

Going to the peripheries - Fr Pierre Bouillon sm in the South Solomons

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Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.¹

One of the traditions in the formation houses of the Oceania Province at evening prayer has been to listen to the names and some of the story of those Marists whose anniversary of death occurs the following day. *Alive in Memory* is the current book being used in Oceania. There are equivalent memorial books in Australia and New Zealand.

A few things strike me as I read these books.

- So many young Frenchmen came to Oceania.
- Many of them died at a young age.
- For many Marists there are just a few sentences to describe the life of someone who worked for thirty or more years in Oceania.
- It also raises the question in my mind - what are they going to write about me!

For the last three years I have been based at Marist College in Suva and one of the highlights for me has been the opportunity to give retreats to some of the different regions around the province. In those retreats I have tried to shed some light on the lives of Marists who have gone before us, much in the manner of what Craig Larkin did for us in his book *Bearings*. Having access to the archives in Suva has helped immensely.

I want to share something of one Marist who I have come to know and who inspires me as I try to be a faithful Marist today.

First Marist Mission to Melanesia

When Bishop Pompallier and his Marist companions arrived in Oceania he had been appointed the Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania. It was not many years before sections of that territory were placed under the authority of others as the reality of the immense task emerged and tensions rose between Bishop Pompallier and the Society of Mary. The Vicariate Apostolic of Central Oceania was erected in 1842 and placed under the authority of Bishop Bataillon.

In 1844 Bishop Jean-Baptiste Epalle was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic for Melanesia and Micronesia. He immediately set to work in Lyon publicising this new mission and seeking financial support. Soon afterwards he set sail from London for Oceania with thirteen Marists: six priests and seven brothers.² They arrived in Sydney in 1845. Many of them left for Melanesia on the *Marian Watson* a few months later and after a brief stop in New Caledonia they came upon what we now call the Solomon Islands. They made land at San Cristobal³ briefly before moving on in the search for a better place. It was on Santa Isabel Island a few days later that Bishop Epalle and his companions were attacked on 16th December 1845.⁴

Jean-Pierre Fremont, the Pro-vicar, in his letter informing Fr Colin of the news wrote:⁵

“Death has removed one of your dearest children but it has occurred undoubtedly to place him in heaven. Bishop Epalle has given his life for his faith. He is another martyr in the Marist

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, N. 20.

² Mervyn Duffy sm & Alois Greiler sm (ed), *Verguet’s Sketchbook: A Marist Missionary Artist in 1840’s Oceania*, Adelaide, ATF Press, 2014, p. 3-5.

³ San Cristobal is now called Makira.

⁴ 26 January 1846 — Father Claude Jacquet to Father Para, Chaplain at General Hospital, Montbrison <http://mariststudies.org/docs/Girard0469> Accessed 9th August 2016. Some authors refer to Ysabel Island, others to Santa Isabel, and some even use the term San Isabel.

⁵ 22 February 1846 — Fr Jean-Pierre Frémont, San Cristobal, to Fr Jean-Claude Colin <http://mariststudies.org/docs/Girard0479> Accessed 9th August 2016.

Society. The people, he was going to save, the people for whose salvation he had made so much sacrifice and whom he loved so much without knowing it, took his life at the moment when the virtuous prelate was busy most actively using means to teach them and to save them.”

Violence and sickness and struggle were characteristics of this initial Melanesian mission which lasted less than two years. As they tried to establish themselves on San Cristobal they faced a number of challenges. Fr Xavier Montrouzier was speared in the back when he was mistaken for a European sailor. Fr Cyprien Crey died from sickness just a month after arriving in February 1847. Then just two months later on 20th April 1847 Frs Jean-Marie Paget and Claude Jacquet, and Br Hyacinthe were attacked and killed as they undertook a journey.⁶

Soon after the newly ordained Bishop Jean-Georges Collomb, the successor to Bishop Epalle, arrived and the decision was made to leave San Cristobal and try to begin again in a new place. In September 1847 the Marists moved to Woodlark (Muyua) Island. It was much closer to mainland Papua New Guinea.

There too there were difficulties. In May 1848 four of the group moved to another island: Rooke (Umboi) Island, in the hope of a better response from the local people.⁷ Not long after their arrival Bishop Collomb and Fr Gregoire Villien both fell ill and died. By May 1849 all the Marists were together back on Woodlark Island. But the struggles and difficulties continued as the community was still dogged by illness and disharmony.⁸

Eventually the decision was made that the Marists would withdraw and hand over to the Foreign Missionary Seminary of Milan.⁹ Three Marists offered to stay for some months to assist in the handover. By the end of 1853 all the Marists had left Melanesia.

Nineteen Marists were sent to work in Melanesia from 1845 to 1853. Four were killed, three died of sickness, four left the Society, three went back to Europe and continued to work as Marists, and just five remained in Oceania.¹⁰

Fr Joseph Thomassin had travelled with many of that group from London to Sydney and then on to Melanesia. He was present when Bishop Epalle was attacked. He was on San Cristobal as they struggled to form community in what was such a different culture for these young Frenchman. Sickness took its toll on each of them and then there were the additional physical attacks. He was there when the news of the death of Frs Paget, Jacquet and Br Hyacinthe was received. He then went to Woodlark Island. The difficulties in community there grew to such an extent that he and Fr Pierre Treprenard tried to establish a new community away from the main group for more than a year.¹¹

After he left Melanesia and returned to Sydney he wrote to Fr Colin:¹²

“Ten years ago our mission to evangelise the islands of Melanesia got under way. It was a glorious launching, one laden with high hopes; with a large and ardent company led by a guide

⁶ Cf Xavier Montrouzier, 19th July 1847, Letter to his brother Henri Montrouzier, in Charles Girard sm (ed), *Letters from the Marist Missionaries in Oceania 1836 – 1854*, English Edition, Adelaide, ATF Press, 2015, p. 476-480. <http://mariststudies.org/docs/Girard0644> Last accessed 9th August 2016.

⁷ Cf Gregoire Villien, 10th July 1848, Letter to his cousin Fr Villien, in Girard (ed), *Letters from the Marist Missionaries*, p. 504-509.

⁸ Hugh Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: A History of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands*, p. 22-29.

⁹ Cf Ralph Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Melanesia and Micronesia 1850 – 1875*, p. 58.

¹⁰ Those who died: Bishop Epalle, Fr Claude Jacquet, Br Hyacinthe Chatelet, and Fr Jean-Marie Paget were all killed. Fr Cyprien Crey, Fr Gregoire Villien and Bishop Collomb died of sickness. Those who left the Society: Fr Leopold Verguet, Br Prosper Rouesne, Br Charles Vincent, Br Optat. Those who returned to Europe and continued as Marists: Fr Etienne Chaurian, Fr Eugene Ducretet, and Fr Pierre Treprenard. Those who remained in Oceania: Fr Xavier Montrouzier, Fr Jean-Pierre Fremont, Fr Joseph Thomassin, Br Aristide Brun who all worked in New Caledonia and Br Gennade Rolland who lived at Villa Maria in Sydney for the rest of his life.

¹¹ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesia*, p. 25

¹² Fr Joseph Thomassin Sydney to Fr Colin, Lyon, 6th January 1854, following the translation by Hugh Laracy in his article, “Colin and Melanesia”, in Alois Greiler sm (ed), *Catholic Beginnings in Oceania: Marist Missionary Perspectives*, Adelaide, ATF Press, 2009, p. 87.

respected for his experience. And what is the result of it? It has entailed much cost, loss and suffering, without any successes or conversions. May our successors be more fortunate than us."

The Society of Mary continued to be responsible for the Vicariate of Melanesia. From time to time enquiries would be made from the Congregation for the Propaganda of the Faith as to when men would be sent there again. And for decades the Marists ignored those requests.¹³

Eventually the time came when the Marists felt able to support a return to Melanesia in the late 1890's. As part of the preparations for that mission a visit was made to Canon Leopold Verguet in Carcassonne in France. He had been a member of that first Marist group who had stepped ashore in the Solomon Islands all those years ago. He had left the Society of Mary and joined his local diocese as a priest. He was an artist and had not only made many paintings of the flora and fauna, he had constructed maps and drawn the local people.¹⁴ In 1893 he prepared a dossier of information for the new missionaries.

Second Marist Mission to Melanesia

Bishop Julien Vidal sm was the first Vicar Apostolic of Fiji Island. Soon after being named as bishop in May 1887 he made a visit to France where he was ordained as bishop. While there he visited a number of places publicising the mission in Fiji. One similar such visit took place in 1891 to the diocesan seminary at Le Mans. The Bishop spoke about the challenges of the mission of the Church in Fiji and the need for more priests to come and to preach the gospel in the Pacific. The Bishop was successful that evening when seven seminarians came forward to express interest in the mission in Fiji. What he didn't know was that his talk had raised a lot of questions for one of the professors, a man named Pierre Bouillon.

Pierre was born in Sarthe France on 24th February 1854. He was a brilliant student who completed two doctorates in Rome and upon ordination as a priest in 1877 he had been appointed as one of the youngest professors at the Le Mans Major Seminary. He had attended the presentation by Bishop Vidal and he was intrigued. He made further enquiries and determined that this was to be the life for him. He was nearly forty years old.

Over the next four years Pierre changed his way of life. He started sleeping on the floor, gave up the fire in his room, stopped drinking wine and eating meat, and began to take long walks in an attempt to prepare himself for the physical rigours of the Pacific. He also tried to learn about sailing and other practical skills.

At the end of the academic year in 1896 Pierre left the major seminary in Le Mans and soon after entered the Marist novitiate at Sainte Foy in Lyon. His novitiate continued as he began the journey to the Pacific with Bishop Vidal and a group of Marists in March 1897. He was professed in Fiji on 12th September 1897. However, he was destined to stay in Fiji for only one year.

The Society of Mary were about to start again the mission in the Solomon Islands and Pierre was to be a key person in this new Marist outreach. Bishop Vidal had been appointed the Prefect Apostolic of the English Solomon Islands in July 1897. He left Fiji in early 1898 bound for what was then called the South Solomon Islands with the small group of Marists who were to form the new Marist mission: Fr Pierre Bouillon, Fr Pierre Rouillac, Fr Joseph-Marie Guitet, Fr Louis Menard and Br Felix Pieux.¹⁵ A group photo

¹³ Cf Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church*, p. 468-484.

¹⁴ Cf Duffy & Greiler (ed), *Verguet's Sketchbook*, 2014.

¹⁵ Cf Letter from Pierre Rouillac sm to Fr Guillemin sm of the Sydney Procure dated 15th August 1898, in *Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, p. 5-6. Felix Pieux was a Marist seminarian from the province of Lyons who had been recruited by Bishop Vidal. He had been a medical student and Vidal had apparently promised that he would ordain him in the Pacific. This did not eventuate. There was a disagreement and Br Pieux returned to Sydney soon after arriving; *The Collection Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, Honiara 1979. These letters were collected and translated into English by

was taken, probably in Sydney. But when the ship left Sydney in May 1898 they were not all on board.

Fr Menard did not make that first journey as he fell ill while in Sydney. He eventually arrived at Rua Sura in December 1898. Repeated bouts of sickness meant that he left the mission in 1900. After recovering his health in Sydney he spent many years on the Maori missions in New Zealand before returning to Sydney in 1934 where he died five years later.¹⁶

Bishop Vidal only stayed in the mission for a few months before returning to his duties as the Vicar Apostolic for Fiji. He returned for visits in 1899 and 1901 before Fr Jean-Ephrem Bertreux sm, who had been the director of the catechists school in Fiji, was appointed as the new Prefect Apostolic for the Southern Solomon Islands in 1903.¹⁷

Learning the local language and customs was an important step in the development of the mission. Pierre spent many hours with the local children patiently trying to understand the local language. Within a few months he was sufficiently fluent as to be able to begin teaching them about the Catholic faith. Eventually he was able to produce some publications that helped in the evangelisation of the Solomon Islands.¹⁸

An early issue for the new mission was where to base themselves. Obtaining land was an issue and eventually they were able to purchase an island, Rua Sura, off one of the traders.¹⁹ While the traders, who were European, welcomed the presence of the Marists, many of the local people, did not.

The Marists soon realised that they needed a ship. Pierre Bouillon quickly informed the Procure in Sydney of their need:²⁰

“Being better acquainted, now that we are on the spot, with what is required for these parts, we realise now that our whale boat is far from adequate for the work in the mission.”

They could not sit back and wait for the local people to come to them. They needed to go out. Pierre Rouillac, who was the son of a fisherman, was very keen. He spent most of his time on the move visiting different islands:²¹

“Coming here, I have never believed in remaining stuck in one place. Lack of exercise in a hot climate like this gets on my nerves. Travelling, visiting the village and mixing with the natives is a real morale booster for me. And this goes more or less for everybody. Moreover there is a real risk in remaining too isolated from the Solomonese. Prejudices against take root and when one day we decide to make a real start we’ll find ourselves in impossible situations which were non-existent before.”

While Frs Rouillac and Guitet, were travelling around the islands, Fr Bouillon, as superior, spent most of his time at Rua Sura. He continued to deal with the practicalities of life as superior and bursar. There are many letters back and forth to the Sydney procure. In them he confirms the orders that have been received and places more orders. He also went on some of the journeys with Rouillac.

Fr Albert de Theye sm. It is not always clear which particular Marist the letter is addressed to. This unpublished document is in the Oceania Marist Provincial Archives in Suva Fiji.

¹⁶ *Alive in Memory. A Biographic Necrology of Oceania Marist Province 1836-2011*, Suva, fourth, revised edition, 2011, p. 194.

¹⁷ Fr Bertreux sm had been the director of the Catechist school at Levuka in Fiji. He became Bishop Bertreux sm in 1912.

¹⁸ Cf. *Marist Messenger*, “A Great Solomons’ Missionary: Peter Bouillon”, Monday 1st March 1943, p. 7. Apparently most of the remaining copies of these works were destroyed when the Cathedral at Visale on Guadalcanal was bombed in 1942.

¹⁹ Cf Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, p. 39-40.

²⁰ Pierre Bouillon sm to Fr Guillemin sm, Sydney, 16th August 1898, *The Collection Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, p.7.

²¹ Pierre Rouillac sm to Fr Guillemin sm, Sydney, 6th December 1898. *The Collection Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, p.18.

As a consequence of this activity the mission was offered land in many places, and some people came to Rua Sura to assist in the work of the plantation. Gradually the community grew. Pierre Rouillac managed to travel to Santa Isabel Island and retrieved the remains of Bishop Epalle who had been killed so many years before. The directions left by Leopold Verguet to the burial site had been accurate.²²

Soon after Pierre Rouillac and a crew of Fijian and Solomonese young men sailed the mission ship, the Eclipse, to Sydney. The ship had been damaged and needed repairs. Until then he only had sailed to the different islands in the Solomons. Sailing all the way to Sydney was a much larger challenge. When they arrived in Sydney in April 1901 there was a lot of publicity and amazement that such an inexperienced captain and crew had made such a long and difficult journey. This feat was acknowledged by many in Sydney. The publicity also helped to raise the necessary funds to pay for the repairs of the ship.

As superior of the mission Pierre Bouillon had to deal with the distinct mix of personalities amongst the Marists, be the main teacher at the developing catechist school and be the bursar for the mission. He was also responsible for ensuring that the mission took root and expanded.

It was not long before the Marists were able to begin a new mission at Tangarare on the south west coast of Guadalcanal. Pierre Rouillac had been able to purchase some land in 1899 and in April 1900 two priests took up residence: Ferdinand Guilloux and Joseph-Marie Guitet.²³

“The Marist priests who landed there, notably under the leadership at Tangarare of the young and vital Ferdinand Guilloux in 1900, did not suffer from the enclosed compound mentality of their Marist predecessors of the 1840’s.”

Fr Guilloux visited the villages in his neighbourhood and succeeded in forming a school at Tangarare. He gathered about him forty children to whom he taught the catechism and upon whom he built great hopes for the future. However, one day these forty children, frightened by rumours of war, fled, and Fr Guilloux found himself nearly alone at the mission, for only two children had remained faithful to him.

Fr Guitet did not stay long at Tangarare. He fell a victim to fever and returned to the Fiji Islands in order to repair his shattered health. Sadly, within a few months he died in Cawaci on 20th June 1901. He was just 30 years old.²⁴

Ferdinand Guilloux was then on his own until March 1902 when Fr Joseph Pellion arrived. Soon afterwards the mission ship, the Eclipse, under the command of Fr Pierre Rouillac, got stuck on the reef near Tangarare. For three weeks many efforts were made to free the ship. Unfortunately, on 27th May 1902 Ferdinand Guilloux drowned as he attempted to free the Eclipse. Fr Pellion wrote an account of his death which was published in the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith in 1903.²⁵ It included the letter that Fr Bouillon sent to the Superior General at that time:

“God has sent us a very hard trial in his death, Father Guilloux was truly the missionary of the Solomon Islands. His endless devotion approached heroism and his never wavering gentleness made him beloved by all, especially children. Great was their grief when they heard the terrible news of his death.”

²² Cf Duffy & Greiler (ed) *Verguet’s Sketchbook*, p. 35.82-83. The remains were taken to Sydney and examined. They were then returned to the Solomon Islands where they were apparently stored in the Cathedral which was completed in 1930 at Visale on Guadalcanal. During World War II the Cathedral, and the remains of Bishop Epalle, were destroyed in 1942.

²³ John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, p.73.

²⁴ *Alive in Memory*, p. 136.

²⁵ Annals of the Propagation of the Faith 1903
http://www.archive.org/stream/annalspropagati02faitgoog/annalspropagati02faitgoog_djvu.txt Last accessed 8th August 2016.

"Oh! Why did he die? ' they cried out sobbing; 'he was so good. If one of us had died it would not have mattered, but he was our Father; he is with God; all is well with him; but what are we going to do?"

"I heard these remarks about me; with one voice all spoke of his goodness.

"Think of us. Father, and pray for us! It seemed to us that the affairs of religion were progressing. Do not think that we are discouraged, however. In cruce solus!"

The following year, 1903, Fr Bouillon was relieved of his duties as superior when Fr Bertreux was appointed the first Prefect Apostolic of the South Solomon Islands Prefecture. Fr Bertreux had spent some years in Fiji and had most recently been the head of the Catechist school there at Levuka.

The arrival of Fr Bertreux brought about other changes too. After the wreck of the Eclipse on the reef at Tangarare in May 1902 Fr Pierre Rouillac had tried to raise the necessary funds to buy a replacement ship. When Fr Bertreux arrived to take up his new role the following year he made it clear that he did not want Fr Rouillac to be a part of the Marists working in the Solomon Islands.

By 1904 Pierre Rouillac was working in Hughenden in northern Queensland. He spent many years working in central and northern Queensland. He was the first resident priest at Bowen. His final years were spent at the Marist Brothers Novitiate in Mittagong in southern New South Wales where he died in 1922.²⁶

Fr Bouillon was then appointed to Tangarare where he spent the next two years. While there he walked to many different villages. He would often return to Tangarare worn out. But he did not complain. He was heard to say: *"If I desired comfort and leisure, I would have remained in France."*²⁷

His health suffered. Besides the normal bouts of fever and dysentery he developed eczema which got so bad that he needed to seek more specialised treatment in Sydney. So in July 1905 he travelled to Sydney. It did not take long before his health improved. The doctors informed him that the tropical climate of the Solomon Islands would continue to be challenging for him. Most likely the eczema would return.

Meanwhile the Marist community of St Patrick's in Sydney was seeking a new organist. While recuperating there Pierre Bouillon was heard playing the organ one day. Fr Ginisty, the parish priest encouraged him to stay, for the sake of his health, and to play the organ. He even offered to sponsor a fundraising concert to support the work of the Marists in the Solomons. Despite these enticements Fr Bouillon did not give in. *"I have given myself, and not for all the money in the world would I abandon it."*²⁸ Fr Ginisty then reminded him of what the doctors had told him, that the eczema would return. *"Well if God will it so, I also will it."*

He returned to the Solomons soon after and was appointed to the mission at Longu, later known as Avuavu. This was apparently a very challenging mission. In the short few years since it had been founded three missionaries had been overcome by illness and failure, and a fourth had been attacked.²⁹ Fr Bouillon spent many days and weeks walking to visit the many villages. He tried to build good relationships with the local people. After two years the eczema returned. This time it struck on the soles of his feet. Gradually the pain got so bad that he was not able to walk. Eventually he was unable to stand even to celebrate Mass. He spent time in his bed and on a deck chair that enabled him to move to his desk. He spent time studying the local language and receiving people:³⁰

²⁶ Cf Peter McMurrich, *Not Angels, Nor Men Confirmed in Grace: The Society of Mary in Australia, 1892 – 1938*, Unpublished M.A thesis, 1988, p. 64. 96-97.165. In the OMP Archives in Suva is a photo of Fr Rouillac. On the reverse is written, in French and English, "the original Marist rebel in the Solomons."

²⁷ *Marist Messenger*, "A Great Solomons' Missionary", Thursday April 1, 1943, p.17.

²⁸ *Marist Messenger*, "A Great Solomons' Missionary", Thursday April 1, 1943, p.17.

²⁹ Cf. Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, p. 42-43.

³⁰ *Marist Messenger*, "A Great Solomons' Missionary", Thursday April 1, 1943, p. 18.

“My eczema has broken out again, this time on my feet. I cannot use my feet at all, so cannot offer the Holy Sacrifice; no doubt, I did not acquit properly the work the good Lord set for me, and He in His love for the Solomonese, has resolved to put me aside and to take charge Himself.”

He took some convincing before finally agreeing to return to Sydney for further treatment. Eventually he saw his inability to work as a sign that God was calling him to return to Sydney. Just getting to the point of departure for the trip to Sydney was a huge undertaking. His condition meant that it took many more days than usual to get there.

He arrived in Sydney in November 1907. It did not take long for the condition to respond to medical treatment. He then moved to Villa Maria at Hunters Hill for recuperation and to participate in the second novitiate in 1908. While there he was able to indulge in his love of music once more. The Marists in Australia tried yet again to encourage him to stay and take up a position there. At the time there was a need for a new parish priest in the parish of Hunters Hill. Yet again Fr Bouillon said no:³¹

“I belong to the Mission; even though my feet should trouble me again, I can always teach and further my studies of the native languages, although I may be forced to remain in my deck chair.”

There had been some discussion within Australia at the time that the Society of Mary should begin an apostolic school in an attempt to recruit vocations. In 1907 the Oceania Provincial Chapter had proposed that the Marist General Administration "study the question of establishing a juniorate in Australia for the Province of Oceania."³²

The Provincial of the time, Fr Marion, thought that ex seminary professor Fr Bouillon would be a good choice to head the juniorate. In a letter to Bishop Chanrion sm of Noumea he wrote, *"I am encouraging him to learn English; if, according to the wishes of the Provincial Chapter, we could found a juniorate here, this dear Father could be very useful to us"*.³³

Despite the efforts of Fr Marion, Pierre did not want to remain in Australia. He wanted to return to the Solomon Islands. He did so at the end of 1908 and took up a new appointment on the island of Savo, just off the coast of Guadalcanal. The doctors in Sydney would have been pleased to hear that he was on a small island as they had advised him of the need to refrain from long walks.

There was no other Marist on Savo. He lived closely with the local people spending much time studying the different local languages. He spent a lot of time alone and spoke fondly of those days: *"it is good to be alone; one lives so much closer to God and feels drawn to confide in him."*³⁴

In 1911 Fr Bouillon was appointed back to the original Marist mission station on Rua Sura. He was asked to be the director of the catechist school. This was still the headquarters for the Marists in the Solomon Islands.

In early 1919 Bishop Bertreux died. He had been the leader of the mission to the Solomons for nearly sixteen years. On 19 February 1919 Fr Louis Raucaz wrote a letter to the procure in Sydney:

“Fr Bouillon has taken over the Mission’s helm. We are all delighted with our new boss and we would like to see him at our head in a more permanent way. Unfortunately, his age might be against him.”

He also spoke quite frankly about some of the challenges facing the Marist mission in those times:

³¹ *Marist Messenger*, “A Great Solomons’ Missionary”, Saturday May 1st, 1943, p. 6.

³² Peter McMurrich, *Not Angels, Nor Men Confirmed in Grace*, p.191 (“Letter of Rev. Father Provincial of Oceania”, n.7, 2 February 1908, p. 3, OMPA C3).

³³ *Ibid.* p. 191-192. Marion to Chanrion, 14 January 1908, copy OMPA B140/2.

³⁴ *Marist Messenger*, “A Great Solomons’ Missionary” Saturday May 1, 1943, p. 6.

“Our catechist school has been a complete failure, because the bishop insisted on having it on Sura against the advice of everybody. At our next retreat we are going to discuss that subject and I feel sure that we will succeed. We wasted thousands of pounds on the development of Sura. Nothing serious was done to improve the situation and all the stations of the Mission had to suffer under it. Everything has to be rebuilt or built anew.”³⁵

With the death of Bishop Bertreux the talents of Pierre were once again to the fore. He continued to carry a heavy load in the leadership of the mission despite his advancing years. As he said in a letter to the Procure:³⁶

“Owing to Fr Aubin’s departure, (to the second novitiate), I am Pro-Vicar, superior of Sura, sort of parish priest of a part of the Guadalcanal coast line, procurator, etc, all rolled into one.”

Louis Raucaz was appointed the next Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of the South Solomons in July 1920. One of his early decisions was to transfer the Marist headquarters to Visale on Guadalcanal.

Pierre Bouillon continued as the mission procurator, this time at Visale, for some years and he maintained his lifelong interest in linguistic studies. He eventually died on 5th February 1934. He had been a Marist for 36 years and a priest for 56. He had lived in the Solomon Islands since May 1898 except for two periods when he went to Sydney for medical treatment and the second novitiate.

The successors of Bishop Epalle and those first missionaries to Melanesia were more successful. They had the advantage of better medical treatment and the presence of other Europeans in the area. They too struggled with the physical conditions and a culture that at times seemed so challenging. They persevered. Men like Pierre Bouillon felt called to put aside their relatively comfortable life in France and set out on mission.

What was it that encouraged this academic to change his life so completely?

- To set aside the academic life of a seminary in France to go to the other side of the world.
- To give up on many of the luxuries of life.
- To learn other languages.
- To take on the hardship of life in the Pacific.

There were times when he could have given up, returned to France, or taken on a new role in Australia with the Society of Mary. But he did not.

His story makes me think about my life, to reflect on how comfortable I am, and what am I willing to give up for the sake of the mission? It helps me to wonder what I am doing now and why.

One of the most formative experiences can be when we go to somewhere else that is so different. When the assumptions of our own culture are challenged by another, when our horizons are broadened, when we are confronted with our weaknesses.

I can remember the challenges I faced when I went for my pastoral year to the West Sunshine parish in Melbourne Australia. It was so different from anything I had previously experienced. Many of my assumptions about people and faith and Church and groups were challenged by living in a community made up of people from so many different cultures. I learnt so much about life, faith and myself.

Pierre Bouillon and many of his contemporaries could see that there was a bigger vision than the world that they grew up in. He was willing to go, in the words of Pope Francis today, to the peripheries. What about me? What about you? What are you willing to give up? How far are you willing to go for the sake of the gospel?

³⁵ Letter Louis Raucaz sm to Sydney Procure 19th February 1919, *The Collection Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, p.174. Accessed 26th June 2015.

³⁶ Letter of Pierre Bouillon Dated 2nd April 1919 from Rua Sura, *The Collection Solomon Islands Letters to the Procure from the First Missionaries*, p. 176-177. Accessed 26th June 2015.

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