinea. All their thoughts, prayers and desires had carried them to the islands and the poor souls awaiting them. However, in God's designs, Australia was destined to be a field of fruitful apostolate for the missionaries of the Sacred Heart as well as for the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. (Reference?)

Halt in Australia

The missionaries arrived in Sydney, Australia on 31st January, 1885. On arrival they learnt that plans had changed according to the decision made between Archbishop Moran and Fr. Navarre in consultation with Mother Marie Louise. Fr. Couppe was appointed as Parish Priest of Botany while he would attend to the needs of the missionaries by establishing a Procure in Sydney. The

Sisters opened a Convent at Botany Parish and Sr. Xavier, who was a trained teacher, was appointed to teach in a newly opened Catholic School within the same Parish and a lay teacher was appointed to teach with her. The other four Sisters, waited in Sydney for the rest of 1885 and in January 1886 they travelled on to Thursday Island where they opened a house that had been prepared for them by the MSC Fathers. On the 8th January, 1887 Sr. Ligouri and the first Australian novice, Margaret left Sydney to join the others on Thursday Island. At this time there were six Sisters including the novice on Thursday Island. They were fully occupied with apostolic work with the people of the Island. Yet deep within their hearts they knew that this was not the Land of Promise – quietly working and waiting for the day when they would be able to set foot on the land that was so close to them. (Reference?)

The first four O.L.S.H. Sisters arrived in Yule Island

The MSC Missionaries who were in Yule Island before the Sisters were, Fr. Navarre, Fr. Verius, Fr. Coupe and Fr. Toubanc as well as six Brothers. In preparation for the arrival of the Sisters the Fathers and Brothers built a house on the same line as their own house, the Church being in the middle of the two houses. Fr. Navarre who had been appointed by Rome as Vicar Apostolic of Melanesia was on his way to Europe to be consecrated as Bishop. Stopping over on Thursday Island he made arrangements for the Sisters to travel to Yule Island. On the 1st August 1887 the first four Sisters: Mother Ligouri, and Sisters Clare, Madeline and Martha arrived on Yule Island, welcomed by the Fathers and Brothers as well as the people. Soon after arrival the Sisters started work, nursing the sick, dressing sores, teaching in the school and taking charge of the Church and the sacristy as well as doing some pastoral work. At home they took charge of the laundry, the cooking and cleaning. Between 1885 and 1975 there were 160 Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart who had been in Yule Island Mission and 76 out of these had died there. There had been many vocations too who hailed from the Yule Island Mission. (Reference?)

The first five OLSH Sisters arrived in Vunapope

Look for the information

Chapter V

The Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Introduction

Due to the fact that the mission was in need of more Sisters, Bishop Coupe was putting pressure on Mother Marie Louise Hartzer to send more Sisters, especially German speaking

Sisters since New Pomerania had become a German Protectorate and the German administration informed Bishop Couppe that they wanted German Missionaries. There were German Priests who could come to the Mission whereas in the case of Sisters, the German girls who had entered were still doing their novitiate. After further consideration it was decided that a Novitiate of the OLSH Sisters Congregation would be started in Germany. Mother Marie Louise and Fr. Chevalier both agreed to it and Bishop Couppe was delighted about this project. The building site was decided on and the building plans were prepared. However, the German Government laid down the conditions that a German foundation would involve a change of title and the Constitutions and this would mean independence from the administration centre at Issoudun. Mother Marie Louis and Fr. Chevalier did not agree to this. The outcome of all this heartache and suffering was the birth of a new institute closely related to the Charism and Spirit, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart (MSC) in 1900.

Foundation

Since Fr. Hubert Linckens, took on the job of laying the foundation for a novitiate of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Germany and because this was not agreed upon by the German Government, nevertheless, he felt the onus would be on himself to start new congregation. The building plans intended for the OLSH Novitiate became readily available to build the Convent for the new congregation. The Sisters of Providence were asked to provide two Sisters for the formation of the young women who would enter. Therefore, two experienced religious women from the Sisters of Divine Providence were released to help with the formation of the Sisters of the new congregation; these were Sr. Servatia who was to be the Superior and Sr. Mechtildis was to be the Novice Mistress.

The first candidates gathered in a rented house in August 1899 and there they were entrusted to the care of Sr. Servatia and Sr. Mechtildis with Fr. Hubert Linckens as their spiritual director; the community moved into the new house in December, 1899. The new religious community was canonically erected on the 6th February 1900 by the Bishop of Munster and they were given the name Missionaries Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the 25th March, the Congregation's Foundation Day was the reception of the habit and for this ceremony Bishop Louis Couppe, MSC received them into the novitiate. There were a big number of novices but out of this ten went on to make their first profession which took place on the 25th March, 1901. The new community grew quickly and the sisters were ready for ministry. In 1902 twelve Sisters left for the missions, five went to the Marshall Islands and seven came to New Pomerania. Four more left for the Marshalls on 8th December, 1903 and another six came to New Pomerania in February, 1904. Sadly, on the 13th August, 1904 five of those young Sisters were among the ten missionaries who lost their lives in St. Paul's Baining, East New Britain. More of this information is given in the next section.

The Baining Martyrs

(75 GY pg. 31-34)

Waldersee gives the following account of the massacre at St. Paul's Baining. To Mario was the man behind the massacre of the ten missionaries. He was captured as a child and sold as slave to one of the traders. In 1890 his white master died and To Mario was rescued by Bishop Couppe at fourteen years of age. He was placed in the orphanage at Volavolo and later at Vunapope. When he left school he went to work in the New Guinea mainland where he learnt to use firearms. On his return to Vunapope he asked to be admitted in the new Christian Village at St. Paul's, his original home. To Mario was married but he became attracted to another woman, Savunut, who was also married. He planned to divorce his own wife and marry Savunut. A few times they escaped but they were brought back and punished by beatings. This was the penalty given by the Parish Priest, Fr. Rascher, with the intention of stamping adultery and polygamy. This form of punishment was not accepted by To Mario who began to plot against Fr. Rascher and all the missionaries in the stations as well as their faithful followers. To Mario got supporters not from those living in the Christian Village but from others living in the area. They planned to take action on the 7th August but their plan was interrupted due to a visit by the Area Manager of New Guinea Company and an armed party. Therefore the date was moved to the 13th August, 1904.

That Saturday morning the 13th August there were nine missionaries living at St. Paul's Station. On that particular day there was going to be the blessing of the new church building at St. Paul's so the people and the missionaries were all busy preparing for the blessing. Three Sisters were stationed at St. Paul's and four others had come from the coast to help with the preparation. With Fr. Rascher were two Dutch MSC Lay Brothers and two Trappist Brothers who had come to look into the possibility of a Trappist foundation in E. N. B, one of them was the brother of Fr. Bernard Bley, MSC. Early that Saturday morning Fr. Rascher planned to go down to Vunamarita for some business but he was sick, therefore, he sent two Sisters, Dorothea and Sr. Brigida to Vunamarita to get some supplies. Those two as well as one of Trappist Brothers had also gone to Vunamarita that morning and so had escaped the carnage.

To Mario had gone to Father's house and asked for a gun to shoot birds. He immediately pointed the gun at Father Rascher and shot him dead. The gunshot was the signal so when the other assailants heard the gunshot they went ahead and killed the other eight missionaries with axes and clubs. Fr. Rutten who was stationed at Nacharunep, a nearby station, was also killed and his body was buried in a shallow grave near the station.

The news reached Vunamarita so Fr. Vander der Aa, the Parish Priest, got on his horse and went up to St. Paul's. He had time to see only the body of Fr. Rascher and two Sisters before he was driven away again by the murderers. There was an attempt made by an Irish trader, Tom Gough, who went to St. Paul's and managed to bring the body of Fr. Rascher to Vunamarita, but he did

not try again because To Mario threatened to wipe out all the missionaries at Vunamarita if he went up again. Another trader, Mr. Misterfeld, armed fifty Buka boys in case there was an attack. There was no attack even though the alarm was raised at 4.30 am. For safety the two remaining Sisters were sent to a nearby island of Massikonapuka, where they were safely guarded by a chief named Tilang. Thanks to him the Sisters were saved.

The News of the Murders Reached Vunapope

In the morning of that Saturday, 13th August, a sailing boat on its way to Volavolo, arrived at Vunamarita, they were given a letter to send to Vunapope. The Sacred Heart whom the missionaries had served so well gave the sailing boat a quick trip to Volavolo being blown by an unseasonable northwest wind. Another trader, Mr. Hilderbrand, sent a boy to Vunapope with a letter. The boy arrived in the middle of the night and being so late he would not wake anybody up. Instead, he slept until morning. Early on Sunday morning he gave the letter to Mr. Singwanz who took the letter to Vunapope and alerted the Priest who informed the other missionaries and it was a great shock to them. They received the news about Fr. Rascher but there was an uncertainty as to whether the other missionaries had been murdered as well or not. Mr. Singwanz set out on the journey to St. Paul's on Sunday morning with local Police and a Priest to find out what had happened, arriving at 5.00 pm. After Mass on Monday morning they left for St. Paul's and arriving safely they found that the St. Paul's Mission had been completely deserted after the murderers robbed the houses and the Church.

The bodies of those who were murdered were still lying where they were killed. The group dug a common grave and eight times they carried the body of a Brother or Sister to the grave while the Buka boys kept guard in case of any sudden attack. The next day they went on to Nacharunep and found that Fr. Rutten had also been killed and his body was buried in a shallow grave nearby. Some days later an expedition was sent from Kokopo under the leadership of Schaper, the Chief of Police accompanied by the Buka Boys. Arriving at St. Paul's they were able to capture the murderers with the exception of To Mario who tried to resist but when he fired his gun the cartridges did not go off. He hid behind a tree thinking he was safe but the bullet penetrated the tree and hit his neck killing him instantly.

The murderers were brought to Kokopo; they were tried and found guilty so they had to face the death sentence, but, the good news was that all nine of them were baptized before they faced the firing square.

PART III
Chapter VI
Bishop Louis Couppe

Louis Couppe was born in Romorantin, France, on 26th August, 1850. As a young man he entered Seminary and was ordained a diocesan priest on 30th May, 1874. Wanting to be a missionary and attracted by the spirituality of Jules Chevalier, he applied to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart for entrance to their order. He had great difficulty in obtaining permission from his Bishop to join the MSC. He entered at last on the 26th June 1880 and made his first profession on 26th July 1881. His final vows were made in Rome on 25th July 1884.

Fr. Loius Couppe, Fr. Henry Verius, three lay MSC brothers and the five FDNCS Sisters left Issoudun to travel to Oceania. At Marseilles Fr. Verius became very ill with typhoid fever and had to remain in hospital while the others continued on. During the journey Fr. Couppe also fell ill from typhoid fever. When they reached Bourbon Island he was hospitalized and the others had to wait for him. The state of Fr. Couppe's health became worse and he asked for and received the last Sacraments. The Sisters greatly alarmed, prayed earnestly to Our Lady not to allow their Father to be taken from them. They decided to begin a solemn novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, "Hope of the Hopeless". At once they went to the wharf to get the statue of OLSH which had been presented to them at Marseilles by the Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus. At the Convent of the Daughters of Mary, the statue was given a triumphal reception. The children from the school, people who sympathized with the sick priest, and the sisters who depended on him to conduct them to their mission in Oceania, all united daily in the solemn novena. Our Lady was never left alone; each day the crowd of local people increased until Fr. Couppe gradually recovered from the illness which had brought him so close to death.

Then a boat from France called into Bourbon and Fr. Verius who was on board realized the other missionaries were still on the Island. He was suffering from a relapse and had to be hospitalized once again. At last on the 7th January, 1885, all the missionaries sailed for Australia on the good ship "Caledonia". How grateful they were to the kind missionaries of Bourbon who had befriended them in their hour of need for two whole months.

They eventually arrived in Australia on their way to the Islands. Cardinal Moran, the head of the Church in Australia requested for a priest to remain, therefore Fr. Couppe stayed back and took charge of Botany Parish for some time. This period gave him the opportunity to learn the English Language. After his time in Australia Fr. Couppe found his way to the Islands, arriving in Yule Island on the 27th August, 1886. He teamed up with Fr. Verius and they laid the foundations of the new mission. They explored the Roro and Mekeo tribes and named a river they discovered after St. Joseph.

Fr. Coupe was appointed by Pope Leo XIII as first Vicar Apostolic of New Pomerania (New Britain). He went back to Europe and was consecrated Bishop in the Chapel of the MSC Monastery at Antwerp, Belgium, in 1890. Returning from Europe he continued on to New Pomerania to face the challenges of establishing the Church in the new mission land.

The Bishop possessed great business foresight. On foot, on horseback, by small ships, and later by a tricycle, he travelled far and wide around New Britain, New Ireland and Manus in order to find suitable sites for future mission stations. He was never satisfied with general observations or second hand reports. He would examine anchorages by swimming under water to make sure of their safety for ships. In every place he thought would be a suitable location for a mission station in the future he bought land for Church, priests and Catechists. In his time churches were built, schools, including boarding schools were established, plantations were started and sawmills were introduced for the material needs of the mission. One of the major tasks that he was engaged in was the foundation of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. There will be more details about this in the next chapters.

Spheres of Influence

When the mission seemed to be flourishing with more missionaries arriving and Bishop Coupe wished to have a strong foothold in the Gazelle Peninsula, the Government divided the country into “Spheres of influence” in 1890, putting the Methodists in the northern part and the Catholic Mission in the southern part where there were not so many people. But, there were two Catholic Stations, Volavolo and Malagunan, already established in the North. The two parish priests were allowed to work but only within a limited area around their own stations. So this made extension almost impossible, but God had his own ways. The priests at Volavolo and Malagunan trained Catechists who went into the villages to teach and lead the prayers. On Sundays they gathered on the two stations for Mass. In 1896 great crowds arrived on the stations for instruction. A real problem was what to do for the sick and dying. The Bishop instructed the priests to go to the sick and the dying who needed them. Eventually the dividing line between the Catholics and Methodists became a dead letter. It was enforced on the 20th January 1890 and ended on 27th March, 1899, eight years later.

For 33 years he served God as Bishop and leader, being attentive to the needs of the missionaries and the people, labouring under many hardships and challenges.

Due to ill health the Bishop was going to leave but he had to wait until the new Bishop arrived to replace him. As reported by Sr. Adela who interviewed Fr. Mertens:

When Father Mertens was telling me the story of the Mission he said that he remembered Bishop Coupe as a man who was an excellent leader with a mind that was clear and practical and blessed with great foresight, in short, a real pioneer. When Father Mertens

first arrived an old Priest advised him, “Never ask the Bishop anything to which he could give a definite “no” as an answer, because after he has said “no” to it, it will still be “no” in 20 years time, if you ask again.

In August 1923, he went to Douglas Park, Australia where he lived until 1926 when he went home to God to receive a well-earned reward. His body was disinterred and brought back on the 14th February and was buried at Vunapope cemetery.

HIS SPIRITUALITY

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Mt. 16:24)

Bishop Couppe was inspired to follow Christ. Therefore, he renounced his loved ones, his homeland and he followed Jesus in the society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and he travelled through difficult circumstances until he arrived in New Britain. Inspired by the love of the Sacred Heart and full of zeal for souls, he “put his hand to the plough and never looked back”.

Like Jesus who confronted the Teachers of the law, the Scribes and the Pharisees, Bishop Couppe reacted strongly against the exploitation of the people by the New Guinea Company (NGC). These German traders did not want the people to be educated for their own benefit since they wanted to use them to provide cheap labour for the benefit of the traders. Furthermore, when the “spheres of influence” was introduced the NGC clearly discriminated against the Catholic Mission. Due to the spheres of influence the Gazelle Peninsular was divided into two parts and the richer and most densely populated part was given to the Wesleyan Mission and the poorer part was given to the Catholics. Bishop Couppe reacted strongly against the evil intentions of the NGC because these were blockages to the work of evangelization. He reported these matters to the highest authority in Germany and the Catholic Newspaper spread the news nationwide. In the end the NGC disappeared from the scene and the spheres of influence ended in 1899. (Delbos, 1985)

Summary

Bishop Couppe was a man of deep faith, very close to God and he did everything he could to win souls for God. He had a very strong sense of justice and he went out of his way to fight for the rights of the people. He never allowed difficulties to discourage him but took them as challenges to be overcome. He did not concentrate only on the spiritual but on the material needs of the Mission and the people. He knew that if their material needs were satisfied then they would be ready to surrender their lives to God.

PART FOUR

Chapter VII

The Foundation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, FMI

(Ref: I will give them one heart)

One of the greatest achievements of Bishop Couppe was the foundation of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI). In the year 1912, just thirty years after the arrival of the first missionary priests and only twenty years after the coming of the first five Sisters of O.L.S.H. to New Britain the Bishop decided to start the new congregation in spite of opposition from some of the missionaries. He was aware of the low status of women

Bishop Couppe decided spent time to pray and discern if it was the will of God to start a new congregation. After receiving advice, both favourable and unfavourable, he felt sure it was God's will to find a community of local Sisters. They were to be named Daughters of Mary Immaculate and interested candidates would come from the young girls who had been under the care of the Sisters at Volavolo, Vunapope and Malagunan.

The work of the Bishop and the missionaries had been fruitful; therefore, many families had asked for and received the grace of Baptism. Local Catechists had gone to the villages assisting in the work of evangelization. Still the Bishop was not satisfied, he wanted to do more for the people. He felt that the Faith would not take deep root amongst the people unless some respond to Our Lord's call: "*Go sell all what you have and come follow me*", unless some generous enough to offer their lives to God through the three vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, sacrificing themselves that God's Kingdom would reign truly in the hearts of their people.

For the above matter he prayed and talked with the O.L.S.H. Sisters as well as the senior school girls during religious instruction at Vunapope boarding school. He explained what Religious Life meant, its difficulties and its immense value in the salvation of souls.

In preparation for the foundation the Bishop wrote two letters; in the first letter dated 21st October he stated his reasons for starting the congregation. The content of the first letter was:

1. That it was the wish of the Pope that each mission should be self-supporting, supplying its own personnel.
2. That the local sisters should be able to take over the education of the young should the expatriate sisters were unable to continue.
3. Having local sisters would release the great burden of bringing missionaries from overseas.
4. The life example of the sisters would be a Christian witness to the people.
5. The reception of daily Holy Communion would create a spiritual milieu where God would call the young women into religious life. (See Appendix 1 for more information).

On the 21st October, 1912 the first six local girls entered the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, Vunapope. Of the six girls, three were Tolai girls, one from St. Paul's Baining and two from Manus. These had been at Vunapope for some years. Mother Gerarda FDNsc played the role as Novice Mistress while Sister M. Helena was her assistant. Bishop Couppe was the Spiritual Director who came on a regular basis to instruct the postulants in the Religious Life.

The second letter dated 27th October was the official approbation of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. In the letter he also stated the general aim of the Congregation, that is, the sanctification of its members and the special aim which was the teaching of girls in the Catholic way of life. (See Appendix 2 for more information).

The official foundation day is the 27th October 1912.

Two Tolai girls soon found life difficult and left and there remained four.

The first Sister to pronounce her vows was Veronica, a Postulant from St. Paul's Baining. Veronica was one of the orphans under the care of the sisters at St. Paul's Baining. She was 12 years old at the time when the ten missionaries were killed at St. Paul's. She must have witnessed what happened. The orphans were transferred to Vunapope. Moved by that great sacrifice she decided to enter religious life and to give her life to God at the age of twenty. As a postulant she was dying from an ulcer on her leg and she asked to make her promises. On 19th July, 1913, Sr. Mary Veronica pronounced her three promises of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The Bishop received her promises and she died peacefully, the very first Papua New

Guinean religious Sister. We know that the “Blood of Martyrs is the seed of Christians” and I add the “Blood of the Baining Martyrs is the seed of religious vocations in PNG”.

Girls continued to enter as postulants; some may have had genuine vocations but others may have come out of curiosity; therefore some persevered and others did not. The first three Novices who completed the novitiate training and who pronounced their first promises of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience were: Sr. Cecilia from Malagunan Parish, Sr. Eugenia and Sr. Gertrude, both from Manus. Of these three Sisters professed only one, Sr. Cecilia, persevered till the end. During the Japanese occupation she was the one who provided very strong leadership to the struggling community till the end of the war. She died on 30th May 1945.

Bp Coupe was the spiritual director of the young Congregation and he visited them regularly to instruct them in the religious life. Mother Gerarda de Bakker, fdnsc, from the Netherlands was their first formator and when the number increased she was their Superior as well. She was assisted by Sr. Helena Kobloth, fdnsc who took over when Mother Gerarda passed away in 1932. The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart continued to help us until we had the first general Chapter and elected our first Congregation Leader in January 1979. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The aspirants did not find life easy – being expected to say long prayers, to have silence in the house and to work in the garden. Recreation hours were restricted to certain time and places. They felt that they were in some kind of “Kalabus” (gaol). They looked forward for the free day given to them once a week. Somehow they were inspired by the good example of the European Sisters. However, the life of sacrifice was too much for the three Tolai girls and since their homes were close by they left and the other three continued.

Photo Here

After that tragic war of blood shedding, one of the St. Paul’s Baining girls, Veronica Habuai, entered as an aspirant early in 1912. She became a postulant in 1913 but she had a very serious ulcer on her leg which could not be cured by medicine. She was determined to become a Sister. On the 19th July, 1913 she pronounced her three Vows of Poverty, Chastity and obedience on her

sick bed in the presence of the Bishop, then she died. Sr. Veronica was the first Papua New Guinean woman to dedicate her life to God in the F.M.I. Congregation.

Soon some young girls expressed interest in the Religious life and were accepted. Some persevered whereas others left after a while. For the young girls who were interested in religious life at that time it was not easy. On the one hand there was excitement on the part of the girls themselves but on the other hand they faced some suffering especially on the part of their own families and relatives who could not understand why the girls would reject married life to embrace religious life. The girls had to face all kinds of obstacle put their way by the family members and relatives. The begged Bishop Coupe to pay bride price for their daughter, but the bishop explained to them that God did not pay bride price, that he expected them to give their daughters freely. Some parents still would not accept the bishop's explanation and still engaged in measures that would stop their daughters entering.

One girl named Luisa Ia Pia entered as an aspirant and soon after some members of her family paid her a friendly visit, offering her some food they had brought as a gift. She ate of it and died very soon after as it contained deadly poison against which all treatment proved useless. Her death occurred whilst she was still an aspirant on 15th October, 1916.ⁱ

[Photo Here](#)

The first three postulants to receive the Habit were: Ia Markapa from Beka, Malagunan, Nakanas and Ia Pea both from Manus. In Religion they got the names as Sister Cecilia, Sister Gertrude, and Sister Eugenia respectively. Bishop Coupe himself performed the ceremony carefully explained to them and to the people present the significant of the Habit. The Habit consisted of a grey dress with a black cincture tied around the waist, a white cap and veil tied under the chin by two white straps.

Early Stages

After a week's break the three novices commenced their novitiate training. They were tested to know if they were really had a calling to religious life or not. Bishop Coupe did his best to initiate the three into the religious way of life. As Novice Mistress Mother Gerarda gave herself faithfully to the task and Sr. Helena assisted with the practical formation. The good work

continued daily with the Bishop instructing, exhorting and clarifying what religious meant while the Sisters training them to become sacristans, cooks, teachers and nurses.

The day of the first profession was on 10th October, 1915, the very first three Sisters to make their promises Poverty, Chastity and Obedience before the congregation of priests, Sisters, Brothers and people, with the Bishop as presider of the ceremony. Mother Gerarda and Sister Helena greatly rejoiced with Bishop Couppe as well as the people who were present.

Photo Here

Of these three Sisters professed only one, Sister Cecilia persevered and during the Japanese occupation she was appointed as Superior and she played her role very well as leader of the struggling community till the end of the war. Due to the emotional stress, lack of proper accommodation and rest, the harassment and torture by the Japanese, Sr. Cecilia was worn out and she became sick and died on 30th May, 1945. Sister Eugenia left and got married in Gunanba, E.N.B. where she lived until her death. Sister Gertrude also left and returned to Manus about 1933. During the Second World War she joined her people in the Paleo heresy. She declared that she was there physically but that her heart was in the Catholic Church. So we may conclude that God was merciful to her at her hour of death.

From the beginning the small Congregation of F.M.I. continued to grow in number. Sister M. Margareta, Sister M. Regina and Sister M. Klara were in the second group who entered. More girls from Vunapope, Volavovlo or Malaguna boarding schools continued to offer themselves to God's service year after year. Sister Margareta lived to celebrate her Golden Jubilee (50 Years) in 1966. Sister Regina died in 1929, and Sister Klara, left as a young Sister.

“Writing of those early days, Sister Margarita says: ‘His Lordship Bishop Couppe in conjunction with Mother M. Gerarda FDNSC accepted six young girls for the foundation members of the Congregation of Mary Immaculate in New Britain – the first congregation of Sisters to be founded in Papua New Guinea Islands. The simple postulants’ dresses were prepared and with great confidence in Divine Providence and the Immaculate Mother, the humble work commenced. Bishop Couppe was happy. Every day he came to help the young Sisters in the ways of the Religious life. He made the meditation with them. Instructed them in the meaning and rules of the community; wrote their Constitutions and left no stone unturned that these foundation members understood the responsibilities and benefits of their new way of life’.”

Sister Margareta continues:

“The good Bishop prepared us carefully for our first retreat. We were very raw recruits but he explained the meaning and graces attached to our first retreat and remained in the chapel or small room assigned to him in our new Convent so that he would be on hand if we needed him’ ”.

Photo Here

There was a good deal of criticism from the clergy and others of the Bishop’s latest venture. They were against the foundation saying that the time was not ripe for such an important undertaking, concluding that the people were too primitive and the girls from “Palairam” and other schools were too immature. It was true that before World War II the Tolai girls came at any early age to be taught and trained by the Sisters and hardly returned home villages until they were marriageable age. Therefore, they were in some way out of touch with village life. Most of the girls were sought after as wives in the marriage market and there was much concern and anxiety in many families when they learnt that a girl, whose bride price had been paid at an early age, rejected the chosen suitor and preferred to enter the Convent.

So some parents had second thoughts about sending their daughter to be educated by the Sisters, thinking that it was better for them to stay home rather than become involved in the disturbing situations, such as entering Convents. They feared losing their *tabu* (shell money) and there would be no peace in the families.

The Bishop’s two letters written in October, 1912, (see Appendix) set forth his reasons for the foundation of the Congregation. Both letters were inserted in “*A Varkurai na Vavaki upi ra Kivung Tabu kai ra umana Natu i la Maria Immaculata*”. (The first Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate)

The above problem was understandable since in the traditional society the girls were expected to get married, and the families benefitted from the bride price. Furthermore, they must have children in order to perpetuate the family line. Some parents who had some understanding about religious life allowed their daughters to enter whereas those who did not understand about religious life were against their daughters entering. The following cases indicate the type of reaction shown by the parents or relatives.

Sr. Fidelma Atau

Clara Atau comes from Bariai, W.N.B. She was going to school at home in her village and then her father, Francis, decided that she should attend boarding school with the Sisters, so he travelled with her by ship to E.N.B. where she was admitted to Vunapope Boarding School. She had been in the school for a year or two when she felt called to religious life and she wrote to the parents to inform them about her intention. When the father read the letter he was upset and he returned to the Boarding School to let the Sisters know he was not happy about the news. He expressed that he brought his daughter to the school to be educated and he was not happy that the Sisters had influenced her to want to become a religious. Fr O'Hanland, the Mission Education Officer, who happened to be around heard about Francis and had a talk with him giving him some good advice. As a result Francis did not make any more fuss but quietly found his way back home.

Clara entered and became a postulant on the 1st March, 1954 and she became a Novice on 11th September of the same year. She was professed on 12th September, 1956 and she became Sr. Fidelma Atau. Two years after religious profession she went on home leave for the first time in December, 1958. It was a new experience for her people to see her clad in the religious habit and there was much excitement. The father was touched and he declared: "I am a sinner and yet here is my daughter, a religious." He had learnt to appreciate that in spite of his unworthiness, God had called his daughter and she has given herself to him as a religious.

Interview: Sr. Brigid/ Sr. Angelica/ Sr. Fidelis/ Sr. Elizabeth/ Sr. Genevieve/ Sr. Kostka/ Sr. Xavier/ Sr. Benedicta L. /Sr. Gorethy /Sr. Esther/Sr. Margaret Rai.

In 1914 four girls entered as postulants and thank God all four persevered until death. Three of them were Tolai girls and one from Manus. Sister M. Crescentia from Bitagalip celebrated her Golden Jubilee of Profession in October 1967 and went home to God on the 5th of April, 1972 having spent fifty-five years in religious life. Of the next group received into the Congregation, Sister M. Josephine, celebrated her Golden Jubilee of Profession in October, 1968.

The above three jubilarians, Sr. Margareta, Sr. Crescentia, and Sr. Josephine, who were among the pioneer Sisters, have proved that Bishop Couppe did not make a mistake when he judged that the local girls of the South Pacific were fit to become worthy Daughters of Mary Immaculate,

dedicating themselves to God and following in the footsteps of Jesus and Mary in the service of God and his Church.

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Chapter VIII

Opening up New Convents

The number of Sisters was increasing year by year and when they were judged capable of being in charge of Mission stations, some Sisters were sent to open a Convent at Tapo in 1920. In 1922 another group were sent to open a Convent at Takabur, and in 1924 another group went to Paparatava. Their ministries in those stations were teaching small children, doing some basic nursing, doing pastoral work, taking care of the Church and the sacristy and doing other household duties.

As has been indicated earlier, in 1923 Bishop Couppe retired on account of old age and being worn out by hard work with no holiday breaks. He left New Britain Douglas Park, N.S.W. Australia, to spend the rest of his life. The Sisters who have been touched through his work of foundation of the Congregation, his teaching and his care and concern for them, were heartbroken to see him go. Bishop Gerard Vesters was appointed to replace Bishop Couppe. Fr. Kleintitschen became the Spiritual Director of the F.M.I. Sisters while Mother Gerarda continued as Mistress of Novices and Sister M. Helena held her job as Socia training the Sisters for the various responsibilities they would be expected to fulfil on the outstations.

Tragedy Strikes

The Sisters were increasing in number every year, some girls becoming postulants, some receiving the habit and other making their profession. More and more young women were happy to respond to the Lord's invitation: "*If thou wilt be perfect go and sell all you have and come follow me.*" Some missionaries commented that there were not enough stations for the all the Sisters to be assigned. The flourishing congregation had an unwanted visitor. Like a robber that came in the night, the sickness of TB sets in and grabbed hold of so many of the young Sisters before it was recognized. Today TB can be controlled since doctors are able to diagnose it and are able to determine whether it is A, B, or C grade. At that time 1920's and 30's there were no

X-rays, nor special medicines to help those who contracted it. Malaria was prevalent at that time so the Sister's fever was thought to be caused by malarial virus.

[Photo Here](#)

Finally, the Doctor Brehm, mission doctor decided it was tuberculosis. Therefore, all precautions were taken to fight the disease. The sick Sisters were isolated from the others, but this was too late because the Sisters contracted the disease when the community was together and it took time for the virus to spread in the body. Treatment for TB was administered to the sick with nourishing food and rest. Still all this was of little help because within a time frame of ten years between 20 and 25 Sisters died of the dreaded disease. Then another conclusion was that the outbreak was caused by an infection of 'Open' TB of the young Sister who was appointed as Socia in the Novitiate.

[Photo Here](#)

An additional time of sorrow was forced upon the Sisters when Mother M. Gerarda passed away on 9th February, 1931. She had been suffering from diabetes and other ailments in the body, being exposed to the tropical heat and having so many responsibilities with so much stress and no time given for home leave, therefore, her last illness was short. Sister M. Helena relaced Mother Gerarda as Superior.

On 12th October, 1937 the Congregation celebrated its Silver Jubilee (25th Anniversary of foundation). The community was weak due to the fact that twenty-two of the Sisters have died, with forty-three still alive but some of who were ill, so no new postulants were admitted.

Those Sisters offered their suffering for the Church and for the Congregation Surrendering their lives to God as saints being resigned to God's Holy Will. There was rejoicing in heaven on the day of the Silver Jubilee even when the community at Vunapope was very weak.

God showered his blessings during the Jubilee, so after that occasion the Congregation began to take on new life. It was decided by Bishop Vesters that those who were free from TB should be moved to Takabur. Therefore, on the 11th February, 1938 twelve Sisters were taken to Takabur by the Mission truck. During Holy Mass Fr. Bender welcomed the Sisters and many people came

to greet the Sisters. Sixteen Sisters remained in Vunapope – nine of them were sick in bed. Soon after Sister Imelda died. At Tapo Community there were five Sisters and at Paparatava there were four.

Sister M. Helena was appointed as Superior of the Sisters at Takabur and Father Bender was their Spiritual Director. Realising that the Habit may have been a contributing factor in the sickness of the Sisters, the Habit was modified, the cap was done away with and a lighter veil replaced the heavy one. Some Sisters found it difficult to adapt themselves to the changes. Two Sisters decided to leave, however, the others listened to the good advice given by Fr. Bender and Sister Helena so little by little they adjusted themselves.

The begin again the new Novitiate, on 1st of June 1938, eight young women were received as postulants at Takabur the six of them received the Habit as Novices on 8th December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The young congregation had passed through its dark period of trial and a new life began again. Fr. Bender, M.S.C. passed away in 1940 and Fr. Swinge was appointed as Spiritual Director. Three FMI Sisters were sent to Rabaul, in January, 1941, to help the O.L.S.H. Sisters, but they returned as Japanese were arriving for the Second World War.

[Photo Here](#)

Chapter IX

Impact of World War II on the life of the FMI Sisters

In January, 1942, the Japanese bombed the Rabaul Airport and on 23rd January they invaded Rabaul. The European women and children were evacuated whereas the men were taken prisoners by the Japanese. Many were interned at Vunapope until the Japanese put them on a ship destined for Tokyo but it never arrived.

All the Missionaries in the Gazelle and elsewhere were interned at Vunapope, and the smallest buildings whereas the Father's House, the Convents, the schools and hospitals were kept for the Japanese. A barbed wire fence was erected enclosing the missionaries and in the nearby hills the seminarians excavated underground tunnels to be used for safety during air raids. These proved to be very useful.

The FMI Sisters, since they were local from New Britain, were at first allowed to stay with the other missionaries at Vunapope camp. They were allowed to go to Takabur about 10 km away and to the school vegetable gardens at Gunanur, about 5 km away, to collect food for themselves and for the missionaries at Vunapope.

It was after the Coral Sea battle that all FMI Sisters from Paparatava and Vunapope went to Takabur. When Father Zwing, MSC and Mother Helena, FDNSC had to go away from Takabur, they appointed Sister M. Cecilia, FMI as Superior and Sr. Scholastica and Sr. Josephine as her assistants. Anticipating that it may be necessary for the Sisters to disperse, each one was given a secular dress. Sister Cecilia being one of the first three professed in 1915, therefore, she was the senior member of the Congregation, and the only surviving member of the first three professed Sisters.

The Japanese soldiers came to Takabur and took over the Novitiate building, placed some people in Father's house and allowed the Sisters to live in the Professed Sisters' Convent. The Japanese allowed the Sisters to pray in the church but there was no Blessed Sacrament since Father had removed it from the church. Lucas To Vanganga, the Catechist, took care of the Sister's needs and he built bush house where he stored the sacred vessels, vestments, and personal property of Father Zwing and that of the Sisters and these were safely guarded day and night by the Catholic people.

The Sisters were advised by some of the people to change their Religious Habit into secular clothes but the Sisters preferred to remain as they were and to witness Christ among the people. They were united with their new Leader, Sr. Cecilia, who played her role wisely and well. Furthermore, the Japanese had great respect for the Sisters and feared to provoke the people by injuring the Sisters in any way. All the Sisters performed their religious duties daily though they deeply felt that they were deprived of Holy Community so they had to be content with Spiritual Communion.

Father Juenemann was not with the other missionaries in the prison camp; he lived at Bitagalip and was able to carry out his priestly ministry. The Japanese allowed the Sisters to go to Bitagalip, go to confession, attend Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion. This was their great joy because they had been deprived of this at Takabur.

As the feast of the Immaculate Conception was drawing near and the Sisters needed to have their annual retreat, however, there was no retreat Master so Sr. Cecilia decided that she would conduct the retreat herself for six days. They had four conferences each day, recited the rosary and made the Stations of the Cross offering all their prayers for the interned missionaries and for the people. At the end of the retreat they went to Bitagalip to attend Holy Mass, receive the Sacrament as well as renew their vows.

The good behaviour of the sisters was a clear demonstration that the Sisters have learnt very well what religious life was all about. They would not abandon their religious, instead, they decided to stay and continue in spite of all the hardships they encountered. The unity of the Sisters, their prayer life, their perseverance and their sacrifices was the spiritual strength that kept the Church alive in spite of the war.

The Sisters organised their daily routine very well. Once their religious exercises were over they must go to their vegetable gardens; they worked for long hours making sure that they had something to send to the starving missionaries interned at Vunapope. Whenever they did not have enough from their gardens they went to the villages to buy food with tabu or shell money. The Sisters were fulfilling God's word: *I was hungry and you gave me food... in prison and you came to see me. (Mt.25:35)* It was a service of charity and God was on their side because there were some generous people in the villages who gave food and refused payment. The Sisters would distribute food in baskets and carry them on backs heavily laden and would follow the 10km road to the missionaries at Vunapope. They would go early in the morning and were told to be careful of dangers and to hurry back before the planes began to drop bombs.

All this time there were spies around the place so the Sisters were very careful about there language. At times the Police would stop the Sisters on the way and interrogate them accusing them of carrying secret messages; at times they even hit them. At other time the Police raided the community cupboard and took whatever they wanted.

On 23rd November, 1943, the eleven FMI Sisters from Tapo joined the Takabur community. It was sad that two of them, Sisters Tarsicia and Agatha died at Tapo since the invasion of the Japanese. Soon after those from Tapo Arrived the Army Captain from Tobera appeared and

ordered the Sisters out from the only building they were allowed to use. Then, a large number of Japanese arrived to take over the Sisters' building and the Church.

Immediately the Sisters gathered together all their belongings and disappeared into the banana plantation where they started to build a bush house. A man from the village, To Buvavar heard about their plight and offered his house. So some Sisters agreed to live in his house while some of them continued to live in the plantation. They had to do that as a way of guarding the gardens from the Japanese who helped themselves to the fruits and vegetables from the Sisters' garden. The screams of the Sisters was enough to frighten away the common soldiers. They were frightened of the people and also reports to their superiors.

The Church was no longer a holy place of worship; it was more like a "den of thieves". The Sisters did not feel free to go and pray in the Church; they fulfilled their spiritual duties at home or took turns to go to Bitagalip where to attend Holy Mass and seek advice from Fr. Juenemann, MSC.

When Bishop Scharmach who was at the prison camp at Vunapope, heard about the Sisters' plight and sent a message for them to put off their Religious Habit and return to their homes. But the Sisters preferred to continue their Religious life as a community and to keep their beloved Religious Habit. Only four went to Gunanba to live with their relatives but still retained the Religious Habit. When one of them, Sister Christina, died suddenly, the other three decided to return to their community.

Sister Juliana who had been sick when the Sisters were thrown out from their convent at Takabur, died and was buried in the cemetery there.

Bombings

As time passed the bombings increase in intensity so on the 11th February, 1944, the bombings targeted Vunapope and for the first time, it was bombed. What a fearful experience, the bombings started without warning. None of those who were caught outside the air raid shelters, dug into the hills, escaped death or injury that day. Sr. Adela expresses the experience:

The missionaries were using an old shed, usually used for storing kapok, as a hospital for the sick Fathers and Brothers. Among the inmates were Father Mertens and Brother Redmond, S.M. with Brother Wischen as infirmarian. The siren sounded – Father Mertens rushed to the tunnels in the hills, but Brother Redmond, who was bedridden, stayed with his nurse in the “house kapok” only to be blown to pieces by the deadly bombs that fell that day. Twenty Brothers and priests were to die as a result of that bombing. Some lingered for days, being nursed in dark, earthy tunnels, as were the Sisters who had also been wounded. Henceforth the Missionaries lived in these tunnels. One was set apart for the priests, one for the Brothers, one for the F.D.N.S.C. Sisters, one for the M.S.C. Sisters and one for the mixed race schoolboys who had nowhere to go.

Soon it was realised that the Americans intended to bomb Vunapope out of existence – it was blasted daily from the air and the sea with a ferocity that defies description. At last there was nothing left to bomb but the church. For some time it had been used for all kinds of profane purposes by the Japanese, but for the time being these were at a safe distance from the doomed mission.

As one tunnel had received a direct hit and everyone’s nerves were tried almost beyond endurance, the Bishop told the Brothers to burn down our beloved Cathedral. In the calm of the evening we watched the grand monument erected by Bishop Couppe for the worship of God, go up in flames and the great bronze statue of the Sacred Heart standing on its highest pinnacle, in thanksgiving for the mission’s safety in World War 1, come crashing down to the ground.

At the end of the war the surviving missionaries returned to Vunapope to find their beloved home covered with jungle. The only two landmarks that guided them were the cement tank riddle with holes and the Sacred Heart Statue still lying where it had fallen to ground when the Cathedral was burnt. The statue was taken over and placed on the tank it stood there facing the entrance to the Mission with open arms to welcome those who enter Vunapope. Now the statue has been moved again and placed in front of the new cathedral.

Moving to Ramale Prison Camp

The Missionaries had to pack their clothes and carry them on their backs as they began their two hour journey to Ramale. Sr. Adela continues her story:

When there was nothing more to bomb in Vunapope, the Americans left us in peace amongst the rubble. The Japanese now gave orders that the missionaries were all to go to a “safe” place at Ramale – a dark damp unhealthy valley about two hours’ walk from Vunapope and five hundred feet down a jungle – covered gorge. The missionaries were not anxious to leave the safety of the underground tunnels, excavated at such an enormous cost of energy, even though the bombings had ceased since the destruction of all the buildings. At Ramale there was nothing but virgin bush and who knew if the bombings might not be later aimed at that area!

Anyway, the Japanese were the masters so the long procession of almost three hundred evacuees set out early one morning for their new home, each one carrying a bundle of clothes, and falling flat on the ground as planes passed overhead. A truck was provided for the sick, bedridden patients. And so the head mission station set up and organised by Bishop Louis Couppe became a deserted wilderness.

At Ramale all able bodied inmates got busy clearing a site for the camp, setting up a few shacks, but especially digging safety tunnels into the hills. There was one for each community – damp and dark but providing sleeping quarters, hospital and above all refuge from danger. In these first days at Ramale the F.M.I. Sisters came and worked generously with their displaced Fathers and Sisters. However a strong guard of Japanese Police was installed on the hill above the camp, and they strictly forbade the Native Sisters to enter the Ramale camp – they were to stay out.

The FMI Sisters were once more separated from the European missionaries once again. The moved to a nearby valley called Lalapit. Their kind friend and supporter, Fr. Juenemann, had to join the others in the camp therefore the Sisters were left on their own with the joy of attending Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion. The missionaries, as designed Divine Providence were able to participate in daily mass and to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, something that is very necessary for their spiritual support. Sr. Adela testifies how the flour had lasted the whole period:

It was almost miraculous the way the small amount of flour which they had brought with them from Vunapope to make Altar Breads lasted until peace came in spite of the camp dark valley in which they lived. Like the Manna in the desert, there was sufficient for everyone to have their daily food for the journey.

The FMI Sisters have been deprived of participating in Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion that had been part of their lives before war began. During the month of December their spiritual hunger intensified at the thought of not being able to receive the Lord at Christmas so they wrote a note and inserted it within the leaves that covered the food for the missionaries; they wrote:

‘Dear Bishop and Father, we want to let you know we are in distress. For days and nights on end we have been crying and unable to sleep for sorrow. Christmas is so near and we know there will be no Mass and no Holy Communion for us even on Our Lord’s Birthday. Can’t you help us, dear Bishop? Your little Sisters.’

The message stabbed the good Bishop Scharmach to the heart – he had tried repeatedly to make Mass and Holy Communion possible for them but had failed. This Holy Christmas Day he won and the F.M.I. Sisters stood outside the boundary fence and united themselves with Ramale inmates assisting at Holy Mass. Then to their joy they saw Bishop Scharmach approaching them carrying the ciborium from which he gave each one Holy Communion.

Six Sisters were sent to Takabur to take care of their food garden. Sadly, an aeroplane suddenly appeared above and dropped bombs over Takabur killing two Sisters, Anna and Sophia. They were buried there in the Takabur cemetery and the other Sisters left Takabur and returned to Lalapit to be with the rest of the community.

All the Sisters stayed together Lalapit and continued to be faithful to their community life. As Feast of the Immaculate Conception, their Patronal Feast was drawing near the Sisters decided to follow their custom by making the six days’ retreat. Once again the Superior, Sister M. Cecilia decided to conduct it. Even during that retreat the Sisters did not forget those at Ramale camp.

In between the conferences each day the Sisters would quickly prepare the vegetables and fill up the baskets to be carried to Ramale Camp. The Japanese Police set a rule to be followed by the Sisters, that each day they would carry the heavy baskets of vegetables up the hill and set them down. The Police would examine them the baskets and would help themselves first before the Sisters carried them down to the camp where they would empty them over the fence. The food would be carried to the kitchen to be cooked for the day’s meal. Sisters kept a special calendar indicating the Patronal Feast of all the missionaries. Therefore when the Feast of each missionary

came round the Sisters would prepare a delicious meal. This meant the vegetables would be wrapped up in banana leaves, moistened with coconut cream and cooked in hot stones. This was given to the one who celebrated the Feastday and there would be enough for the respective community.

Back at Lalapit they continued working, praying and attending conferences in spite the continuous distractions of planes passing overhead causing them to duck for cover. The area where the Sisters lived was not entirely free since there were spies around the place so they Sisters had to be very careful of their language. At times the Sisters were harassed by the Japanese who threatened them with death penalty. However, like a true mother, Sr. Cecilia always defended the Sisters.

Sisters before Japanese Court

One day the Sisters became very frightened because the young men who had been employed by the Japanese police as spies informed the “Kempei” (police) that Sister Teresia said: “America number one, Nippon (Japan) number ten!” The Japanese had a meeting and decided that the Sisters must be punished for such an offence. Since the police headquarters was just above Ramale camp the police feared that the prisoners could see what they were doing, therefore, they decided the Sisters’ case should be dealt with in a place far removed from Ramale camp in an obscure corner where the prisoners could not see them. So the police with the spies proceeded to torture the Sisters. Sr. Adela expressed it in the following paragraphs:

In due time Muru, a policeman, arrived at the Sisters’ hut in Lalapit. Here he found only two sick Sisters and he demanded to know the whereabouts of the other Sisters. “The other Sisters are at Kabaleo getting food for the missionaries at Ramale camp.” There could be no objection to this activity for, as mentioned earlier in this story, the police always obtained the choicest portions of food when examining the Sisters’ baskets for secret messages.

Muru departed and before long came upon the weary Sisters, each carrying two baskets of sweet potatoes, yams and tapioca suspended by bush rope from their heads. In addition, some of the stronger Sisters carried a large bunch of bananas.

Muru hustled them along to police quarters where they were told to leave their food and proceed further. They were conducted by two policemen who occasionally looked behind to see if their activities could be observed from the camp. Spies were awaiting them at the scene of the “trial” with six long, green, heavy bamboos. The Sisters were not told what the accusation against them was.

The police merely ordered them to kneel down. Then the spies lifted the bamboo poles and put them behind the Sisters’ knees. The Sisters were then ordered to sit back on the bamboo while spies stood on each end of the six bamboo sticks. The Japanese police called to the spies, “You fellow play boy! You fellow play boy!” and the boys see-sawed and jerked the heavy bamboos to the satisfaction of their masters.

While suffering from the torture the Sisters endured the interrogation by the Japanese who accused Sr. Teresia of saying: “America Number One, Nippon Number Ten!” Sr. Teresia denied the charge but they insisted and they threatened to cut off her neck.

(More details about the torture endured by Sisters is given in Appendix 3)+

Peace Once Again

In preparation for the Feast of the Assumption all the missionaries in Ramale camp had attended a retreat. We can be sure that during that retreat every Missionary had prayed very hard to Our Lady for peace. Their prayer was answered because Mary our Mother and Queen has had enough of the suffering of her sons and daughters. Therefore, on the 15th August, the Feast of Mary’s Assumption into Heaven while the missionaries and the rest of the Catholic Church celebrated the feast the Americans bombed Hiroshima and this ended the Second World War. So on that glorious day in 1945 peace came to the Pacific.

On 17th August, the Japanese chief of police called for Bishop Scharmac and declared to him: “The war is over. You are free now!” When the news reached Ramale camp there was great rejoicing and for thanksgiving to God there was a special solemn Benediction.

The inmates remained in Ramale camp for some time since there was danger from the Japanese and also there was no homes for them to go since Vunapope had been bombed flat on the ground.

It was only on the 13th September that the Australians reached Ramale Camp and things began to change for the better – food in abundance was supplied and gifts of clothing was given to cheer up the inmates. The missionaries learnt all about what has been happening in the outside world. For three and a half years they had not received letters, neither newspapers nor listened to the news broadcast. Therefore it was a time to rejoice and to celebrate and give thanks to God for his gift of peace.

The Australian soldiers took charge of the sick missionaries who were flown to Jacquinot and those who needed special treatment were flown to Lae. Those who remained took time to regain their strength and they teamed up with the Australian soldiers to begin clearing the wilderness that Vunapope has become. Each evening they had to return to Ramale as there was no shelter at Vunapope where they could sleep.

The FMI Sisters were invited to join the other missionaries in the camp and to make space the mixed race people moved out and the Sisters occupied their quarters.

Sr. Teresia, FMI who had valiantly stood against the tortures and threats of the Japanese had been worn out and in spite of her brave exterior in reality she had developed bad health. The Lord called her to receive her reward on 21st March, 1946.

Finally the joyful day arrived when the exiled missionaries were allowed to leave the Prison Camp and to return to Vunapope. They were given tents and a few army huts for shelter. They were all relieved to be back at Vunapope and to be able to enjoy the natural environment again.

No one was happier than the F.M.I Sisters who had suffered much during their exile but God had sustained them through many dangers of soul and body. The valiant Sister Cecilia had done a great work of leading the Sisters through all the emotional and psychological stresses that that was forced upon them in the circumstances. She had guided the flock confided to her into safe pastures - other hands were there to guard and guide them; gradually her health began to fail and she joyfully gave up her soul to God on the feast of the Ascension, 1946.

Chapter X

The Growth and Expansion of the Congregation

After the war there were only thirty FMI Sisters who survived the war and the terrible sickness of TB. Mother Helena Kobloth, FDNSC, became their Superior once again. Since the Japanese had taken over the Sisters' Convent at Takabur, the place must have been in a mess so the Sisters could not return to Takabur. However, in March 1947 four Sisters went to Anelaua to join the MSC Sisters in their work among the lepers. In the same year four Sisters went to open a house at Vunavavar.

Some girls applied to enter the Congregation therefore, Mother Helena and Sr. Gerarda, FMI, went to Takabur to get ready for their entrance. Four postulants were received on the 17th December, 1947. After that there was a continuous flow of vocations; some entering as postulants and others receiving the habit while others pronouncing their three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

Now it becomes obvious that that tiny Melanesian tree planted by His Lordship Bishop Louis Coupe is now a very strong rain tree, standing firm against wind and hail and storm and having been threatened with death and extinction yet it still stands and will continue to stand because it is not the work of human beings but the work of God.

The 21st June, 1962 was day to be remembered as it was a thanksgiving day for the FMI Sisters. At the Church ceremony a large number of Sisters pronounced their perpetual vows and received the ring as a sign of fidelity to the Lord. Therefore the Congregation ceased to be a pious society and became a Religious Congregation. The Daughters of Mary Immaculate became firmly established as a Diocesan Congregation attached to the Vicariate of Rabaul.

Golden Jubilee of the Congregation

The Golden Jubilee (50th anniversary) of the foundation of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate was celebrated on the 27th October, 1962. The Archbishop, Priests, Brothers, Sisters and Catholic people rejoice with the FMI Sisters. It was a day of thanksgiving to God

who has given the spiritual strength and courage to endure the many trials and tribulations helping them to endure patiently through sickness and torture for fifty years. Only God knew how many souls have been saved by the Sisters in that period of time.

EDUCATION

When the Congregation started there was no education level required for the aspirants to adhere to before entering. The girls were being taught at the primary level by the Sisters; learning about God and about the basic necessities of life and how to survive in the world. They learned to be responsible for themselves, to be confident and live as normal human beings who are able to socialize and learning how to deal with other people in private and in public.

At the beginning the Novitiate was near the O.L.S.H Convent at Vunapope and in 1938 it was moved to Takabur. When the girls expressed interest they were accepted as they were. Before 1960 the aspirants were educated at Takabur with Mother Champion as their teacher. The programme ended at the end of 1960. Mother Champion continued as Novice Mistress and she was also in charge at Vunapope. In 1962, at the celebration of the Golden Jubilee Mother Champion became the Superior General and she moved residence to Vunapope. Mother Joanita, FDNsc took over as Novice Mistress. In 1965 Mother St. Paul (Sr. Kathleen Gaffy) became the Mother General and Mother Athanasius became the Novice Mistress. Mother Joanita became the Superior of the OLSH community at Kuragaga. In 1971 Mother Joanita became the Mother General, taking the place of Mother St. Paul who went back to her OLSH community at Kuragaga. Mother Joanita was the last OLSH Superior General. It was during her time that we had our first General Chapter, in January 1979, and elected the first FMI Congregation Leader, Sr. Paula Mavoko, FMI. We became independent from that time onwards and we have the Chapter every three years. Here is a list of those who have been elected and the time they have served:

LIST OF CONGREGATION LEADERS WITH THEIR TIME OF SERVICE

1979 - 1981	Sr. Paula Mavoko, FMI	1 Term
1982 - 1984	Sr. Brigid Kumui, FMI	1 st Term
1985 – 1987	Sr. Brigid Kumui, FMI	2 nd Term
1988 - 1990	Sr. Leoba Vateten, FMI	1 st Term
1991 - 1993	Sr. Leoba Vateten, FMI	2 nd Term
1994 - 1996	Sr. Bernadette Lik, FMI	1 st Term
1997 - 2000	Sr. Bernadette Lik, FMI	2 nd Term
2001 - 2003	Sr. Tarcisia Pilake, FMI	1 Term
2004 - 2006	Sr. Margaret M. Maladede,	1 Term

	FMI	
2007 -2009	Sr. Bosco Taman, FMI	1 st Term
2010 - 2012	Sr. Bosco Taman, FMI	2 nd Term

LEADERSHIP OF THE DAUGHTERS OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart for their contribution to us in so many ways. They helped to educate our Sisters, in our formation, in leadership and administration, in advice and counseling, in challenging us and overall in being role models in religious life and in the society as a whole. The names of those who have helped us are given in the following paragraphs.

Mother Gerarda de Bakker

The very first Sister who helped to train the young women into the FMI way of life was Sr. Gerarda de Bakker from Holland. She came from a family of nine, seven girls and two boys. Petronella de Bakker was born on 7th June 1869. As an aspirant Petronella (Pietje) joined the community of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at Anwerp, Belgium. After two months she continued on to Issoudun, France to start her Novitiate. On the 25th June 1896, with five other Novices she made her first profession. One of the five was her own sister, Da de Bakker. Peitje received the name Sr. Gerarda and Da received the name Sr. Flavia. The following day, the six newly professed Sisters, left by ship to travel to New Britain. The journey through the Suez-canal took them two months, therefore, on the 25th August they arrived at Vunapope, the main station in New Britain. Then she was assigned to Volavolo.

Arriving at Volavolo Sr. Gerarda engaged herself in all the works. After one year she was appointed Superior of Volavolo station. She did not allow personal difficulties to stand on her way in her work and in her relationship with the members of her community, with the Children in the orphanage and with the community at large. She patiently endured all the difficulties of the tropical climate, insufficient food and the lack of comfort that one deserved after a hard day's work. She was a strong person and was able to endure the fatigue that resulted from the climate. She held this job for six years.

In 1903 she was appointed as Superior of the whole Mission and she had to move to Vunapope. She was a woman with a big heart that overflowed with love and she got on very well with people of all works of life. Therefore she drew everyone to herself. After her installation as Superior the works entered upon a new era of progress and continued. She was a genius in organization, far-sighted and excellent in judgment, therefore, the Sisters were able to cope with all the works that presented themselves, such as, boarding schools, orphanages, schools

for children from the remote areas and hospitals for women. Under her direction everything went smoothly and she was the beloved Superior of the Mission for thirty years.

In 1912, when the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate started, Mother Gerarda was the Co-foundress. The initial formation of the pioneer Sisters in the religious life was due to Mother Gerarda with the help of Sr. Helena Kobloth who occupied the position as Social. In the midst of Contradictions, humiliations and difficulties Mother Gerarda was always with a smiling face.

On the 25th December, 1930 Mother Gerarda received the announcement from Issoudun that her term of office was renewed for another term. On this special day she went to bed and the Sisters thought that she was just worn out due to the midnight Mass and her time with the Children that morning so no one was overly worried. Instead, they were thinking of preparing a community party in her honour. However she was not able to get out of bed and had to endure suffering for the next six weeks. She suffered first from an abscess on her back and on her leg; she was also treated for diabetes from which she recovered but then she lost sight on her left eye and the fever was persistent.

On Friday the 6th February, 1931 she received the anointing of the sick. Bishop Vesters was at her deathbed and Fr. Kleintichen said the prayers for the agonizing. As always she was calm and smiling to the last moment and she gave up her spirit very gently at 8.30pm.

Conclusion

We thank God for the giftedness of Mother Gerarda who stepped in to help with the formation of the young women who were the pioneers of the newly formed Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. Even though she was very busy in her role as Superior of the whole Mission Setup, she was prepared to sacrifice her time to teach the young Sisters to become religious. She has passed on to us the spirituality of Mary Immaculate and of the Sacred Heart which was started by Fr. Chevalier, affirmed by Mother Marie Louis Hartzler and carried out by the MSC Society and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart until it reached us through our Founder Bishop Louis Couppe and Mother Gerarda herself.

ⁱ Sr. Adela

APPENDIX 1

This is the first letter of Bishop Couppe regarding the foundation of the Congregation.

Vunapope,

21st October, 1912.

In order that I might know the Will of God I prayed fervently, considered the matter carefully and asked the advice of others as well as begging many to assist this I feel that it is the will of God that I found a Congregation of Sisters in this Vicariate of New Pomerania. (New Britain was formerly known as New Pomerania).

The first end of this congregation will be the sanctification of its members. As in all congregations of Religious they will labour strenuously for their advancement in perfection.

The second end for which this Congregation is founded is that they may labour in works of charity amongst their own people especially in teaching the young Native girls and training them to be true Catholics. Likewise the Sisters will carry out any works of charity assigned to them by the Bishops.

The following are the reasons which prompted me to undertake the foundation of this community of Native Sisters.

The Wish of the Pope

It is his wish that the Vicar Apostolic choose some of the people in his Vicariate and instructs them in the various works of Religious that the Church may progress in the country and endure forever. The Holy Father wishes that each mission be self supporting so as to be able to supply its own personal and not be dependent on missionaries from other countries. Thus, in instructing this Congregation of Native Sisters I am obeying the express wish of His Holiness that they may instruct the girls in our various schools in the Catholic way of life.

Education

Today all teachers in our schools are Religious from foreign countries. If any law or trouble arises in this country and the Sisters were unable to continue their work who would take their place if we have not Native Sisters to do so?

Economy

The mission spend a great deal of money on the European missionary Sisters On account of the great distance they have to travel and also because of the many illnesses which afflict them here in the tropics. The mission income is not sufficient to provide many foreign Sisters.

Example

On many missions the Vicars Apostolic have established Congregations of Native Sisters. Some of these have entered the European Sisterhoods already existing on the mission. Others again have founded a special Congregation suited to the Sisters to the Country. These Bishops have expressed their joy and satisfaction with the conduct of these Sisters and their works of charity also.

The Will of God

Since the day we established our various boarding schools for young girls to train them in the Catholic way of life, especially by prayer and frequent Holy Communion according to the wishes of His Holiness Pope Pius X regarding Holy Communion and reception thereof by young children, I recognized the call of God that many would become Religious because Holy Communion is the ‘Wine that bringeth forth Virgins’.

For these reasons I consider the time has come to institute a Religious Congregation for Native women, otherwise I would be failing in my duty. I Dedicate the Congregation to Mary Immaculate, entrusting it to her special care. Those who enter therein will be known as Daughters of Mary Immaculate. They will strive to imitate her virginal purity and thus become pleasing to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Earnestly I beg the Sacred Heart of Jesus to love this Congregation tenderly and to bestow on it abundant blessings because it was instituted for His glory alone and the sanctification of its members, so that all their prayers and work may increase the love of the Heart of Jesus in this Vicariate.

Ludwig Couppe M.S.C.

APPENDIX 2

The second letter written by Bishop Couppe:

Vunapope

27th October, 1912

(The Bishop granted his approbation to the Congregation of *Mary Immaculate to its Constitutions.*)

For all those reasons enumerated in my letter of 21st October, 1912, I now establish in the Vicariate of Nova Pomerania a Congregation of “Daughters of Mary Immaculate” entrusting it to her protection as Mother and Model.

The aim of this Congregation, as for all others, is the sanctification of its members. Thus they will obey all its rules and practise the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience according to their promises.

The special aim of this Congregation is the teaching of Catholic girls in the Catholic way of life. Besides this the Congregation will carry out other works of charity which the Bishop may confide to them.

It is my wish that the Sisters follow these constitutions and put them in practise so that if found suitable they will receive final approbation.

Ludwig Coupe M.S.C.

Ep. Leo.

APPENDIX 3

When it began to get dark, and the Japanese still had not told the Sisters the reason for their punishment, the Sisters could bear it no longer and called for pity.

Sisters: Master our legs are paining terribly!

Tagai: Yes your legs are paining. Can you put up with a little suffering? When Jesus hung on the cross he felt greater pain but did not cry out. He bore it patiently.

The perspiration caused by the pain was pouring from the Sisters bodies.

Sisters: Master, please have pity on us!

Tagai: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament keeps silence always.

The charges against the Sisters began: Sister Teresia was called to stand forward. A policeman placed his bayonet on her neck and cried, “Nippon governs this place, English no! You Sister Teresia, you insulted us by saying “Nippon number ten, English number one”

Sister: Master, I know nothing about that talk you accuse me of!

Police: You Know! You said it!

Sister: No sir!

Police: You did say it!

This went on for some time. Then the Police called Sister Cecilia, the head Sister, and said, “We are going to cut off her head!”

Sr. Cecilia: Master, have pity on me. Do not cut off Sister's head, cut mine instead.

Police: No! Sister Teresia must die-not you!

Then the two policemen blandished their bayonets, putting them close to her neck and waving them in front of the other Sisters, who by now were beseeching the Mother of God to assist them.

The young Sisters began to cry with fright but the older Sisters told them not to cry but to pray to their Immaculate Mother as they had been taught to do.

It was now late at night and the police were relieved by two others, who showed little respect for the Sisters. Sister Cecilia gave order, "If these men try to do anything to you run as fast as you can and scream loudly". The Japanese did not understand her word in the native language, but the Sisters feared a fate worse than death was upon them. The spies, seeing the lustful manners of the two policemen, began to adopt the same leering attitude. The Sisters were furtively glancing around to see which side would be the best to run.

Then their prayers to Our Lady were answered and the court assumed a serious tone once again. A great peace filled their souls because now they wished only to die.

The police asked Sister Teresia if it was true that she had spoken disparagingly of "Nippon". Sister again denied the charge.

Police: Sisters "Black skin", you like me cut off your head or Sister Teresia's only?

Sisters: Please Sir, cut off all the Sisters' heads. We all prefer it that way.

Police: Aren't you frightened to die?

Sisters: No Sir, we are glad to die.

The Police sent off the limping Sisters, keeping only Sister Teresia. Sister Cecilia begged that Sister Teresia be released also. After more threats and warnings the police sent the spies after the departing Sisters to say they must return. Those Sisters took the opportunity to tell the spies just what they thought of them and their revolting conduct, and they did not spare their words.

Sister Teresia was then handed over to her Sisters and all returned to their home in the valley, thanking Our Lord and His Immaculate Mother for their deliverance.

It was now past midnight and it was long hours since the Sisters had eaten, but those war-weary victims were glad to drop on to their beds and rest their tired limbs - at daybreak they must be off to Kabaleo again, otherwise the missionaries at Ramale would starve. Only those who were in the camp could realise just how great that hunger was.

Further Ordeals

Just as they had recovered somewhat from their ordeal with the Ramale police, the Sisters receive an order to present themselves to the Japanese Officer in charge of Telo near Bitapaka which was about eight miles distant, but no-one seemed to know about Telo.

The Sisters thought that the police probably intended to take them to a deep valley or to one of their tunnels and kill them. Praying fervently they set out, accompanied by some faithful catechists. After a long track they arrived in the vicinity of Bitapaka. No Japanese was to be seen so they tried various paths only to become separated from one another. When they were all together again, they set off, to land this time in the midst of a large ammunition set-up, cannon, machineguns, and all the other attractive implements of war presided over by Japanese officers and soldiers who seemed quite upset at this invasion of Sisters into the secret domain.

The Sisters were ordered to stand at attention but they fled, followed by the abuse of the Japanese. The Sisters, now tired and footsore, continued their search for Telo, and stumbled once again upon some Japanese sentries guarding their treasures in a secret hiding place. The Sisters did not wait to inquire about Telo as they were once again confronted with military harshness which sent them scurrying off.

Once again they came upon an ammunition dump, but this time a well-disposed Japanese met them, and after enquiring about their business, put them on the right track. Soon they were close to the Japanese headquarters. Waiting till all the Sisters were together they prepared for the ordeal. One Catechist warned them, "If they offer you rice and "kakaruk" (fowl) to eat, don't accept it – refuse it at once because that is the sign they are going to kill you".

They saw a Japanese sentry looking out for them so the Sisters presented themselves and were immediately conducted to a small room or shelter. There they awaited the officer who was seated at a table near a tunnel. When the sentry advised the officer of the Sisters arrival he appeared before them carrying a book in his hand.

The frightened Sisters bowed low and gave the Japanese salutation: "Ohaio Goshaimas!" The officer took his seat, surveyed the Sisters and ordered: "Sing Ave Maria for me".

Gladly the Sisters arranged themselves to sing Mary's praises in different parts. With all their hearts they sang the lovely hymn in Gunantuna, "Ave, Ave Maria." When they finished, the officer clapped his hands. The Sisters began to relax somewhat as they had seen this Captain Sakaiama.

The Captain called a Namatanai native boy, To Geor to translate the Sisters' answers for him if he did not understand clearly.

The Sisters were fearless now and as some knew Pidgin English quite well they were spokesmen for all.

Sakaiama: Are you children of the Mission?

Sisters: Yes, Sir.

Sakaiama: Do you love the Fathers and Sisters of the Mission?

Sisters: Yes Sir, we do.

Sakaiama: Do you also love the Kristo?

Sisters: Yes Sir, we do love Him.

Sakaiama: You have pity on the Missionaries of Ramale and bring them food everyday. Why is that?

Sisters: We help the Missionaries because they taught us everything we know; because they have worked for us and brought us up. The Missionaries fed us when we were small and gave us everything we have.

Sakaiama then looked thoughtful and asked To Geor if what the Sisters said was true. To Geor assured him the statements were all true. Sakaiama laughed and abandoned his questions about the Missionaries, and changed to the vital subject of war.

Sakaiama: Are you Sisters cross with Nippon (Japan) because we came here to your country and chased away the Australians?

Sisters: No, Sir

Sakaiama: Nippon number ten?

Sisters: No Sir! Nippon number one!

Sakaiama: “English,” Doiska and America, do you like them?

Sisters: We like you all. This is not our War but yours. We have nothing to do with it. We obey your laws but we are not fighting anybody.

On that note the interview ended. Sakaiama remarked to To Geor that he was surprised at the answers given by the “Black Sisters”.

Then once again the pagan soldier asked the Sisters to sing “Ave Maria”. They sang with all their hearts an Ave Maria different from the first one, and as he seemed pleased they sang yet a third, one composed by M.S.C. Missionaries.

Sakaiama thanked them, and then called Sister Cecilia to ask if the Sisters would care to cook rice and eat it, but she assured him they had their own food. He then asked all the Sisters if that were true. Then they bowed themselves out, glad to be free from the interview.

Soon after this Sister Bernadette and Sister Magdalene became very ill, so the Japanese allowed them to be taken to Ramale Camp. There they died and were buried beside other victims who did not survive the starvation and misery of the internment. A little latter the police asked Sister

Cecilia if she and the others would go into the camp too. She answered, “Why not?” We not frighten of the camp”. However, one or other of the more kindly disposed Japanese advised the Sisters to stay where they were, saying, “In a little time all the missionaries in the camp will be killed”.

The Sisters replied, “In that case we would like to die with them”.