



Photo 6.1 The Reverend William Fletcher and family, Rotuma 1865. *Fletcher family archives.*



Photo 6.2 First Methodist mission house in Rotuma. *Fletcher family archives.*

6 The Missionary Experience: Transforming the Rotuman Religious Imagination

I wonder what the future holds. Spirituality thrives on a sense of mystery. In the past we Rotumans associated spirits with the mysteries of nature: with the bush and the sea, with sunshine and rain, with birth and death. The spirits of our ancestors gave us comfort in this somewhat unpredictable world. But now we live in the age of technology, and confront the mystery of machines like computers that do marvelous things we do not understand. Is this where contemporary spirits reside—a modern-day 'Oroi? If so, can we rely on them to comfort us?

Elizabeth Inia, *Kato'aga: Rotuman Ceremonies*, 2001

When considering the conversion of indigenous peoples to Christianity, it is useful to contrast the notions of religious *imagination* and religious *beliefs*. Religious imagination refers to an experiential universe inhabited by supernatural or mysterious entities in a variety of forms, ranging from gods of various qualities and character, to benign and malevolent spirits, ghosts, and so on. In societies where religion is based on personal experience rather than established theologies, individual imagination plays a profound role in shaping the way in which the supernatural world is perceived. Even within relatively tight-knit communities, religious imagination tends to be expansive, heterogeneous, unsystematized, and unrestricted. Characteristically, the question of whether an idea is true or false does not arise.

Religious belief, in contrast, tends to reduce the scope of religious imagination, relegating various components of it to obscurity. Although belief is multidimensional,¹ it primarily

involves propositions that can be deemed either true or false. To believe is to accept the truth of a proposition; to disbelieve is to reject it. Belief is ultimately a mental phenomenon, located in individual minds, and is subject to verification only through inference from talk or action. Underlying beliefs are presuppositions or basic assumptions about the nature of reality.

An emphasis on belief tends to restrict and confine religious imagination by shifting the focus from the world of experience to the world of discourse. Because belief places the emphasis on "truth," that which is not deemed true must be false and hence discarded. Thus believing in "one true God" requires rejecting much of the experience that otherwise would engage religious imagination. The Christian emphasis on belief—on "the word of God"—also lends itself to systematized theology and orthodox behavioral prescriptions and proscriptions, thus constraining the ways in which individuals are supposed to interpret their experiences, including their experience of the supernatural. Religious orthodoxy also lends itself to hierarchy, either within an organized church or by those with knowledge of "the truth" presiding over and instructing those without that knowledge, or with lesser knowledge.

In this chapter we explore the dynamics of interaction between Rotuman religious imagination and Christian missionization in the mid-nineteenth century. Our aim is to shed light on the nature of religious transformation as it occurred following European intrusion.

The Rotuman Religious Imagination

At the time of European intrusion, the Rotumans lived in a world they shared with a wide range of mysterious, supernatural beings, including ghosts of varying dispositions (*'atua*), and gods (*'aitu*), ranging from local spirits who inhabited the bodies of animals to a high god, Tagroa, who lived in the heavens and controlled weather, crops, and human fertility. Ancestral ghosts took up their abodes in various offshore locations under the sea, while other *'atua* were said to dwell in trees, wells, rocks, cemeteries, and isolated localities on the island. Some spirits were free roaming and could be encountered anywhere in the form of animals or apparitions. Spirits could be called on for assistance in solving problems, but they could be dangerous as well—the cause of disease and ill-fortune—requiring

people to exercise caution, to follow a variety of prescriptive and proscriptive rules, and to pay attention to omens of various kinds. Bush areas away from villages and hamlets and the surrounding reef were enchanted regions where one expected to have encounters with a variety of supernatural beings, some benign and helpful, others malevolent and dangerous.

Some of these roamed about in companies. For example, the *sa'aitu* consisted of the spirits of deceased chiefs and men who had been uncircumcised during their lifetime. Men who died in war also joined the company. This "big company" helped the living in wartime when they were summoned by men chanting a special song to work up their fighting spirit. Another company was called *la'oag ta*. They roamed about looking to recruit the souls of women approaching childbirth. Then there were the *uarepa*, the spirits of prematurely born babies or miscarriages, which Rotumans regarded as being particularly potent. The souls of such children had particular dwelling places, such as caves. When seen by humans, they appeared to glow like rotten wood or phosphorescent centipedes. The lower surface of the *uarepa* was a mass of children's legs.

It appears that a haunting concern about death and separation provided the main fuel for the Rotuman religious imagination. This preoccupation was evident in the elaborate death rituals and graveyards, which were the source of much commentary by early European visitors.² Prevailing rituals were ways of maintaining social continuity with remote ancestors as well as recently deceased relatives.

Spirits and gods were well incorporated into the social world of the Rotuman people. Relationships with them were maintained indirectly through symbolic exchanges or directly through mediums and possession. The spirits of close family members were especially likely to communicate with the living and to protect them from harm when called on. They could also be implored to bring justice to bear on people who had wronged family members; however, they could also vent their wrath on family members who quarreled or otherwise caused dissension within the family unit.³

Thus, pre-missionary Rotuman society incorporated a rich pantheon of supernatural beings, reflecting a lively, active religious imagination.

Encounters with Europeans

Early European visitors to Rotuma had difficulty coming to grips with the Rotuman religious imagination, in part, it seems, because their inquiries were framed in terms of beliefs rather than experiences with the spiritual realm. They were disconcerted by the lack of systemization in Rotuman thinking about supernatural beings, as is evident in the account of Lesson, who visited Rotuma in 1824, prior to the arrival of any missionaries:

As far as one can tell, their religious ideas are extremely superficial; they believe only in a supreme being or spirit who inflicts death by suffocation. They call this death *atoua*. They believe that after death, all is dissolved. We tried to make them understand the tenets of the Christian religion, the punishment of evil and the reward of good, all of which seemed to astound them greatly.⁴

It seems likely that the conclusions of such early commentators were based on Rotumans' responses to a way of talking they found unfamiliar. Instead of discussing spirits in the abstract, Rotumans probably talked about spirits in rather specific contexts—when telling stories, expressing apprehension or a sense of foreboding, attempting to explain anomalous occurrences, coping with uncanny feelings and unnatural sensations, and so on. Not surprisingly, Rotuman "religious beliefs" are described in European accounts as "superstitions," a term that suggests irrationality as well as inconsistency and incoherence.

In fact there was no word for "belief" in the Rotuman language prior to European intrusion. The missionaries had to introduce "*pilifi*" as a Rotumanization of the term. The closest Rotuman equivalent is *aier'aki* (to accept as true, correct), which derives from *aire* (true, correct). The antonym of *aire* is *siko* (false, untrue or incorrect). However, *aire* and *siko* are primarily used as terms of affirmation or denial of a speaker's claims (whether about events, rights and obligations, or other phenomena). They are not ordinarily used in reference to an individual's personal convictions about what is metaphysically true or real; in essence they are relational concepts. Thus *aire* is used to signify agreement, and *siko* to signify disagreement, with a speaker's statements. This usage reflects a distinctive theory of truth based on an implicit link between mana and truth. Since

mana derives from spirits, such notions of truth reflect an assumed linkage between the world of humans and the world of spirits. This meant that the missionaries, when they did come, were judged more on the basis of their perceived potency as social beings than by the persuasiveness of their theologies.

The first missionary encounter on Rotuma took place in 1839, when John Williams of the London Missionary Society left two Samoan teachers there, in response to the requests of Tokaniua and Fürsefaua, two Rotuman chiefs.⁵ The Samoans were eventually replaced by Tongan Wesleyans and still later by Fijian teachers, but progress was slow. By 1847 Rev. R. B. Lyth reported only sixty-eight Rotuman Christians on the island.⁶ The Wesleyan mission relied on Tongan and Fijian teachers until 1864, when Rev. William Fletcher took up residence on Rotuma. He was followed by a succession of English and Australian missionaries until the mid-twentieth century.

In 1846 two Roman Catholic priests, Fathers Pierre Verne and Gregoire Villien, arrived from Futuna and attempted to establish a mission. They, too, found the Rotumans resistant to conversion and left the island in 1859, but the mission was reestablished by Fathers Pierre Dezest and Joseph Trouillet in 1868.



Photo 6.3 Monument commemorating first mass performed on Rotuma, 1996. *Alan Howard.*

Initial Resistance to Christianization

In his Bachelor of Divinity thesis, Jione Langi noted that one source of resistance to the missionaries' conversion efforts was "the intense propaganda against missions which had been carried on for many years by the early white settlers."⁷ For the most part these men were hostile to missionaries in general and island teachers in particular, and they did not hide their feelings. Collectively, they were "'a thorn in the flesh' and an object of terror to many Fijian and Tongan teachers."⁸

The presence of a less than morally obsessed class of white men also diminished any sense Rotumans may initially have had about European superiority. Thus the Reverend Fletcher rued the fact that:

They have had much intercourse with white men, and have seen something of the world...money and property have circulated largely amongst the people. All this has tended to give them a very fair opinion of themselves, and their knowledge of white men would have been for the better had it embraced a wider circle.⁹

Langi also noted, however, that one of the main difficulties Rotumans had in accepting Christianity was that while their own spirits seemed to give material evidence of their mana by bringing misfortune on individuals, Christianity provided them with no material proofs. The miracles related in the Bible, which the missionaries so often talked about, were merely stories to Rotumans. They could see no miraculous interventions on behalf of Christians to impress them.¹⁰

Although some of the chiefs were favorably disposed to Christianity and even sought the presence of a missionary, most were apprehensive about how it would affect their prerogatives. An incident in 1858 crystallized their opposition:

Rev. J. Carey arrived from Sydney, but was not allowed to remain. In an interview with the chiefs, he was told that not only he must go, but the teachers as well. The church (*lotu*) had made just enough impression on the people to disturb the equanimity of the chiefs, devoted to things as they were. There was a shrewd suspicion that the *lotu* was not only antagonistic to the customs of the past, but that it would eventually carry all before

it. Whist thus regarded with misgiving, the promptings of a renegade Tonga man led the few *lotu* people at a Christmas festival to act very injudiciously. A beautifully dyed girdle of dracaena leaves is at certain times worn by the "Sau," and by him alone. But now all the professing Christians put on such girdles; and the heathen were greatly incensed, fighting ensued, and many Christians were killed.¹¹

After the Reverend Carey left, the chiefs ordered the chapels closed or pulled down, preaching ceased, and people were forbidden to honor the Sabbath. They were successful in their special efforts to win over leading men who had favored the *lotu*, with one exception. A chief by the name Zerubbabel Urakmata held fast to his Christian profession, and though his firmness angered the chiefs, they did him no harm.

Church historians generally credit Zerubbabel with saving the Wesleyan mission, in large measure because he knew how to read. As recounted by Churchward:

Just at this time a number of young men, Rotumans, who had been abroad, arrived back on Rotuma. These men had been to Australia, and thence to the Torres Strait, where they had been employed in pearl-fishing. On their travels they had seen a lot, and learnt a lot, and had been greatly impressed by the white man's progressiveness as compared with the backwardness of their own people. So, on returning to Rotuma, they recounted their experiences, and endeavoured to show their fellow-countrymen, and particularly the young men, how important it was that they should wake up and seek the education which was obviously the secret of the white man's progress and prosperity. "And the first step in education," they added, "is to learn to read and write one's own language."¹²

The young men were impressed, and they were agreed that they must find some way of learning to read and write. They found Zerubbabel more than willing to teach them, but on three conditions: that every lesson begin and end with prayer, that the readings be from Matthew's Gospel (3,000 copies of which had been left by Rev. Carey), and that the book be used reverently as the message of God.¹³



Photo 6.4 Zerubbabel (center) with the four Fijian teachers who went to Rotuma with Rev. William Fletcher in 1864. *Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly Historical Reference Committee.*

Zerubbabel began to hold "love feasts" (the traditional Wesleyan fellowship meeting) and even quarterly meetings (regular business meetings) as a means of organizing an indigenous church. When James Calvert visited Rotuma in 1864, shortly before Zerubbabel's death, he found 1,200 people worshipping in eleven chapels, with 22 local preachers and 250 members meeting regularly in classes.¹⁴

The initial impact of Christianity on the Rotuman religious imagination seems to have been limited, with the apparent exception of the notions of hell and damnation. Rev. Fletcher acknowledged as much when he wrote in 1865, "There is little of what can be called religious experience, but all give prominence to their ruin as sinners, and to their hope of salvation through Christ alone. The dread of everlasting burning is referred to by many."¹⁵

The concept of eternal suffering as a consequence of sin, along with the prospect of harnessing the mana of the Christian God in the interest of worldly riches, allowed Christianity to take root. The testimony of Mataiase during a Methodist love feast, recorded in a letter from Rev. John Osborne on 20 March 1873, is indicative:

I desire, first of all, to render thanks unto God for his goodness in giving me His holy Spirit to help me at all times. When first I joined the Church I strove to do God's will because of my dread of Eternal punishment, and also because I imagined I should be greatly

prospered in my worldly affairs. But now I try to do God's will because of my love to Jesus. Formerly I had a great desire to possess riches, but now, I am not anxious to be wealthy. I desire spiritual riches. The only thing that I really value is the love of God. I greatly rejoice when men abandon their sins, and turn to God and love him.¹⁶

Once missionaries succeeded in drawing converts into their orbit, they strove to teach them to display, in words and behavior, forms they regarded as indicative of commitment and conviction. Thus, in the same letter, Osborne wrote:

It will be seen that I have taught my people to speak short. I do not pretend to assert that what they said is as edifying as the Love Feast Experiences of the Church in York Street or Bourke Street, but nevertheless it has the Methodist ring, and shows that the Rotuman Christians are trying to possess an intelligent piety.¹⁷

The Missionary Assault on Custom

Rev. William Fletcher was the first European missionary to take up long-term residence on Rotuma. Because there was already a sizeable Christian following by the time he arrived in 1864, he set out to consolidate the hold of the mission on converts' lives. The chiefs remained skeptical—one of them told Fletcher that he feared a missionary would try to do away with all the powers and prerogatives of the chiefs—but after assuring the chief that the *lotu* instilled respect and obedience to rulers, Fletcher embarked on a program designed to reshape the political, along with the social, landscape. He focused his attention on the institution of the *sau*.

In describing the institution, in a letter dated 26 January 1865, Fletcher wrote that the *sau*

holds the highest social place, drinking kava before the chiefs yet he gains his dignity at some expense. The poor fellow has to eat, and drink kava, many times during the twenty-four hours, by night as well as by day. He presides at certain dances, regularly held, when as at his drinking kava, the old *atua*, or gods are invoked. These *atua* appear as old chiefs, whose history is not as well known as their names. With all this there

is the most profuse daubing with turmeric. Food is continually taken to the Sau from all parts of the island.¹⁸

Fletcher considered the *sau* to be the greatest hindrance to the acceptance of Christianity because would-be converts continued showing deference to the *sau* as "a high priest or a living god." Anyone appointed to the position had to give up his church membership because of its heathen associations. In his report to the 1869 district meeting, Fletcher reported that people had asked him whether they might have "a lotu Sau," i.e., a Christian type of *sau*, but he had told them that was impossible; "it would be like trying to unite Jehovah and Baal."¹⁹



Photo 6.5 The Reverend William Fletcher and Mary Fletcher in later years. *Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly Historical Reference Committee.*

Fletcher, obviously disconcerted over Rotuman willingness to retain their traditional rites while professing Christian beliefs, remarked in a 26 January 1865 letter, "The opinion...appears to be, if we serve God, it is well, but if we do as our forefathers did, it is well." In reaction, he attacked the institution head on, focusing not only on the rites of homage but also on the dancing and smearing with turmeric that accompanied the rites. Writing on 12 November 1867, Fletcher reported:

Just at present this dancing, and the homage paid that living god, called the "sau," are our great difficulties, unless I include the use of turmeric. All the members of society are forbidden to recognise in any [way] the sau, or his adherents, and no attempt has been made to compel them, especially as I have refused to admit as a member, or to continue as one, any one who wavered on this point. But of the non-members, many at heart like the old doings, and appear unable to feel aught but reverence for that miserable object of homage, the sau. Many professedly Christian are helping to uphold heathenism by their vacillating conduct, by their want of a little pluck, by their secret love of sin....Our prayers and our hopes are that the "sau" now in office, may close the long list of such officials, extending to generations of the distant past. The proximity of the dancing houses, the taunts and coaxings of heathen relatives, the want of judgement on the part of our own members, and office bearers, the neglect of private prayer, and the natural indolence of the people, with their ignorance over and above, all retard our work, and exercise our patience. I never felt so much in Fiji, as I have done, and do here, there we are face to face with a foe, who by authority, by craft, and by every available means, short of violence would drive us off the field....Though I am told all are at liberty to join us, yet there is a private, and very effectual check put upon the people by their chiefs, who promise to lotu all together soon.²⁰

In his condemnation of dancing, Fletcher implemented a resolution unanimously adopted by the Methodist assembly, which read as follows:

The conference has observed, with sincere regret, the existence in some quarters of a disposition to indulge in and encourage amusements which it cannot regard as harmless or allowable. The obligation which rests on Christians to "do all to the glory of God" must be held to extend even to their recreations: and recreations which lead to association with the ungodly and promote a trifling spirit which indispose persons for devotional exercises, and do not harmonize with that use of "the word of God and Prayer" by which the social intercourse of Christians should be hallowed, can never be safely or innocently followed by any who desire to "adorn the

doctrine of God our Saviour." It behooves all such to keep at the utmost distance from evil, and to set an example which shall at once instruct and improve the ungodly. The original rules of our Society are express [*sic*] against such music and other diversions as do not accord with these general principles and subsequent regulations have specified dancing as incompatible with Christian propriety. The well known rule which forbids the teaching of dancing in schools conducted by Methodists proceeds upon the principle of its unlawfulness, not merely in schools and among pupils, but among Methodists in general. To the views long since indicated the Conference still entirely adheres, and entreats heads of families...to watch against every practice which tends to lower the tone of devotional feeling.²¹

In some respects his condemnation of the use of turmeric was even more indicative of the degree to which Fletcher and the missionaries who succeeded him strove to transform lifeways on Rotuma. The missionaries brought with them a certain sense of order, which was represented and supported by particular forms of bodily appearance and types of dwellings. Turmeric, which Rotumans smeared over themselves as both practical and ritual protection against bodily insults from external sources,²² disgusted Europeans because it came off readily and stained their own clothes and possessions. When converts seemed to be adopting at least some aspects of European dress Fletcher was pleased:

The contrast between the skins and garments, stained with turmeric and the clean shirts and dresses, was too marked to be overlooked. The young men of the district appeared in a sort of uniform, clean white shirts, and clean cloth wrapped about them in place of trousers. The idea was their own: the effect was good.²³

Contrasting "heathen" and Wesleyan sections of a village, Fletcher remarked: "As I reached the houses of the heathen part of the village, the difference was very marked. Everything was dirty. Turmeric was on all sides."²⁴

Rev. John Osborne served on Rotuma in the interval between Fletcher's two periods of service. In a letter of 1 March 1873, praising his predecessors' efforts, Osborne seemed to equate changes in appearance and housing with sincerity of conversion:

It is pleasing to note the delightful changes that have taken place in the circumstances of the people during the past ten years. Before Wm. Fletcher's last appointment to the island, there was a comparatively large number of Christians, but they were necessarily very ignorant; while the majority of the inhabitants were thoroughly degraded. Their houses were the meanest hovels imaginable, and they themselves were unutterably filthy. They wore European cloth round their loins, but it was so daubed with turmeric and impregnated with dirt, the accumulation of months, as to be in the highest degree offensive. Through the instrumentality of Mr. & Mrs. Fletcher, and several really superior Fijian teachers, the most gratifying changes were effected. Hundreds *lotu'd*, and when they *lotu'd* they got rid of the turmeric. Then they purchased soap, and tried to make their scanty garments more presentable. Bye and bye numbers of them became convinced of sin, and entered the Church. Then they grew dissatisfied with their hovels, and commenced the erection of substantial and neat houses. So rapidly did they advance, that when I was appointed to take Mr. Fletcher's place, nearly four years ago, I found that there was a membership of upwards of 450, & a large attendance at the schools. There were also scores of well-constructed wattle and lime houses neatly whitewashed, having doors and glazed windows. At that time about 300 or 400 of the people were still heathen, and they tried hard to keep up their system of filth and sensuality. But they utterly failed in the attempt; and about two years ago they abandoned heathenism forever.²⁵

The Contrast between Wesleyans and Catholics

In this chapter we have focused on the Wesleyan mission for several reasons. For one, more documentation is available; for another, the Catholic missionaries were considerably more tolerant of "heathen" practices and less intent on altering personal appearance and the prevailing lifestyle. Rather, they put their effort into building impressive churches and schools. Father Lucien Soubeyran, who served on Rotuma from 1907 to 1954, provided the rationale. He later remarked in a letter that Rotuman Christians were impressed with what they saw, so that good buildings meant

more attention to Christianity and its teachings. They believed what they saw, he said, and although they could not see God, they saw the Host in the monstrance [receptacle] and prayed and sang; they understood that the Lord was there and were more fervent in following their religion.²⁶ Indeed, the French priests built two impressive cathedrals on Rotuma, importing many of the materials from France, including gargoyles, stained glass windows, statues of saints, etc. They also erected a two-story school building on the grounds of the main church at Sumi.

The Methodist missionaries were disdainful of Catholic tolerance for traditional customs and lifestyle. Thus, on 26 October 1864, Fletcher wrote that Catholicism

is but heathenism hallowed and Christianity degraded....It were hard here, even as in Fiji, to tell a Papist from a professed heathen by his outward gait and demeanour. There is the same unkempt head of long hair, the same daubing with turmeric; indeed, the same wild, and unpolished, and unwholesome appearance. If by searching, you do at last catch sight of a little figure of Mary hanging around the neck, you may suppose the man to be a Papist and not a heathen.²⁷

Rev. John Osborne, writing a few years later (1 March 1873), commented on why he considered the Catholics less successful than the Methodists in their missionary endeavors:

The heathen could not see the difference between the religion which the priest preached, and that which was professed by themselves, and they did not see the use of abandoning their own system to embrace what in their opinion was no better. It is painful to be compelled to state that Roman Catholicism in Rotumah is really no better than heathenism. It does not raise the people socially or morally; their houses and their persons are nearly as filthy as ever they were. It does not teach the people to respect the Sabbath: they buy and sell on that sacred day as on other days; and it certainly does not teach them to be obedient to their chiefs.²⁸



Photo 6.6 Frs. Gustave Griffon and Lucien Soubeyrand. *Marist Archives, Rome.*

Some Consequences of Conversion

When chiefs, along with everyone else, finally converted to Christianity, they severed their ties with their ancestral spirits and the other gods, and so lost the traditional basis of their moral authority. In compensation, the missionaries supported the chiefs so long as they conformed to the Church's teachings, but it soon became clear that it was the missionaries, and *not* the chiefs, who controlled communication with the Christian God. Moral authority now came from this new God, but it came only indirectly, through white missionaries.

In some ways the missionaries encouraged the chiefs to take more prerogatives than they had been entitled to in

earlier times. A system of fines was established for various offenses against the new religion, including neglect of school, absence from the preaching services and from prayer meetings.²⁹ To encourage enforcement, the chiefs were given a percentage of the income from fines. But on the whole, with the acceptance of the missionaries and Christianity, the chiefs found themselves one step further removed from the divine source of their authority.

How did conversion affect the Rotuman religious imagination? Initial contact with Christianity probably expanded it by suggesting new entities: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary, saints, etc. Progressive commitment to Christianity, however, resulted in a steady pressure to constrict religious imagination through an emphasis on belief in the church's dogma, a direct assault on practices associated with traditional spirits (especially on the institution of the *sau*), and indirect attacks that removed people from circumstances where their imaginations could operate in an expansive manner. This embodied a shift away from a focal concern for continuing relationships with deceased ancestors to a concern for individual salvation.³⁰ In contrast to traditional rituals, which relied on the immediate experiencing of the supernatural and mysterious, Christian church rituals depended on proclaiming prescribed dogma in word and song. Wesleyans in particular were encouraged to go to church services several times a week, to attend prayer meetings, and to participate in various other church activities that affirmed belief. There was little room for exercising religious imagination, particularly within the Wesleyan camp.

Outside of church, however, in the bush, in cemeteries, in the dead of night, Rotumans continued to experience encounters with spirits of various kinds. They paid heed to omens in the cries of birds and animals, in the appearance of anomalous creatures. Indeed, aspects of the Rotuman landscape remained the unquestioned abode of indigenous spirits throughout most of the twentieth century. It was not until the last quarter of the century that the combined impact of such modern influences as electrification, the widespread use of motor vehicles, increased exposure to formal education, and periodic visits to cosmopolitan centers generated a secular template for experience that seriously reduced the sense of the uncanny, resulting in an eclipse of a once enchanted universe.³¹



Photo 6.7 Fr. Griffon and Rotuman men. *Marist Archives, Rome.*



Photo 6.8 Sr. M. Pierre and young girls. *Marist Archives, Rome.*

Notes to Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is largely based on two previous papers. The section detailing Rotuman concepts of supernatural beings draws on "Speak of the Devils: Discourse and Belief in Spirits on Rotuma" (Howard 1996b), which was published in *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, edited by Jeannette Mageo and Alan Howard. The description of the Rotuman conversion experience derives from an unpublished paper entitled "Transforming the Rotuman Religious Imagination" (Howard and Rensel 2000), delivered at a conference on religious conversion in Oceania, at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, held in Paris in May 2000.

¹ See Howard 1996b, 136–142, for an extensive discussion of belief.

² For an account of Rotuman death rituals, see Inia 2001.

³ See Inia 2001 and Howard 1996b for more detailed descriptions of pre-Christian beliefs.

⁴ Lesson 1838, 437.

⁵ For a full account of Williams's visit and the events leading to his decision to leave the Samoan teachers, see Prout 1843. For summaries of Williams's account, see Eason 1951 and Langi 1971; Langi's comments on the encounter are especially interesting and insightful.

⁶ Wood 1978, 121.

⁷ Langi 1971, 27.

⁸ Forbes 1875, 224.

⁹ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 31 (April 1865).

¹⁰ Langi 1971, 27.

¹¹ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 13 (April 1870).

¹² Churchward 1938, 302–303.

¹³ Williams and Calvert 1870, 567.

¹⁴ Wood 1978, 122.

¹⁵ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 35 (April 1866).

¹⁶ Methodist Missionary Letters from Rotuma, 1872–1879.

¹⁷ Methodist Missionary Letters from Rotuma, 1872–1879.

¹⁸ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 34 (January 1866).

¹⁹ Wood 1978, 123.

²⁰ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 5 (April 1868).

²¹ *Methodist Magazine*, 1856, Pt. II, p. 839; as quoted in Eason 1951, 75–76.

²² See Howard and Rensel 1998.

²³ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 35 (April 1866).

²⁴ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 37 (October 1866).

²⁵ Methodist Missionary Letters from Rotuma, 1872–1879.

²⁶ Letter dated 18 November 1865, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Reel 467, Section 5, Miscellaneous Papers Chiefly Historical.

²⁷ Methodist Church of Australasia, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, no. 31 (April 1865).

²⁸ Methodist Missionary Letters from Rotuma, 1872–1879.

²⁹ The fines were evidently initiated by the teachers rather than by Fletcher, who, on returning for his second term on Rotuma in 1874, commented in a letter dated 5 March:

On my arrival I found that fines were imposed not only for neglect of school, but for absence from the preaching services, or from prayer meetings. I could not sanction such rules, and the chiefs gave them up. Tobacco and Kava too were stringently forbidden to all members of society....It is in these and some like matters that I have thought our native agents likely to act injudiciously & mischievously. (Methodist Missionary Letters from Rotuma, 1872–1879)

³⁰ The emphasis on individual salvation, at the expense of both community and relationships with ancestors, is even stronger in the newer Christian religions (e.g., Assembly of God, Jehovah's Witnesses) introduced in recent years. One's relationship with Jesus Christ as personal savior is given priority over all other relationships.

³¹ See Howard 1996b.