

The Pacific was the last major region of the world to receive intensive Christian missionary attention. Although the Spanish were the first to introduce Christianity to the Pacific in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the major developments have been in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Pacific covers a vast area, from Australia to Easter Island, and from Hawaii to New Zealand, and encompasses the island nations of Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

In Australia, the Christian story is dominated by the development of the mainline churches, but the heroic labours of Caroline Chisholm and Mary McKillop in the nineteenth century are memorable, and the work of the Bush Brotherhood and the Australia Inland Mission are also significant.

The earliest formal mission work in the wider Pacific was in Tahiti (1797), followed by New Zealand (1814), Hawaii (1820), Tonga (1822), and then wider and wider. The work was carried out by Protestant missionary societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and by Roman Catholic orders such as the Picpus Fathers and the Marists.

In almost every island group of the Pacific, Christianity has spread through the people's contact with those around them in everyday life. Under the guidance of a relatively small number of European missionaries, the main evangelistic work has in fact been done by the Pacific Islanders themselves. It is entirely appropriate that we should honour the great European missionaries of all the churches: John Williams, the pioneer in the Cook Islands and martyr; Henry and William Williams in New Zealand; Pierre Chanel of Futuna; John Patteson of Melanesia; John and Charlotte Geddie on Aneityum; the colourful Shirley Baker in Tonga; Charles Elliot Fox in the Solomon Islands; George Brown in Samoa and Melanesia; John F. Goldie in the western Solomons; Elizabeth and Jane Baldwin in Micronesia; and Mother Marianne Cope in Hawaii.

We must also remember, however, their early converts. Many of these suffered severely for their faith. Others became priests, evangelists, and catechists in the remote villages and settlements. The names of Ruatoka, Joeli Bulu, Ini Kopuria, Ta'unga, Paoo, George Sarawia, and Maretu are well known, but there are hundreds of others who left their own island communities to share the message of the gospel in other places, often in the face of loneliness, sickness and death.

The story of heroic service by both expatriate and indigenous workers has continued into the twentieth century. Throughout the Pacific, European leadership of the churches has gradually given way to a strong indigenous ministry, particularly since the Second World War. The church in the Pacific has a proud record of service, both to the Christian cause and to the emerging nations in which it is established. Many church members have held important positions in government, having been brought to the knowledge of Christ in the local church. This heritage was first accepted and then spread by the island forerunners whom we honour today. They carried the message over the vast sea distances of the Pacific, and have gone on to develop their own strong, Christian style in liturgy, architecture, mission and witness.

For further reading:

John Garrett, *To live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, Geneva and Suva, WCC and Institute of Pacific Studies, 1982.

John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, Suva and Gene-

va, Institute of Pacific Studies and WCC, 1992.

For Liturgical Use

Much of the evangelistic spreading of the gospel in the Pacific has been done by the Pacific peoples themselves. Under the leadership of the great European missionaries of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Christian message has been first accepted and then spread by the peoples of the Pacific. From Papua New Guinea to Tahiti, from Australia to Hawaii, from Micronesia to New Zealand, the good news has been proclaimed. Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, we rejoice in their memory and pray that we will follow their examples.

Sentence

You, O Lord, have displayed your saving power to all the nations.

Psalm 98:2

Collects

God of the boundless ocean
and the southern stars,
you have set the saints and martyrs of the Pacific
to light the way for the churches of this region;
in our turn make us true and trustworthy beacons,
pointing to our way, our truth, our life,
Jesus Christ our Saviour.

God of the Pacific,
we praise you for those who gave their lives
to bring the gospel of peace to us,
for those who have spent their lives proclaiming peace;
may we learn peace for all the world.

Psalms

65:1-8

107:23-32

Readings

Isaiah 42:8-12

God's praises sung

Galatians 4:4-7

Children of God

Luke 2:25-32

For all peoples

Post Communion Sentence

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16