1. Pierre Chanel of Futuna (1803–1841): The making of a saint

Apart from James Cook and William Bligh—and leaving aside the creative geniuses, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin, whose lives and works find their main constituency of interest elsewhere—who is the most variously and extensively commemorated figure in the field of Pacific history? Nowhere, with the obvious exceptions of the small Polynesian islands of Wallis and Futuna, north of Tonga, is his name an ingrained commonplace. Yet, admittedly without the benefit of exhaustive comparative research, but after perusing bibliographies and consulting with mission historians, one may confidently assert that the likely answer is 'Pierre Chanel'.

A quiet-mannered Catholic missionary, Chanel, after a sojourn of three and a half years unrewarded by a tally of converts or, indeed, by any other conspicuous accomplishment, was murdered on Futuna in 1841. He was a singularly unlikely candidate for fame and his notability is entirely posthumous. Yet it has become deep-rooted, widespread, abundantly attested and, above all, remains current. Within the international Catholic community his cultus is particularly marked in those areas influenced by the sub-culture of the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers), of which there is none more so than the South Pacific.

The major biography of Chanel appeared in ten editions and in five languages between 1885 and 1935. Interest remains steady. Churches, educational establishments and mission ships have been dedicated to him in over a dozen countries. People entering religious life have regularly adopted his name. A bibliography concerning him lists over 120 items and, in the 1990s alone, he inspired at least ten publications in three languages.

What follows is an attempt to trace and explain the process, by no means fortuitous, by which his memory has been secured and propagated. While finding expression in a multitude of local, ethnic and cultural particularities, that memory has also been incorporated into the transcendent Catholic metaculture. There, distinctions between the introduced and the indigenous are blurred if not obliterated; as,

1 Private communications from Ian Breward, Allan Davidson, John Garrett, Francis Hezel, David Hilliard. Davidson writes ‘Chanel has an international profile that has continued to grow because of the saintifying process … [In contrast], the whole Protestant missionary world which exalted heroes like Williams, Patteson and James Chalmers has virtually died. [However], they still have considerable local significance—for example, Patteson in Melanesia, Williams in Samoa and Chalmers in the Cook Islands and Papua’.

2 For the spread and distribution of the Marists, see Francis Durning, The Whole World Marist: a narrative of the expansion of the Society of Mary, Wellington, 1983.

for instance, when Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre, later famous as a schismatic archbishop, sealed a relic of Chanel in the foundation stone of a Marist college at Dakar in Senegal in West Africa in 1948.4

The nearest challenger for Chanel’s place on the commemorative ranking table for the Pacific—and the pre-eminent figure within the ambit of English-speaking Protestantism there—is John Williams of the London Missionary Society. Besides spectacularly receiving Samoa for Christianity in 1830, Williams travelled extensively through the Pacific, including a visit to New Zealand, and in 1835 he published a widely read narrative of his evangelistic and exploratory exploits. Within five years of publication, 35,000 copies of this book were sold.5 As a hero of the expanding frontier of British enterprise, Williams has even been likened to Cook. And, like Cook in Hawai‘i in 1779, at Eromanga in the New Hebrides in 1839 he secured his own claim upon the attention both of contemporaries and of posterity by being killed in the course of his much-admired labours. It was no coincidence that the best known print of his death—contrasting noble innocence with brutish depravity—was made to echo John Webber’s famous ‘The Death of Captain Cook’. A putative coincidence of patriotism and religion was reflected in this tendentious conflation of images.6 One eulogist, who understood publicity, commented,

for popular effect, for the reputation of Mr. Williams, and for the purposes of history, he died in the proper manner, at the proper place, and at the proper time.7

That is, of course, a familiar phenomenon. Would the Easter Uprising of 1916 have contributed much to the Irish nationalist cause without the serial execution of its leaders? Blood sacrifice, or some other dramatic demise (such as death from leprosy), attracts attention and harnesses the loyalty and affection of those who sympathise with the victim’s cause. Base misfortune is thus transmuted by the alchemy of adulation into golden martyrdom. So it also was with John Coleridge

7 John Campbell, quoted in Gavan Daws, A Dream of Islands: voyages of self-discovery in the South Seas, Sydney, 1980, p. 67.
Patteson, the Old Etonian bishop killed at Nukapu near the Solomon Islands in 1871. The story of his death ‘remains central in the traditions of Melanesian Anglicanism’.  

So, too, it was with Chanel. The ecclesiastical response to him, though, contrasts significantly with that towards Williams and Patteson. His memory has been more systematically sustained. For Chanel belonged to a Church that, beyond simply according him a hallowed place in its traditions, had the theological and institutional capacity—albeit exercised via labyrinthine procedures—to recognise martyrs (along with other models of heroic virtue) with canonical formality.  

Second, he was a member of a religious congregation that had a special interest in seeing one of its own elevated to the highest level of veneration, namely sainthood. That goal was reached in 1954. To mark it, 22 publications appeared between 1953 and 1955 and dedications grew apace. In New Zealand alone by 2000 there were six parishes and five schools bearing his name, as well as a shrine at Russell (where his bones once rested for seven years) and the architecturally precious Futuna Chapel in Wellington.  

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The son of a peasant farmer, Pierre-Louis-Marie Chanel was born in the parish of Cuet near Lyon in south-central France in 1803. From childhood he aspired to be a priest, and he was duly ordained for the diocese of Belley in 1827. Then, in 1831, he joined the incipient Society of Mary, a group of priests who, under their leader, Jean-Claude Colin, hoped to become an autonomous religious congregation; that is, independent of the bishop of a diocese. As with numerous other congregations, the matrix from which the Marists originated was the powerful, desperate, even millenarian, Catholic revival that developed in reaction to the persecutions and blasphemies unleashed on the Church by the French Revolution; and which continued spasmodically until being defused by the sacrificial bravery of the clergy in defence of la patrie during the war of 1914–1918. The Marists were part of a movement that, careless of hardships, aimed not only at rebuilding the Church in France, but also at reminding the nation of the honours and obligations that had historically bound it to Catholicism as la fille ainée de l’église (‘the eldest daughter of the Church’).  

11 That title was of later origin. The king of France was traditionally called le fils ainée de l’église (‘the eldest son of the Church’), but not the country. Use of the feminine form represented a transfer of what had been
foreign missions was conspicuous in this religious resurgence. Therefore, when the Vatican offered the Marists the islands of the western Pacific as a field of operation, Colin readily agreed in order to expedite approbation for his Society. This was granted on 29 April 1836.12

Chanel was in the first party of Marist missionaries, five priests and three coadjutor brothers, who left France on 24 December 1836, led by Bishop J.B. Pompallier. After reaching Tahiti, Pompallier turned south to New Zealand. En route he settled Pierre Bataillon and a brother at Wallis (or Uvea), and Chanel and Brother Marie-Nizier Delorme at Futuna, 150 kilometres to the west, with each pair under the protection of the leading chief of the island. On Futuna, this was at Poi, in the district of Tua, with ‘king’ Niuliki. Pompallier intended to return to Futuna within six months, but more than four years were to pass before he did so. Then, it was to collect Chanel’s remains.13

From the outset, Chanel’s task was difficult. Demonstrating the worldly wisdom shown by many Pacific islanders in their early dealings with Europeans, Niuliki heeded an adviser who urged ‘I believe we would do well to keep these Whites on the island, their presence could be profitable to us’. But he evinced slight interest in their religion.14 The reason is plain; while there might be advantages in tolerating missionaries, Niuliki was in no way dependent on them. There were other and more abundant sources of European metal goods and cloth available to him. Above all, he was already prospering politically. Since the early years of the century, whaling ships trading for food and water had visited regularly while, by the late 1830s, there was a resident trader on Futuna as well as several beachcombers.

A major consequence of these contacts was that the Futunans obtained firearms, which helped to enlarge the scale of indigenous warfare and to concentrate power into fewer but larger blocs. In June 1838, following the visit of the Hudson, Chanel wrote

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My poor islanders have bought from the captain only powder, muskets and shot. They burn with the wish to become malo (the ‘victors’) and anything that can make them terrible to their enemies is worthwhile.\textsuperscript{15}

In fact, the Tua people were already malo—but they wished to consolidate their position. About the year 1800 they had been one of six or seven independent districts in Futuna, but, by about 1820, the contestants for supremacy had been reduced to two—Sigave in the West and Tua in the East. In the following years Tua enjoyed two notable victories over Sigave, reducing it to the status of lava (the ‘defeated’), before being itself defeated in a third clash. Then, in a further encounter shortly before the missionaries arrived, Tua, under Niuliki, regained the title of malo. Finally, in the engagement of greatest importance, Niuliki defeated the Sigave again on 10 August 1839 when, in the last battle in the island’s history, he killed their leader, Vanai, and affirmed his primacy over the whole island. In thus becoming ‘king’ without missionary assistance, Niuliki had no reason to transfer his (or his people’s) spiritual loyalties away from the atua (traditional spirits) who had favoured his progress. Chanel commented:

Our good king Niuliki, said to be the man into whom the greatest god in the island [Fakavelikele] descends, seems to have a great fear of what his islanders will say if he rejects a god he has so often told them is powerful and terrifying.\textsuperscript{16}

Not that the Tua leader had not wavered. In June 1839, during a visit to Futuna, the formidable Bataillon from Wallis had persuaded Niuliki to allow him to burn a number of sacred objects in order to demonstrate the superior power of Jehovah. Great was said to be the general admiration when this was achieved without mishap, and Niuliki himself said he would be converted as soon as the whole island decided to become Catholic.\textsuperscript{17} But then came the final victory over Sigave. Niuliki’s renewed indifference was matched by his subjects’ strengthened demands for ‘signs and wonders’ before yielding: they wanted to see Jehovah, to be cured of sickness, and to have a shelter built to protect Futuna from the wind.\textsuperscript{18} That those who did accept baptism (even though \textit{in extremis}) always died was no inducement for them to lower their price. In May 1839 Chanel had commented ‘Twenty baptisms, four of which were adults and the rest children, and all in danger of death, make up the entire harvest I have reaped in eighteen months’. Nor did Pompallier’s delayed return help


\textsuperscript{16} Chanel to Colin, 16 May 1840, in Stuart and Ward, p. 225; also, Rozier 1960, p. 285.


\textsuperscript{18} Chanel, Diary, Feb. 1840, in Stuart and Ward, p. 409; also, Rozier (1960), pp. 486–487.
matters: ‘Brother Marie-Nizier and I were made to look like liars, or like two abandoned men’. He even called for a French naval visit to help counter that bad impression.\(^19\) Throughout Chanel’s time on Futuna the only service Niuliki and his fellows consistently sought from the missionaries was a shave with a steel razor. That attraction flagged only once, and then only for three days, after the razor had been used by a Wallisian surgeon to operate on a man with a putrifying testicle. (The patient, named Manogi Tulia, died two days later).\(^20\)

Relations took a further turn for the worse in November 1840. Niuliki, tolerant of Chanel’s growing insistence on the falsity of traditional religious beliefs as his facility in the local language increased, turned strongly against the mission when he heard that, defying their chief, Lavelua Vaimua, the people of Wallis were turning towards Christianity. As Chanel commented, ‘now that he is truly malo, he gives the impression of wanting to cling to Fakavelikele’\(^21\). Worse still for Niuliki, early in 1841 his eldest son, Meitala, emerged as the leader of a party of young men sympathetic to the missionaries. They were, apparently, impressed by what they had heard from Wallis of the promised benefits of the new religion. More particularly, though, it seems that Meitala, as his father’s heir, was bound by taboo to refrain from eating yams until he himself had fathered a son. Meitala resented this prohibition and, after being reassured by the priest that the atua would not kill him, ‘cooked a large oven full of yams’ and ate his fill. On 18 April 1841 Chanel noted that Meitala had decided ‘to embrace [our] religion’. With this ‘new and important conquest’ the crisis point had been reached. ‘Maddened by the disobedience of his son and the insult [to] his gods’, Niuliki ordered that the missionary be killed. On 28 April, therefore, a party of assassins led by his son-in-law, Musumusu, attacked Chanel in his house, speared him, then clubbed him to death. The other attackers were named Fikitika, Fuasea, Umutaouli and Ukuloa.\(^22\)

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21 Chanel to Bataillon, 19 Nov. 1840, in Stuart and Ward, p. 229.
managed to escape to the American whaler *William Hamilton*, which was bound for Wallis. From there news of Chanel’s death was sent to Colin in France and to Pompallier, who was visiting the French settlers at Akaroa when word reached him on 4 November. Towards the end of that month, in his schooner *Sancta Maria*, accompanied by Fr Philip Viard, and escorted by the French warship *Allier* (Capt. Dubouzet), he set sail for Wallis, reaching there on 30 December.23

From Wallis, Viard, under naval escort and accompanied by Delorme and by Sam Keletaona, a Futunan well acquainted with Europeans, was despatched to Futuna to retrieve Chanel’s remains and take them to New Zealand. He was greeted with a prudent mixture of remorse and fear. The Futunans, blaming Niuliki—who had since died—for the killing, begged forgiveness, and pleaded for another missionary to come among them. Seeing the *Allier* at hand and being mindful of the reprisals taken in October 1838 by Dumont d’Urville against the Fijians of Bau for attacking the French trader *Aimable Josephine*, they were also conspicuously relieved when the missionaries persuaded Dubouzet not to inflict similar vengeance upon them.24 Soon after the departure of the two vessels Letavai, the wife of Meitala, composed a chant, ‘which the women performed with a melancholy air and mournful keening’, voicing their readiness for religious change:

Pierre, alas!
here he is no more!
Chanel came to see,
but, the sad news is
he is dead on Futuna.
Why? Was he a bad man?
Pierre, alas!
Marie [Nizier] has come to tell us New Zealand has embraced the Faith.
Let us do the same
lest we be left in the midst of the fire.
Pierre, alas!
here he is no more, alas!25

Writing to Colin a month after the killing, Bataillon complained that had Pompallier visited his northern missions earlier, as he had promised—and as Chanel had expected—the missionary would still be alive. ‘But then’,

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23 Delorme to Pompallier, 1 May 1841, 19 Dec. 1841; to Colin, 6 Oct. 1844; to Hermitage, 14 June 1846, in Clisby; Keys, pp. 32–35; Ronzon, pp. 91–112; Simmons, p. 61; Twyning, in Rozier (1991), pp. 77–78.
he continued, ‘we would not have a martyr’. Early in 1842, Viard, citing Tertullian’s sanguine dictum regarding the Roman persecutions of the third century, declared that ‘I have confidence that the blood of our confrère will soon be for the island the seed of Christians’. That this trust was quickly fulfilled, even if for a variety of reasons that included fear along with hope of temporal wellbeing, ensured that the story of Chanel and Futuna would be exploited as a stimulus to piety by generations of preachers and hagiographers. Fathers Servant and Roulleaux came up from New Zealand in June 1842 to collect the harvest; and, a year later, most of the 1,000 inhabitants of Futuna had been baptised. In this there was, for those sympathetic to such an understanding, and susceptible to being inspired by it, dramatic proof of the intervention of divine providence. The number of people involved might be small, but the 100 per cent success rate pointed persuasively heavenwards. Killing and conversion were thus linked, in the non-verifiable logic of faith and belief, as cause and effect; there, on a plane of privileged perception, explanation merged with interpretation and, in defiance of orthodox reasoning, subsequence became consequence. In 1860 Pompallier wrote:

it appears that the special mission of Father Chanel was just to be that of the gentle lamb whose blood, united to that of Jesus Christ which takes away the sins of the world, has been spilled by the axe of the infidel and the savage for the benefit of the people of Futuna, who have all become edifying Christians.

In 1845 Jean Faramond, the French consul in Sydney, had detected the same unworldly sentiment when farewelling a party of Marists heading for New Guinea. Referring to their leader, Bishop Jean-Baptiste Epalle, who had earlier worked in New Zealand, he wrote

I was struck by the vagueness of his plans. I pointed out to him the dangers to which he was exposing himself in landing in the midst of savage people … . But I knew in advance that my warnings were useless, he placed himself at the mercy of Providence and regarded it as a culpable lack of confidence in divine power to arrange his voyage according to the ordinary rules of human prudence. I accompanied him to his ship

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27 Quoted in Keys, p. 34. The original comment is in Tertullian, Liber Apologeticus, cap. L: ‘Plures efficimur, quotes metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum’.
28 There is an extensive literature on ‘why Pacific Islanders became Christian’. The best introduction is John Garrett, To Live Among the Stars: Christian origins in Oceania, Suva, 1982.
30 Church authorities versed in Scholastic philosophy were not prone to the fallacy of arguing post hoc, ergo propter hoc (‘after this, therefore because of this’).
I was following him with Archbishop [Polding’s] Vicar General [Abbott Gregory OSB] to whom I said ‘There is a good missionary that we shall never see again. He will be dead with his companions before six months’. ‘That would be a great happiness’, he replied. ‘It is the blood of martyrs which makes religion prosper. Look at Futuna, a missionary was sacrificed there and today the entire island is Catholic.”

As events proved, Faramond’s misgivings were justified, and Gregory’s expectation went unfulfilled. There was to be more blood-letting, but not another Futuna. As David Loades observes, ‘the conversion of a victim into a martyr is the business of the apologist, and the success of the apologist depends ultimately upon the success of the cause’.

Meanwhile, Chanel’s death had also triggered an eager, expectant, response in France. He did not lack apologists and early steps towards his canonisation were soon being taken. In August 1842 formal enquiries regarding his character were initiated in the diocese of Belley. The following month Colin, who had already invoked the killing in arguing (successfully) for the creation of a new vicariate apostolic centred on Wallis and Futuna, with Bataillon as bishop, commissioned a biography of Chanel from his former close associate and friend, Antoine Bourdin. To better provide for the temporal needs of his missionaries, he also helped launch a religious and commercial shipping company, the Société française de l’Océanie, and established a mission supply centre in Sydney, but he remained a visionary pragmatist.

In 1845 Colin obtained a formal report on the events in Futuna from his subjects there and, in 1847, Bataillon obliged with another. Next, Colin ordered that Chanel’s bones be repatriated. They left Auckland in April 1849, were held in Sydney for nine months, and were received in honour at the General House of the Society in Lyon in June 1850.

At about the same time, Bourdin presented the manuscript of his book, which was to be included in Chanel’s dossier for consideration in Rome. But it was unsatisfactory. Colin, who was also a pragmatic visionary, found the draft to be

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inaccurate, overly reverential and unduly concerned with personalities, so he rejected it, and turned his attention to composing the definitive constitutions for his Society.\textsuperscript{36}

With that, the Marist call for Chanel’s elevation faded, but only temporarily, though not for the last time. It was resumed under a new superior-general, Julien Favre, who had succeeded Colin in 1854 and, following discussions with the Pope himself, by Bataillon during a visit to Rome in 1857.\textsuperscript{37} Accordingly, in September 1857, the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of Rites accepted the Marist’s application. It thereby awarded Chanel the title of Venerable and undertook to deal with his cause for canonisation according to the requirements of Canon Law (which, in the codified version in force from 1917 to 1983, contained 142 articles pertaining to that matter).\textsuperscript{38}

To this same end, Bourdin was persuaded to revise his book. It was eventually published in 1867, running to 624 pages. But it was still flawed, as Delorme, the closest witness to what is the probably the most thoroughly investigated missionary death in Oceania, pointed out in a long and detailed letter to Colin.\textsuperscript{39} So, in 1875, Rome requested a new biography. This was entrusted to Claude Nicolet, a Marist priest, who also took on the office of postulator in attempting to persuade professionally sceptical tribunals of the merits of Chanel’s case. It was slow work, but efficacious. Chanel’s writings were favourably reviewed in 1877; Nicolet’s book appeared in 1885; and a decree of authentic martyrdom, certifying that Chanel had been killed \textit{in odium fidei} (‘in hatred of the Faith’), was issued in 1888. Then, on 17 November 1889 Pope Leo XIII affirmed that Chanel had lived an unimpeachable life and declared him Blessed, along with another French missionary, Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, a Vincentian, who had been killed in China in 1840.\textsuperscript{40}

While the Beatification was an honour for Chanel it was also a singular accolade, a sign of coming of age, a warrant of fitness for the Society to which he had belonged. The Marists celebrated accordingly, encouraged by the spirit of display fostered by the Paris exhibition of 1889 and, more particularly, by the spirit of the \textit{Ralliement}. This was a timely interlude of reduced tension in the endemic feud between church and state and was engendered by Pope Leo XIII’s acceptance of the view that it would be better for French Catholics at last, 100

\textsuperscript{36} Rozier (1991), pp. 11–12.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. Mangeret, pp. 211–219. Bataillon brought a Wallisian, a Tongan and a Rotuman to Europe with him.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Missions des Îles}, no. 55 (1954), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{40} For detailed chronologies of Chanel’s life and of the progress of his Cause see Rozier (1960), pp. 21–30; Stuart and Ward, pp. 31–50; \textit{Acta Societatis Mariae}, pp. 93–95.
years after the outbreak of the revolution, to recognise the Republic rather than endure permanent alienation from government by continuing to support the Royalists.  

During 1890, beginning at Belley and in the presence of Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, Chanel was honoured throughout France by a series of at least 20 tridua. These were three-day-long liturgical festivals of Masses, blessings, prayers, processions and sermons by distinguished preachers, and several were graced by the presence of the martyr’s bones in their handsome reliquary. Other tridua were held in San Francisco and at Madawaska in Maine, where there were large French communities; in Sydney, in the presence of Cardinal Moran; and also in Belgium, England and Spain. All these events were well-publicised and many generated sizable volumes of proceedings. That for Lyon, where Monseigneur d’Hulst, rector of the Institut Catholique in Paris, preached, had 80 pages, and that for Saint-Brieuc, where Bishop Grimes of Christchurch was present, ran to 107 pages. As well as providing both devotional occasions and nationally significant displays of religious triumphalism, the triduum series of 1890 also advertised on an unprecedented scale the existence and works of the hitherto obscure Marist congregation; indeed, they were its epiphany. As one report had it:

Four years ago the Marists endured the sad privation of not being able to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the approbation of the Society. Alas, in our own France we were proscribed, in our chapels prayer had to be in silence so as not to be deemed seditious. How could we sing the canticle of gratitude, which requires elan as much as gratitude? Our divine mother sympathised with us, and let us wait but a little time for an even more memorable anniversary. She inspired the controllers of the churches to open their, for the moment respected, temples to us, and the vast surroundings of them were well suited to resounding with the zeal of the faithful. Thus we have had the jubilee year of our Martyr.

Nor was that all. Between 1889 and 1892 the Marists kept the printing presses busy airing Chanel’s name. Among various items published were a second edition of Nicolet’s biography (with translations into Italian, Spanish and German), a 200-page abridgement (which would run to at least eight printings and several translations), a pamphlet ‘Life’ (which saw six editions by 1926), an oratorio and a verse drama in three acts. Furthermore, an elaborate reliquary

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42 Freeman’s Journal, 3 May 1890.
43 The leading centre of higher education for the French clergy.
44 Laracy, Chanel—bibliography.
was commissioned from a prominent Lyon silversmith to hold Chanel’s remains. And, on Futuna itself, a hexagonal-shaped stone chapel was built on the very site of the martyrdom to house some relics deposited there amidst great ceremony by Bishop Armand Lamaze, Bataillon’s successor, on his return from the celebrations in Europe. The first shrine on that spot, a leaf and bamboo structure, had been erected in 1844.46

Elsewhere, too—notably at Cuet, Chanel’s birthplace—efforts were made to enshrine his memory permanently and prominently. There the enthusiasm of 1890 begot a project (abandoned in 1914) for building a basilica in his name; a weekly pilgrimage (which lasted until 1939), and was promoted by a monthly bulletin from 1920 to 1927; and a series of panegyrics extolling some feature of his life, work or character. These were preached, and later usually published, annually until 1940. Disruptive as it was, though, the impact of two wars on such observances did not expunge Cuet’s claim to share in the glory of its famous son. In 1991, marking the sesquicentenary of his death, local church and civic authorities combined to set up a museum there dedicated to him, the Musée Océanien et de Saint Pierre Chanel.47

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Rigorous as the path to beatification was, the way from there to canonisation was even more problematic. It required the occurrence of two events which, after close scientific investigation, had defied all explanation as natural phenomena and which might, therefore, according to the assumptions of Faith, reasonably be attributed to supernatural intervention. That is, two ‘miracles’ which could be used as evidence that the candidate for sainthood was ensconced in Heaven (however that supernatural realm might be conceived) and had the power to procure divine favours. The favours sought were to be unambiguous cures for some serious ailment, and the candidate needed also to have been invoked directly. The earliest claim for a miracle wrought through Chanel’s intercession concerned a missionary nun who is said to have been cured of a strangulated hernia after praying at the scene of his death in 1858.48 Others followed. In 1891 Nicolet issued a book recounting a dozen more cures and ‘signal graces’ from the same source. One involved a young soldier named Francois Vion-Dury who was blinded by fire in November 1889. Both his retinas were detached, so that no light rays were relayed to the optic nerves. Eye specialists declared his condition incurable. Yet, in August 1890, his sight was suddenly restored. Doctors agreed that there was no natural explanation for the cure. A similar case was that of Marie-Rosalie Monnier, a 33-year-old woman with an inoperable

46 Angleviel, p. 100; Clisby, p. 138; Ronzon, p. 122.
gastric ulcer, and who had suffered from tuberculosis for 15 years. She was on the point of death when, on 8 September 1904, after prayerfully invoking Chanel’s assistance during a visit to the healing shrine at Lourdes, she was suddenly cured. The disease never returned, and she died at the age of 73.\textsuperscript{49}

These two events were duly investigated in both diocesan and Vatican tribunals. In the latter they were several times scrutinised by a theologian acting as Defender of the Faith (the famous ‘Devil’s Advocate’) and by a panel of medical specialists. These processes were inherently thorough rather than rapid. They were conducted within a system of thought that was doctrinally bound to allow the possibility of metaphysical agency in mundane affairs, but which, despite that, was not predisposed to recognising alleged instances of it. Explanations that needed to be located within a realm of subsistent mystery might be conceded, but not at all readily, as was shown in the case of Monnier’s cure. That was submitted to the Vatican in 1911, to replace a cure that had been presented ahead of it, but which was rejected in 1906, only to prove diagnostically problematic itself. With that setback Chanel’s cause was side-lined for four decades. Procrastination, though, also derived from the fact that during the term of the fifth superior-general, Ernest Rieu (1922–1947), the Marists became more interested in procuring the beatification of their founder, Colin, who was declared Venerable in 1908, than in advancing the cause of Chanel. That order of priority, however, was reversed by his successor, Alcyme Cyr, an American, and in January 1954, after renewed Marist pressure and reconsideration of the Monnier file, the Roman authorities formally recognised each of the nominated cures as miracles. Consequently, (but not inadvisedly, since 1954 was being celebrated as a ’Marian Year’)\textsuperscript{50} on 12 June 1954, in Rome, amidst spectacular ceremony, Chanel, along with four others, was canonised as a saint by infallible decree of Pope Pius XII, and was named as spiritual patron of Oceania.\textsuperscript{51} In 1969 he was additionally honoured, and exposed to a vastly wider audience, when his feast day was added to the general liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{52}

A feature of the proceedings in Rome in 1954, which attracted an international Marist-organised group of about 2,000 pilgrims, was a procession through St Peter’s square with a banner showing the martyr being received into glory. Such visual representations of the Greek practice of apotheosis, of transforming

\textsuperscript{49} [Claude Nicolet], Quelques guerisons et graces signalees obtenues par l’intercession du Bx P.-L.-M. Chanel, pretre de la Societe de Marie et premier martyr d l’Oceanie, Lyon, 1891; John Thornhill, ‘The Seal of God’, Harvest, June 1954, pp. 11–13; Missions des Iles, no. 55 (pp. 20–21).

\textsuperscript{50} A ’Marian Year’ is one dedicated to honouring in a particular way Mary the mother of Jesus, a matter of special importance to the Society of Mary.

\textsuperscript{51} Acta Societatis Mariae, no. 14 (1954), pp. 93–95; Pius XII, Litterae Decretales quibus Beato Petro Aloisio Chanel Martyri Sanctorum Honores Decernuntur, Vatican, 1955. The others canonised with Chanel were Gaspard del Bufalo, Joseph Pignatelli, Dominic Savio and Maria Crocifissa di Rosa.

\textsuperscript{52} Stuart and Ward, p. 50.
heroes into gods, had been revived in the Baroque art of the seventeenth century. For the neo-classical heirs of the Enlightenment, it lasted until the late eighteenth century, long enough for Cook to be depicted ascending into the clouds clutching his sextant and escorted by the buxom spirits of Britannia and of Fame. But, in Catholic iconography, it found a more permanent home. So, in his turn, Chanel was shown with two angels, rather more demure than Cook’s physically exuberant escorts, while beneath the clouds a high, verdant island edged with a sweeping coast and bounded by blue sea represented his patronal fiefdom. To complete the formal rites, a solemn triduum, at which Archbishop Liston of Auckland preached, was held in the church of Saint Louis des Francais.

The mood of pious enthusiasm was sustained. There were more dedications, and publications proliferated: in 1954 Marists published seven ‘lives’ of Chanel, while in New Zealand in 1952, anticipating the need to celebrate, the noted composer Ernest Jenner had produced an English adaptation of J.M. Garin’s 1889 oratorio. In 1960 a critical edition of Chanel’s writings was published and, since 1954, another ten ‘lives’ have appeared, including one in Portuguese, published in Brazil in 1980. In 1991 the sesquicentenary of his death inspired not only more publishing, and a wave of liturgical celebrations, but begot the museum at Cuet. Ironically, especially given a family connection to the saint, the odour of sanctity was rather less appealing to the French perfume house of Chanel. Also in 1991, fearing confusion with its own products Chanel threatened legal action against the Marists in New Zealand unless their Mission Estate winery in Hawkes Bay dropped the name Chanel from the label of its best chardonnay. Although the Chanel block grapes had been planted in 1911, and the vineyard established in 1851, the Marists capitulated. The intolerance of the parfumerie reminded one local cartoonist of the cowardly French military attack on the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland in 1985, but the law governing use of trade names prevailed. Sadly, the scarcely evocative name ‘Jewelstone’ was subsequently adopted, although the quality of the wine was unchanged.

Meanwhile, the Futunans, too, had challenged the Marists, but for possession of Chanel’s tangible remains. Mixing piety with political assertiveness, they

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wanted the bones of ‘Petelo Sanele’ their sainted martyr returned to Futuna. They argued that Chanel had, after all, given his life for them and, in the post-colonial ethos fostered by the Second Vatican Council, their claim was heard sympathetically. Already, in 1966, Pope Paul VI had converted the Pacific’s mission vicariates, including that of Wallis and Futuna, into independent dioceses.

In 1977, therefore, at the request of the new indigenous bishop of the diocese, Mgr Lolesio Fuahea, the relics from Lyon were despatched to Oceania, in the care of Fr Claude Rozier, editor of the scholarly edition of Chanel’s writings. Following a circuitous route through the region, and venerated at every stop, including New Zealand (where Whina Cooper, the cynosure of Maori leadership at the time, kept vigil at Te Unga Waka Marae in Auckland), the relics were eventually deposited in the sanctuary of Our Lady Queen of the Martyrs at Poi on 28 April. The last leg of the journey, from Wallis, was made aboard a French naval vessel, while a set of postage stamps had been issued by Wallis and Futuna to mark the occasion. The Futunans, though—in customary Polynesian style—were not to be satisfied until they also possessed Chanel’s skull, which had been taken to Rome in 1954. Accordingly, in 1987, on the 150th anniversary of the Marist’s arrival in the Pacific, and a year after the opening of a handsome basilica dedicated to Chanel at Poi, that wish, too, was gratified. Poi has since become, though on a modest scale, a place of pilgrimage. That development, incidentally, had been foreshadowed as early as 1903 by Moran. He had recently been engaged in bitter sectarian arguments about the progress of religion in the Pacific islands, and planned to lead a tour party from Sydney to visit—and publicise—the Marist missions there, including Futuna, until a shipping strike scuttled the scheme.

Despite the time, effort and money involved, the canonisation of Chanel did not bring about a decline in interest in saint-making among the Marists or within the Church of Oceania. Having crossed that reef, in 1955 the Marists returned to Colin’s cause. To that end Jean Coste, a French scripture scholar, and Gaston Lessard, a Canadian, were appointed from their ranks to produce a definitive record of his life and thought and of the founding of the Society of Mary. Numerous publications followed, chiefly the magisterial four-volume work *Origines Maristes*. But, during the 1980s, interest began to flag, especially in the ‘non-Latin’ provinces of the Society. While John Paul II, who became Pope

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in 1978, was an unusually zealous canoniser, white male founders of religious orders were already well represented among the saints, and the costs of advancing a cause were high, yet success uncertain.\textsuperscript{59} Many Marists, accordingly, doubted the need to proceed further. Besides, they already had Chanel as a sanctified emblem. In 1993, therefore, the six-yearly General Chapter of the Society voted that while ‘the cause of canonisation of Fr Colin remains open it should not be actively promoted at this time’.\textsuperscript{60}

Notwithstanding the canonisation in April 1999 of Marcellin Champagnat, Colin’s confrère and founder of the Marist teaching brothers, who are well known in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands, successful candidates for sainthood are for the time being more likely to be found among those who spent themselves witnessing to the Church outside its traditional European heartlands.\textsuperscript{61} For Oceania that list is already substantial. Blessed Mary MacKillop, co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Australia; Blessed Giovanni Mazzucconi, an Italian missionary martyred in New Guinea in 1855; and Blessed Peter ToRot, a Papua New Guinean, martyred by Japanese forces there in 1943, are obvious candidates.\textsuperscript{62} Others, from New Zealand, who have been mentioned as possibilities include Suzanne Aubert, who founded the Daughters of Compassion; Emmet McHardy, a Marist missionary on Bougainville; and Francis Vernon Douglas, a Columban missionary killed by the Japanese in the Philippines in 1943.\textsuperscript{63} Then, too, and above all, there is Damien de Veuster. The leper priest of Molokai in Hawai‘i, and posthumous protégé of Robert Louis Stevenson, he has long had an international reputation and was canonised in 2009.\textsuperscript{64} It cannot be known if any others of these will attain canonisation; and the list could well grow longer before Colin is again seriously considered. His


name, though, should continue to be honoured as that of the spiritual mentor of Chanel and of the more than 1,700 Marists who, since 1836, have been assigned to the Pacific missions.\footnote{This is an approximate figure. It is based on a register held in the Archivio Padri Maristi, Rome, covering the period 1836–1959, which lists 740 Society of Mary missionaries and 505 Marist missionary sisters. The figures for subsequent decades, especially for the 1960s and 1970s, are considerable but can only be estimated. To reach the final estimate, about 200 Marist Brothers of the Schools are also included. For an account of the ‘Marist family’ see Craig Larkin, \textit{A Certain Way: an exploration of Marist spirituality} (Rome, 1995).}


Fittingly, given his prominent part in the story, his grave, surmounted by a large white cross, is at Poi, in front of the basilica where Chanel’s bones, like an Oceanic equivalent of the remains of, say, St Ambrose of Milan, hold the place of honour. More humbly, the relics offer an encouraging precedent to the Maori Catholics of northern New Zealand who, reclaiming a valued part—albeit of colonial provenance—of their own heritage, called for Bishop Pompallier’s remains to be returned from France to the Hokianga, where he settled on 10 January 1838, after dropping Chanel at Futuna.\footnote{NZ Catholic, 31 Jan., 14 Mar. 1999.}

Appendix

Chanel bibliography\footnote{Compiled by Hugh Laracy, (13 April 1999, draft), University of Auckland, New Zealand.}

1867


1884

1885


1886


1889


Nicolet, [Claude], *Vie Abregee du Bienheureux Pierre-Louis-Marie Chanel: pretre de la Societe de Marie et premier martyr de l’Oceanie*, Lyon, Vitte and Perrussel, 194pp. This book went to at least eight, mostly undated, ‘editions’ (so styled on the title pages); they are, in fact, exact reprints of the original.


——, *Compendio della Vita del B. Pietro Luigi Maria Chanel: sacerdote della Societa di Maria, primo martire dell’ Oceania*, Roma, Tipografia Poliglotta, 228pp. Also issued with a different cover and title and bearing a Marist imprint: *Il protomartire dell’ Oceania, Beato pietro Luigi Chanel (1803–1841)*, Roma, Presso ‘L’Araldo di Maria’. Translation of *Vie Abregee*.


1890

[Anon], i. *Vie Admirable du Bienheureux Pierre-Louis-Marie Chanel, pretre mariste et premier martyr d’Oceanie*, Abbeville (Somme), Editions Charles Paillart, 32pp. First published early in 1890, this work appeared in five
further editions. It announced that ‘Le diocese de Belley et tous les sanctuaires confies aux religieux de la Societe de Marie se disposent a celebrer tour a tour, dans le cours de la presente annee 1890, des triduums (sic) solonnels’.  

——, ii. *Short Life of the Blessed Peter Aloysius Mary Chanel, Marist priest and first martyr of Oceania*, Abbeville, Paillart, early 1890. Translation of i, above; identical format.  


——, iv. *Short Life of the Blessed Peter Aloysius Mary Chanel, Marist priest and first martyr of Oceania*, Sydney, [Society of Mary], 1923, 40pp. Same text as ii, above, but of larger format and with a commentary on J.M. Garin, ‘Oratorio’ (1889).  


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32pp. Reprinted from *Les Missions Catholiques*, 22 eme annee, no. 1093 (16 Mai 1890), pp. 229-252, and from *Le Triduum de Lyon* (1890). Perboyre, of the Congregation de la Mission, was killed in China, 11 September 1840.

1890–1891 Triduum publications (principle items)


*A solemn Triduum in Honour of the Blessed Peter-Louis-Marie Chanel, SM, proto-martyr of Oceania, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, October 10, 11, 12, 1890, at the Church of Notre Dame des Victoires, San Francisco*, San Francisco, McCormack Bros, 1890, 20pp. Despite its title, this is a biography of Chanel. A program leaflet was issued separately.


1890–1940

Panegyriques. Published copies of 35 of the sermons preached in this annual series have been located. For details, refer Rozier (1960), pp. 523–524.

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1892


1894


Fabre, Monseigneur, Un Miracle Recent du Bienheureux Chanel devant le tribunalm du bon sens et de la raison, Nice, C, Orengo, 61pp.

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1897


1898


1899


[1900?]


1901


1902


1903

Nicolet, [Claude], *Vie du Bienheureux Pierre-Louis-Marie Chanel, pretre Mariste et premier martyr de l’Océanie*, Lyon/Paris, Vitte, 385pp. 1907


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*Bulletin du Pelerinage du Bienheureux Chanel: organe du Pelerinage de Cuet*, Janvier 1920 (1er annee, no. 1) – Janvier 1927 (8me annee, no. 84). 1920


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Maria, Giugno (numero speciale), 16pp. ‘S. Pierluigi Chanel: protomartire dell’oceania’.


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1975


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Corbiere, A. de la, St Pierre Chanel: 150e anniversaire du martyr, Bourg, Diocese de Belley-Ars, 21pp.

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1. Pierre Chanel of Futuna (1803–1841): The making of a saint

1996


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