
Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II is the third volume of John Garrett’s history of Christianity in Oceania. The title is taken from the story in the epilogue of John’s Gospel, in which the disciples who have fished through the night without success are directed by the risen Lord to cast their net again. This time they catch such a quantity of fish that they are unable to haul the net in (John 21.5–6). Christianity, in a variety of denominational forms, has, indeed, netted a large following in Oceania. It is the most influential religion in the contemporary Pacific, shaping both community life and public policy. However, as Garrett shows, it has itself been shaped by many waves—by traditional Pacific worldviews, by styles of Christianity from elsewhere, and by the experience of war.

In this sequel to To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania (1982) and Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II (1992), Garrett describes the forging of new relationships as the missionary and colonial periods in the Pacific give way to local churches and independent states. Garrett himself was intimately involved in the era he describes. A minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, he taught church history for many years at the ecumenical Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. A former communications director for the World Council of Churches, he has been active in ecumenical initiatives and in the encouragement of indigenous leadership. In the foreword to To Live Among the Stars, Garrett said that in describing Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican traditions he tried to do so “with a kind of critical affection for them all.” The aim, he said, “is not to praise or blame, but to understand and describe” (Stars, xii). The author continues his evenhanded descriptive approach in volume 3, which, he says, “has been written in the hope of stimulating many friends, emerging Islander historians, to cast a fuller and more detailed light on what Christianity has brought to Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia since the first missionaries arrived in the Marianas in 1668” (vii).

Where Nets Were Cast explores three phases of Pacific Christianity—the war experience (1941–1945), the increasing shift in leadership from missionaries to Islanders (1946–1961), and a phase of ecumenism and experimentation (1961–1996). In each part of the book the author deals first with Melanesia, then Polynesia, and finally Micronesia. Within each region he tells of the experiences of the different denominations in turn. The book opens with the trauma of World War II. It introduces particular local Christians and missionaries, their experiences of suffering and of comradeship, their divided loyalties, and their rethinking of relationships. In New Britain, where Catholic and Methodist missionaries were interned by Japanese
forces, readers learn that local Catholic catechists and Methodist ministers and their congregations worshipped together and supported those in the prison camps. The heroism is described of Uri To Kopik, a patient in a leprosy hospital on Anelaua Island, who, after the hospital was bombed by Americans and the German missionaries staffing it were evacuated, cared for his fellow patients. Strangely, the story of the Catholic catechist martyr, Peter To Rot, beatified by Pope John Paul II, is not included in the saga of the Catholics of New Britain. For the most part Garrett’s account is full of details. Readers interested in a particular denomination or region can be fairly sure of finding information on its major players. Covering so many denominations, so many cultural groups, and such a vast territory, it is inevitable that Garrett occasionally misses a nuance. His description of Tok Pisin as the “national language of Papua New Guinea” (12) is an example. Tok Pisin is, in fact, the *lingua franca* and is one of three “official languages” of Papua New Guinea, the others being Motu and English.

In the postwar phase, Garrett emphasizes the transformation of leadership, recognizing it as an ongoing process that affects not only individual ministers but the ministry of communities. He mentions the difficulty that mandating celibacy as a condition of ordination causes within Catholic circles. He relates the cooperation between local and overseas church personnel in ministry, in education, and in health care, and the role that the churches played in the preparation of an educated elite who would assume political power as Pacific communities moved toward independence. For example, the first prime minister of Vanuatu, Walter Lini, received his early education in schools of the Anglican Church (Church of Melanesia). Later, Lini studied at St John’s College in Auckland, and he was ordained in 1971 as an Anglican minister. When Lini wanted to go into politics he had the support of his bishop (372–376). All the major churches in the Pacific have clergy members who have gone into politics, and Garrett narrates several of their stories.

Garrett sees the third phase of postwar Pacific Christianity as being animated by an ecumenical spirit and by “waves of change” as pentecostalism and spirit groups gain an influence in the region. In this period the World Council of Churches encouraged cooperation among Protestants and included Pacific Islanders in its assemblies; for Catholics, Vatican II opened the way for fellowship and solidarity with other Christians. Then, the mainline churches having embraced an ecumenical understanding, the face of Pacific Christianity has been modified by the introduction of Pentecostal forms of Christianity, by the recovery of spirit experiences from indigenous religious traditions, and by the formation of independent churches and religious movements. I would have liked to have Garrett’s take on where the diverse styles of Pacific Christianity are headed. That, however, would demand a more speculative approach and could be the subject of a fourth volume. The author has made careful use of the materials available to him in archives in Oceania, in Europe, and in North
America to construct his three-volume history of Christianity in Oceania. It is a well-documented, descriptive account that anyone interested in the religious history of the region will want to read and keep as a reference work.

MARY N MACDONALD
Le Moyne College, Syracuse, New York


When I was living on Tahiti and neighboring Mai’ao in the early sixties, my Tahitian hosts talked with reverential sadness about their exiled leader, an aging Tahitian called Pouvana’a a O’opa. He was their Metua, their “Father,” who had been framed and then unjustly imprisoned and banished from his native land by the French and their Demi (part-Tahitian) allies. Then, when in 1963 France announced that its nuclear testing center would be moved from the Sahara to French Polynesia, it became clear to them that Pouvana’a was a prophet whose voice had been stilled to clear the way for this ultimate desecration of their islands.

Pouvana’a was born in 1895, seven years after France had taken over his natal island of Huahine in the Society Islands of French Polynesia. During World War One he volunteered to fight in the trenches for France, and after being repatriated following the armistice he settled in Tahiti’s port town of Pape’ete, where for the next two decades he worked as a carpenter. At the outbreak of World War Two Pouvana’a rallied to the cause of Free France, but his subsequent protests to the local administration over war profiteering and the unequal distribution of foodstuffs and other scarce goods to the Tahitians resulted in his exile. First he was sent to Huahine and then, after he paddled (or sailed?) to neighboring Porapora in order to ask the American forces stationed there to relay his complaints directly to De Gaulle, to the remote atoll of Motu One (Bellinghausen). When electoral politics were opened to indigenous participation after the war, Pouvana’a emerged as the leading politician championing Tahitian rights. He and his party dominated the local legislative assembly, and he represented French Polynesia as its Député in the national parliament. However, in 1958, Pouvana’a once again found himself in hot water with French authorities. After campaigning for a Non vote on a referendum over whether French Polynesia should stay in the French community, and then losing that vote, he was arrested, tried, and convicted of attempting to burn down Pape’ete. For this Pouvana’a was sentenced to eight years imprisonment in France and fifteen years of exile there, a virtual banishment for life as he was then sixty-four years old and in declining health.

Such an outline of Pouvana’a’s life can be found in a number of sources other than Bruno Saura’s biography of the Tahitian leader. Where Saura’s