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Cheerful Pragmatists

*Anglican Missionaries among the Maisin of Collingwood Bay, Northeastern Papua, 1898-1920.**

JOHN BARKER

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO DESCRIBE THE VARIETY OF CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS and evangelizing tactics available to individual missionaries within a single mission. Between 1898 and 1920 five Anglican missionaries in succession laboured hard to bring Christianity to Maisin villages along the shores of Collingwood Bay in northeastern Papua. They were directed by the first two bishops of the mission, each of whom articulated ideals of evangelism which were, for the time, remarkably tolerant of the indigenous culture. Yet the individual missionary's style and ability proved very important in a mission possessing no general strategy of evangelization.

Anglicans in Australia had expressed casual interest in starting a mission in New Guinea, but it was not until Governor William MacGregor invited them to begin work that they considered the idea seriously.¹ In 1890 the Rev. Albert Maclaren arrived in Port Moresby to negotiate a comity agreement, under MacGregor's auspices, with representatives of other missions.² Maclaren pledged the Anglicans to evangelize 480 kilometres of north coast from Cape Ducie to the border of German New Guinea. The following year he led a small party to the high plateau of Dogura, overlooking Bartle Bay.

The mission suffered many setbacks. Maclaren died of fever within a few months, leaving the mission disorganized, dispirited and starved of funds. MacGregor watched the lack of progress with increasing impatience: he supported the missions in principle, and he depended upon them to maintain order and to initiate education and 'civilization'. His thinly veiled threat to invite Roman Catholics into the area provoked a flurry of activity among the Australian sponsors of the venture. In January 1898 they reorganized the mission as a diocese, and elected Montagu John Stone-Wigg its first bishop.

* My thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Killam Foundation for their support of this research, to the Anglican Church and the National Archives of Papua New Guinea for their kind co-operation, and to the Maisin people of Uiaku and Sinapa.

¹ The only published study of the mission by a professional historian is David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea* (St Lucia 1977). Some students have analysed the Anglican Mission within the wider spectrum of missionary activities in Papua: John Barker, 'Protestants and Papuans: a sociological study of the London Missionary Society, Methodist and Anglican missions in Papua, 1871 to 1930', MA thesis, University of Wellington (Wellington 1979); Diane Langmore, 'European missionaries in Papua, 1874-1914: a group portrait', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1981). The present article is part of a larger project to study Maisin religion. See John Barker, 'Maisin Christianity: an ethnography of the contemporary religion of a seaboard Melanesian people', PhD thesis, University of British Columbia (Vancouver 1985).

² See Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 18.

Soon after Stone-Wigg's consecration, he ordered the establishment of new stations at Collingwood Bay and on the Mamba River, at the outer reaches of the Anglican domain. During his reign from 1898 to 1908 he became a familiar figure along the coast, supervising and encouraging the isolated missionaries. He also stamped his strong Anglo-Catholicism on the mission. Flowing robes, candles, incense, and frequent communions became characteristic elements of services in Papuan villages.

Diane Langmore shows that the Anglicans were the most heterogeneous mission in Papua before the Great War. Solomon Island and New Hebridean teachers, recruited from Queensland cane fields, made up the lower ranks of the hierarchy until they were replaced by Papuans.³ Next came Australian laymen, mostly from working class backgrounds, and Australian professional women who served mainly as nurses and teachers. Twenty priests served the mission until 1914, and they included some of modest backgrounds, but the élite was made up of eight university-trained clergymen (including the two bishops, who were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge).⁴ Most of the mission leaders were united by Anglo-Catholicism and committed to inventing in Papua an archaic ceremonial and hierarchical Christianity true to the forms and values of the medieval church.⁵ They were at once hostile to secular trends in European society and sympathetic towards what they perceived as customs strengthening and unifying Papuan village life. A popular book by Henry Newton (later the third bishop) insisted that the church in Papua

is not to be a body distinct from the native life, but rather one that permeates the whole by its influence . . . The Mission has not come . . . to change native life into a parody of European or Australian civilization.⁶

Their stance towards Papuan culture was notably tolerant for the times. But (as Terence Ranger observes of liberal missionaries in Africa) their stance was also profoundly ambiguous because it was based upon a fundamental misunderstanding.⁷ The Anglicans assumed that the Christian traditions they sought to introduce derived from a style of village life which had disappeared in the West but persisted among 'conservative' Papuans.⁸

³ On the Melanesian teachers see *ibid.*, ch. 3.

⁴ For a study of the roles of women in the various Papuan missions see Diane Langmore, 'A neglected force: white women missionaries in Papua 1874-1914', *Journal of Pacific History*, 17 (1982) 138-57. See also Langmore, 'European missionaries', 11, 37-8.

⁵ For a discussion of the concept of 'invented tradition' and the importance of such constructions in British, European and colonial history, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983).

⁶ Henry Newton, *In Far New Guinea* (London 1914), 251.

⁷ Terence Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 247ff.

⁸ For a discussion of Anglican publications see Barker, 'Protestants and Papuans', ch. 6; Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, ch. 4.

In one sense, the assumption that Anglo-Catholicism and Papuan society had a natural affinity simplified the task of creating a general strategy of evangelization, for it implied that the mission leaders could safely ignore Papuan customs. The policies developed by Stone-Wigg and his successor Gerald Sharp said little about Papuan customs and dwelt instead upon Anglo-Catholic traditions. Where these traditions were well-developed (in liturgy, religious instruction, the sacraments, and marriage practices) the policies were correspondingly definitive.⁹ When indigenous customs were considered at all, it was usually in the context of their compatibility with Christianity. Practices which clearly contradicted mission teachings and rules (cannibalism, infanticide and polygamy, to name a few) were banned outright. A few customs posed more of a problem. Beginning in 1905, the bishops periodically called together committees which would (in the revealing phrases of a member of a 1929 gathering) distinguish between 'playful beliefs' and those concerned with the 'real powers of evil'.¹⁰ Their studies produced few clear distinctions. Members of the mission, for example, debated death feasts for more than 25 years before the bishop elected to ban them for Christians.¹¹

The official attitude towards Papuan culture complicated missionary efforts at the local level, where the manifest strains and contradictions between mission Christianity and indigenous practices and beliefs could not be ignored. Where the bishops had devised explicit policies, there were corresponding local routines: preparing candidates for baptism, providing basic schooling and church services, regulating the marriages of Christians, and so forth. Individual missionaries, however, received little guidance on how to establish these routines or on how to extend Christian teachings and institutions in village societies. Newton judged that 'It is doubtful whether the Anglican Mission to New Guinea had any definite theory as to how mission work should be carried on, any thought-out principles'.¹² The first missionaries muddled along, struggling to remain true to the tenets of their faith while adapting themselves to situations as they arose.¹³ In Langmore's apt phrase, the Anglicans were 'cheerfully pragmatic' in attempting to make Papuans into Christians.¹⁴

The missionaries' pragmatism was forced by necessity as well as by inclination. Individuals received little training for their work and infrequent supervision and guidance once they reached their isolated posts. They were forced to

⁹ Gerald Sharp, *Diocese of New Guinea: Its Rules and Methods* (Dogura 1917).

¹⁰ S. R. M. Gill, 'Committee appointed to enquire into the interrelationship between native ideas and Christianity', 12 Feb. 1929, Box 25, Port Moresby, University of Papua New Guinea, Anglican Archives (hereinafter AA).

¹¹ Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 134.

¹² Newton, *In Far New Guinea*, 135.

¹³ Richard Davey, 'The Church of England in New Guinea until 1914', *Journal of the Papua New Guinea Society*, 4 (1970), 89-90.

¹⁴ Langmore, 'European missionaries', 292.

survive on extraordinarily small amounts of money and material support.¹⁵ This circumstance gave each missionary the opportunity to stamp the local mission with his education, previous experience and personality. Turnovers in mission staff could bring abrupt shifts in local policies and practices.¹⁶ The same conditions, however, left the missionaries dependent on the goodwill of the villagers. Local Papuans played no small role in influencing the tactics missionaries adopted and thus added to the diversity of Anglican missionary practice.

IN the late 19th century the Maisin lived clustered in four neighbourhoods along Collingwood Bay, their overall political organization a shifting confederation of villages and clans under prominent war and alliance leaders.¹⁷ Recent migrants to the area, they were feared by their neighbours as deadly raiders. The Maisin had their first known contact with Europeans in 1890, when Governor MacGregor briefly visited each of the Collingwood Bay villages. Albert Maclaren, who accompanied the governor, noted in his journal that the Maisin knew nothing of iron or tobacco and were thrown into paroxysms of fear when one of the landing party lit a match. Their language was unlike any previously encountered on the coast, so Maclaren tried to communicate his purpose through hand signals:

All along I tried to explain, by putting head to head, and sitting down and pointing out to sea, that I was coming to live with them, and they all seemed pleased. In one village they kissed my hand, and at another I had my nose pulled twenty times.

The villagers also inquired of the missionary if he had descended from the heavens.¹⁸

Following Maclaren's death in December 1891, command of the tiny mission fell to the Australian Evangelical priest, Copland King. He was able to visit Collingwood Bay and the Maisin villages for the first time in 1893 as the guest of the governor. He returned for short visits by whaleboat in 1895 and 1896. On each of these trips he landed at the village of Uiaku to a 'continuous roar of greeting' from the Maisin, who had by this time discovered the value

¹⁵ Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 56-7. Anglican stipends remained fixed at £25 for many years, placing the missionaries on the same scale of earnings as a sergeant in the Armed Native Constabulary, much below other Europeans in the colony.

¹⁶ Langmore claims that the Anglicans had a high turnover rate, but a significant number of the terminations were caused by sickness. Several of the missionaries who endured their initial fevers served for extraordinarily long periods. See Langmore, 'European missions', 380; Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 61.

¹⁷ At the time of contact the Maisin, like several coastal Melanesian societies, had a hereditary class system in which they recognized two kinds of leaders—peace-making and war leaders. Government officers and missionaries speak of them as having considerable influence. Oral traditions and evidence from Melanesian societies with similar leadership patterns indicate, however, that the authority of the leaders was based as much on achievement as on the inherited position. There is some debate among anthropologists whether such political types are best regarded as proto-chiefs or as variants of the usual Melanesian 'big man'. For a discussion of Melanesian leadership, see Ann Chowning, 'Leadership in Melanesia', *Journal of Pacific History*, 14 (1979), 66-84.

¹⁸ F. M. Synge, *Albert Maclaren, Pioneer Missionary in New Guinea* (London 1908), 98-100.

of iron.¹⁹ King soon determined that Uiaku was the largest village on the coast, with a population of around 500 souls. In describing the Maisin for Australian readers, he commented: 'There is no doubt about them, they are savages, cannibals, and are always on the warpath'.²⁰ He thought that he detected some improvement in their behaviour from their brief encounters with the government and mission, but 'they still need a considerable amount of training in matters concerning meum & tuum, to say nothing of the necessity of curbing their fighting propensities'.²¹

Stone-Wigg made the extension of the mission into Collingwood Bay his first priority. On MacGregor's advice, the bishop decided that the head station should be erected on Sinapa Point, on the eastern edge of a deep harbour where the governor and Maclarens had first landed in the area eight years previously. A prefabricated house was shipped to the mission headquarters at Dogura. In mid-April, battling against heavy rains and uncharted reefs in a whaleboat, a party of five white laymen and two Dogura 'boys' struggled up the coast to Sinapa to begin clearing the site. When King declined to take the new post, the bishop turned to a recent recruit, the Rev. Wilfred H. Abbot.

Abbot was a young Oxford graduate who, with his high spirits, lively buffoonery and extravagant tastes, soon made himself a favourite among the missionaries.²² He took up his new post with gusto, declaring to mission supporters:

With God's grace we cannot fail to lead happy useful lives if we try to do our duty, the opportunities offered to us of helping men who at the present moment are cannibals, warlike and suspicious, and withal so very lovable and friendly, are so extraordinarily great.²³

Abbot left Dogura by the mission schooner in late May, bound for Sinapa with furniture for the mission house and some Melanesian teachers to supply helping hands. Arriving in an 'excited state of hopefulness, happiness, and assurance', he was surprised to find no welcoming party and no mission house. He came upon the preceding party engaged 'at a kind of choir practice' in a local house. The sing-song abruptly became a litany of miseries. Sinapa, it turned out, was a swamp. Having no mosquito nets, the men had not slept well since their arrival three weeks earlier. Two were down with fever, and one had started back to Dogura on the whaleboat. They had made no progress on the house. Every time a hole was dug, it filled with water. In addition, they had not been

¹⁹ A. K. Chignell, *Twenty-one Years in Papua: A History of the English Church Mission in New Guinea 1891-1912* (London 1913), 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

²¹ *Missionary Notes*, 24 (1896), 106.

²² Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 67.

²³ W.H. Abbot, 'On Collingwood Bay', *Missionary Notes*, 88. The following paragraphs are based entirely on this account.

able to get the local people to help. Abbot insisted that the work continue as 'Sir William MacGregor had chosen the site for us, and he must be right'. Abbot believed that the mosquitoes would decline once the scrub was cleared and the hot sun of the dry season, just beginning, evaporated the exposed waters of the swamp.

Abbot set out the next day to get the work rolling. When a local 'chief' came to 'pay his respects', Abbot called upon Samuel Tomlinson, who had picked up some of the language, to communicate with the chief. 'I explained to this gentleman', Abbot wrote, ' . . . that I should go away unless all his tribe worked for me, promised him a nice present if he made them do what they were told, and sent him off'. The Maisin returned in large numbers, and Abbot soon had them arranged into teams working under the careful supervision of the whites and the Melanesian teachers. The men worked hard at first, but began to take frequent rests as they tired. Dosing himself with quinine, Abbot moved from team to team, and, taking up vantage points on various logs shaded by his white umbrella, he kept the men at work by calling out continually: '*bagi! bagi!*' ('work! work!') and '*tauba!*' (*tauban*, 'good'). This combined with a good measure of rough scolding in English 'seemed to act as a kind of magic, and a crowd that could have rushed us in five minutes, obeyed meekly and worked like mules for nine hours'.

As night approached, Abbot told the crews to return the next afternoon for worship.²⁴ But no villagers appeared on Sunday until four in the afternoon, when three huge canoes hove by Sinapa Point and the men in them began net fishing. After watching them for a time, Abbot marched to the shore and 'commenced in English to scold in my most bullying tones, ordering them all on land'. '[It] was most exciting shepherding them up through the scrub', Abbot writes:

Tomlinson went first, chatting away, his arms working like a windmill inviting them onward. I was in the rear, talking in English and showing my fist when I saw anyone trying to break into the scrub. When we got up to the house we made them all sit down, and now came the difficult question. Should I run the risk of all my new friends disappearing and go and put on my surplice, or had I better preach to them as I was? I decided to run the risk, and disappeared into the house, expecting to find them gone on my return, and I am very glad I did. The effect when I came out in my gaudy Oxford hood was magical. They probably thought I was an extra special wizard, and a very subdued 'sh-sh-sh' (sort of hush) went round the crowd. Before I began I told Mr. Tomlinson to tell them that the first man I saw move, I should have out in the centre with me.

The gathered men were made to stand for a hymn and then kneel for prayers. Abbot gave an address that Tomlinson did his best to render in what must have been very crude Maisin. The crowd was then blessed, instructed to return to

²⁴ The Maisin may have already gained some familiarity with the forms of Christian worship from the earlier visits of missionaries. This is, however, the first recorded service.

labour the next day, and dismissed. The Maisin's extraordinary introduction to Anglo-Catholic worship concluded that evening to the drifting notes of a choral service held by the small missionary party at which Abbot preached on St Barnabas and Mr Dakers played violin.

On Tuesday morning Abbot set off for Dogura, 'delighted with everything'. His future plans seemed firmly in place. He had ordered a big canoe from 'the biggest chief of the district, the terror of the whole coast for 200 miles', and planned to stay with that chief once the canoe was ready.²⁵ Abbot had other plans for the leaders of the Maisin. While in Sinapa he had 'persuaded and bribed' the local 'chief' to allow his 15 year old son to come and visit the bishop. Although the boy was sick and frightened, Abbot treated him kindly, intending 'his visit to do the Mission a great deal of good'. Abbot was confident that he could get both chiefs to entrust their eldest sons to his care by playing them off against each other. 'If I can only get [the sons]', he reasoned, 'they will act as an excellent pair of tame ducks to attract the wilder birds'.

Despite Abbot's confidence about Sinapa, Stone-Wigg decided that the site was too unhealthy for a head station and directed Abbot to move further up the coast. The missionary settled at the Ubir village of Wanigela, about 12 kilometres north of Uiaku. According to Wetherell, Abbot here had some success in creating the type of régime augured by his actions at Sinapa. With the aid of a masterful New Hebridean teacher, James Nogar, Abbot vigorously handled the adults and children of Wanigela in order to force rapid changes. School and church attendance was made compulsory for both children and adults, women were whipped for adultery, village houses were rearranged from traditional patterns into rows, and a crude currency was introduced. Hopeful of bringing the force of the government behind his initiatives, Abbot arranged for the clearing of land and construction of a building at Tufi when it became known that the Administration intended to place a Resident Magistrate there.²⁶ These successes were short-lived, but not because of opposition to this programme. Abbot soon fell foul of the bishop after knocking down a mission teacher during an inspection tour of village schools and running up an unauthorized bill with the merchants at Samarai for a variety of goods including a suspiciously large quantity of liquor. Abbot resigned from the mission in December 1900.

Abbot appears not to have revisited the Maisin after this foray but he had made an impression at Sinapa. In October 1905, Abbot's successor was told by Maisin confidants that the mission party had come very close to being slaugh-

²⁵ The 'chief' mentioned here was very likely Wanigera of Uiaku who served as the main mediator between government and mission parties and the Maisin. He was renowned as a war leader. See C. A. W. Monckton, *Taming New Guinea* (New York 1922).

²⁶ Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 107, 109. On the circumstances of Abbot's resignation, see *ibid.* and also Abbot's letters, Box 20, AA.

tered at Sinapa. A planned ambush on the unsuspecting missionaries was averted at the last moment when a prominent Uiaku war leader, hitherto friendly to the government and mission, refused to give the signal for his men to attack.²⁷

ON 23 June 1901 Percy John Money, a young Australian layman, arrived at Wanigela as the new district missionary. His orders from the bishop included consolidating the work at Wanigela and opening a new station among the Maisin at Uiaku. Although sharing Abbot's supreme confidence in British church and civilization, Money was much more of a pragmatist willing to adjust to the people he lived among. He was also very talented, acting at times as evangelist, teacher, architect, carpenter, translator, journalist and photographer.²⁸

After their initial encounter with Abbot at Sinapa in 1898, the leaders of Uiaku flatly rejected the mission's periodic offer of teachers. Their autonomy was shattered in January 1901 when, learning of a planned ambush on a party he was leading in the area, the new Resident Magistrate led a punitive expedition against Uiaku during which his police shot dead three local men.²⁹ Six months later, Money arrived with a renewed offer to build a mission station. The Maisin leaders consented, with little apparent enthusiasm.

Money put most of his efforts into building the local church organization. He designed and supervised the construction of mission buildings on both the Wanigela and Uiaku station; he arranged for the care and supervised the work of the Melanesian and Papuan teachers who were responsible for most of the teaching and church services in the villages; he began translating church rites and hymns into Ubir and Maisin; he visited possible sites for new missions in his large district; and he kept a steady stream of reports and magazine articles flowing to the bishop. When the Rev. Arthur Kent Chignell arrived at Wanigela in July 1907 as the new district missionary, he found the mission system firmly in place and ready for expansion when resources permitted.³⁰

Money observes in a letter to Stone-Wigg dated 21 August 1905 that the bishop 'gave me no rules as to routine, no instructions as to what station was to be my model, no advice as to how to go about my work'.³¹ Money used the routine established at Dogura as his basic model. There is no evidence that Money had anything but a Western model in mind in creating the mission system, but he was sensitive to the need to win local co-operation. He first found Maisin men to be reluctant to work for the mission, but his response was notably different from that of Abbot; he joked with the men and pitched in. 'No doubt you think

²⁷ P. J. Money, *Missionary Notes*, 132 (1906), 2.

²⁸ I am grateful to Mr John Horne for information concerning Money's career in Papua.

²⁹ Barker, 'Maisin Christianity', 79-80; Monckton, *Taming*, 173.

³⁰ In a popular memoir of his life at Wanigera, *An Outpost in Papua* (London 1911), Chignell generously praises the work of his predecessor, while rather patronizingly referring to him only as 'my Better Half'.

³¹ Money to Stone-Wigg, 21 Aug. 1905, Box 21, AA.

this is a strange course to adopt', he wrote to mission supporters, 'but it is preferable to bullying or force'.³² Later, when mission boarders provided most of the routine labour for the station, Money shortened the work hours on Saturday mornings to give them more time for their own subsistence activities. Ironically, this adaptation was criticized by Stone-Wigg when he visited Uiaku in 1905 as a breach in Christian discipline; the bishop insisted that 'Dogura hours' be kept on the station.³³

After their initial reluctance, the Maisin showed a growing interest in the mission. Statistics from 1903 to 1909 reveal that over 100 students attended the Uiaku school 80 to 90 per cent of the time (out of a total village population of approximately 600). Church attendance was also stable, at about 80 to 90 individuals each Sunday.³⁴

Money's responsibilities for maintaining the local organization allowed him little time for direct evangelism.³⁵ As elsewhere in the mission, the tasks of teaching and conducting services were left primarily in the hands of the Solomon Island and New Hebridean teachers the mission had originally recruited in Queensland. The teachers experienced some difficulty in meeting the expectations of the missionaries, and one in Uiaku fell into 'grievous sin' while others suffered 'temptation', loneliness and sickness, but beyond this not much is recorded of their lives.³⁶ Money insisted on keeping them closely supervised, and for this reason alone we can assume that it was Money who acted as the primary interpreter of mission policy towards native customs during this early period.

Money painted a dismal picture of the Maisin in his published letters. He condemned the local practices of widow mutilation and seclusion, infanticide, magic and sorcery. His dismay at such 'superstitious customs', however, was tempered by a profound respect for the people themselves. After criticizing the faith of the Maisin in 'charms', for example, the missionary noted that when the people came to believe in Christianity to the degree they did in magic, they would be 'noble Christians, for they live what they believe'.³⁷ There is little doubt that Money formed genuine friendships with several of the villagers. In one of his letters, he describes a patrol up the coast to more remote Maisin villages. While at sea, the young men paddling the outrigger canoe taught Money one of their songs, which the whole party sang in high spirits. Soon after, the canoe arrived at the village of Airara, where, 'while waiting for tea to be prepared,' Money recalled, 'I had a quiet talk with a number of men about God and His

³² *Missionary Notes* 90 (1902), 41.

³³ Money to Stone-Wigg, 21 Aug. 1905, Box 21, AA.

³⁴ 'I am continually bobbing about like "dead marine" skimming the work here, giving it a poke there & never able to do anything as it should be done'—Money to Stone-Wigg, 21 Aug. 1905, Box 21, AA.

³⁵ Baptismal and service registers, Wanigela.

³⁶ Chignell provides some humorous, if unflattering, portraits of the teachers in his *An Outpost*. See also Langmore, 'European missionaries', 11, 37-8.

³⁷ 'Notes and News from the staff', 3 Sept. 1904, Box 5, AA.

desire that we should love and serve Him'.³⁸ The contrast with Abbot's style could hardly be more striking.

While there is no evidence that Money tried to force a stop to any customary practices of the Maisin, he reports that he and his teachers frequently spoke out against them. When he first became acquainted with the Maisin's belief in 'charms', Money says, he told 'the natives that it was an absurd superstition, and that they should not believe in it'. Willie Pettawa, the teacher at Uiaku, encouraged the villagers to bring their charms to Money's house. There they were piled into a heap, burnt, and the ashes spread across the swamp behind the village.³⁹ But such apparent breakthroughs were rare and not lasting. Frustration would at times drive Money to despair:

It was very discouraging working among these people, who 'flatter with their lips' say 'what you teach us is true and very good', but dissemble in their double hearts clinging to their old traditions, superstitious customs, and heathenish crimes.⁴⁰

As noted above, Money's disparagement of particular customs was matched by his praise of Maisin character. In this he reflected a common attitude in the mission. The writer of the Annual Report for 1902 says of the Maisin: 'the very tenacity of the people in holding to their own gives confidence that they possess the very elements of character needed for loyal Christians'.⁴¹ Money comes across, especially in the Uiaku log book and in his unpublished letters, as a pragmatist. In these writings he deals mainly with matters of mission routine and the discipline of pupils, especially the dozen or so boys who lived on the mission as boarders, separated in part from the influences of the village. Although directly involved in the mission's larger goal of inventing a tradition-bound Christianity for the Papuans, Money himself seems not to have tried to envisage what that future would look like.

On 22 April 1909 Money married Annie Ker, a lay missionary who had worked from the mission's headquarters at Dogura for a decade. The couple spent some time at Uiaku and may have intended to make it their base. But following the birth of a child the following January, they elected to move to the healthier climate of Australia. Responsibility for the entire Collingwood Bay district fell once more into the hands of a single white missionary, Arthur Kent Chignell. The priest dutifully trudged the nine miles between Wanigela and Uiaku once a week, but inevitably work at the Maisin end began to slide for lack of supervision and encouragement. Within a year of Money's departure, the mission boarders had been sent home, school work was flagging and the church at Uiaku was

³⁸ *Missionary Notes*, 148 (1907), 54-5.

³⁹ *Missionary Notes*, 101 (1903), 33-4. For an anthropological analysis of this and similar events in Maisin history see Barker, 'Maisin Christianity', 110-22; John Barker, 'Missionaries and sorcerers: changes in sorcery beliefs among the Maisin of Collingwood Bay, Oro Province', *Research in Melanesia*, 7 (1983), 13-24.

⁴⁰ *Missionary Notes*, 118 (1904), 101.

⁴¹ New Guinea Mission, *Annual Report 1901-02* (Sydney 1902), 33.

in danger of collapse from white ants.⁴²

Given the size of the Collingwood Bay district⁴³ and the poverty of mission resources at the time, the post of supervisory missionary would have tested the most effective of individuals. With so much authority in the hands of one man, his character inevitably infused the work of the local mission. Malinowski once described Chignell as 'a good natured missionary with absolutely no understanding of the natives'.⁴⁴ This seems fair. Chignell agreed with the general outlook of the mission towards Papuan culture — indeed, he did much to create it in his writings. But his interest in his charges was not active; he can best be described as an amused spectator. Chignell defended the rights of villagers to live their lives as their ancestors had done; yet it cannot be said, as one reads the charming vignettes of native antics that fill Chignell's writings, that he envisioned a distinct Papuan form of Christianity. 'It may well be centuries,' Chignell opined, 'before the older Churches . . . can even dare to withdraw their white men, and leave the native dioceses to be administered by native bishops and priests.'⁴⁵ A patient man, Chignell had no desire to push the native people towards this distant goal any faster than they were prepared themselves to go. Chignell completed several of the tasks begun by Money, including baptizing the first Maisin converts in 1911, but he made few initiatives of his own. In 1913 he married Nurse Rattigan, one of his assistants at Wanigela, and the following year departed for England. Unlike Money, whose name is still spoken around Maisin fires at night, Chignell has faded from the memory of all, even the one surviving member of the cohort which was baptized by him.

WITH the arrival of the Rev. James Edward John Fisher from England in September 1914, the Collingwood Bay mission awoke with a jolt. Fancying himself as the 'Warden of the Coast', Fisher lost little time in placing a burr under lax teachers and in enforcing discipline upon Christian villagers.⁴⁶ He spoke out strongly against traditional marriage practices, magic, puberty ceremonies, several mortuary rituals, and women's facial tattoos; going so far as to say, before a gathering of Wanigela women, 'that all New Guinea customs must finish'.⁴⁷ While not afraid to bully his charges when this helped the goal of moral reform, Fisher wished the Christians to police themselves voluntarily — to consent to the new order. To encourage this, Fisher appointed a church council at Wanigela and organized meetings at the various villages he visited on patrol to harangue the villagers and solidify their support for moral change. After one particularly

⁴² Wanigela Log Book, 8 Sept. 1911, Box 25, AA.

⁴³ The mission district at this time included the north coast from Collingwood Bay to Dyke Ackland Bay. The district had a population of about 5,000 people speaking eight distinct languages.

⁴⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London 1967), 10.

⁴⁵ Chignell, *An Outpost*, 81.

⁴⁶ J. E. J. Fisher, 'The warden of the coast', *A.B.M. Review*, 6 (1915), 67-9.

⁴⁷ Wanigela Log Book, 15 June 1916, Box 25, AA. 13.

inspiring meeting, the missionary wrote: 'It was decided that moral failures must not be allowed to continue; that the villages must be cleaner; that 9 p.m. means "bed"; [and] that greater gifts must be made to the church'.⁴⁸

To a man of Fisher's character, the apparently intractable Maisin presented an irresistible challenge. He had at first hoped to work at Uiaku, but when no replacement could be found for the large Wanigela station, he instead pressured the local teachers to prepare candidates for baptism. The push produced quick results. In 1916, 164 Maisin were baptized, most of them at a huge ceremony along the banks of the Yavaisi River at Uiaku.⁴⁹

By 1917 more than 190 Maisin had been baptized. It was clear to Fisher and the leaders of the mission that this triumph would prove hollow unless the new Christians received guidance from a competent white priest. Fisher now had his hands full with Wanigela. 'I like what you say about Uiaku and the possibility of my taking it on,' he wrote to Chignell. 'My dear chap, they need a *man* there! I could not do what is needed. I cannot even grip the people of Wanigela, though I do think the Maisin people will make even better Christians.'⁵⁰

Arthur Prout Jennings seems a surprising choice for the post of missionary to the unruly Maisin. A shy young man who was originally drawn towards the priesthood through a love of church music, Jennings volunteered for service in New Guinea a few years after his ordination. He was immediately assigned to Uiaku, 'the last place to which one so sensitive should have gone', as a biographer later recognized.⁵¹ There Jennings endured three years of alien mores, dirt, pigs and, worst of all, pounding drums before fleeing for a more thoroughly missionized post.

Despite the bad press they had received, the Maisin in 1917 appeared receptive to the presence of a white missionary. A large number had just joined the mission. Jennings's successful first year at Uiaku indicates that many of the villagers were willing to make a stronger commitment. They repaired and built station buildings, including a large mission house for Jennings and some 29 mission boarders. Many attended church and assisted Jennings on his patrols up the coast to more remote villages. Jennings himself made swift progress in adapting to his new home. He learned the language remarkably quickly, and celebrated his first anniversary by delivering both the Communion service and his sermon in Maisin.⁵²

The missionary developed especially warm relations with the mission boarders. These young men, whose ages ranged from puberty to their late teens, came

⁴⁸ Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 147.

⁴⁹ Baptismal registers, Wanigela; Gertrude Robson, 'Three great days at Wanigela', *A.B.M. Review*, 7 (1916), 107-8. Elderly Maisin today refer to the Yavaisi as the 'River Jordan' in memory of this event.

⁵⁰ *Occasional Paper*, 49 (1916), 3.

⁵¹ *Occasional Paper*, 133 (1956).

⁵² Uiaku Log Book, 5 June 1918, Box 25, AA. Jennings was probably the author of the earliest known translation of the Anglican Liturgy into Maisin: *Kaku* (Dogura 1920).

from all the Maisin villages as well as some non-Maisin groups further along the coast. They attended day school with the rest of the village children, but also received a more intensive indoctrination into the ways of Christian life through the direct teaching and example of the missionary. The boarders provided much of Jennings's emotional (and material) comfort while in Uiaku. He described this life to mission supporters in England:

I have 27 boy-boarders here now, and without them I should be very lonely indeed. Some of them spend the evening in a large room of my house looking at pictures and playing draughts, ludo, snakes and ladders, and that is almost the happiest time of the day for me. On moonlight nights they prefer to play on the beach, and I often go out and sit on a log and watch them.⁵³

The friendship was reciprocal in many cases. Of Jennings's boarders, Frederick Uiaku, Vincent Moi and Frederick Bogara all went on to careers as mission teachers.

Despite the promising beginning, Jennings's relations with the villagers soon began to sour. Like Fisher, Jennings saw much that was offensive in village life. Mourning practices in particular disturbed him, especially the 'awful howling' of the women at a time of death.⁵⁴

Jennings may have been inspired by Fisher in some of the measures he took to stop Christian villagers from participating in these and other customs. According to oral and documented accounts, he protested against the tattooing of schoolgirls and took a hand in arranging their marriages; on several occasions he ordered girls to have their heads shaven as punishment for sleeping with boys. He also disciplined schoolboys for a variety of offences; premarital sex and overly active participation in the death rites being the main ones. And he denied Communion to any Christians found dancing late on a Saturday night. In addition, like Fisher, Jennings appointed church councillors among the young married Christian men to win approval for these restrictions among both Christians and pagans.⁵⁵ These efforts met with some initial success. Jennings triumphantly reported in his 11th month that he had performed a Christian funeral; he had held a service in the church and then, following the cross, led the congregation to the new burial ground 'singing suitable hymns'.⁵⁶

Like Money before him, Jennings found that many of the Maisin ignored or resisted his reforms. But Jennings possessed neither the equanimity of Money nor the firmness of Fisher to deal with such challenges effectively and his inter-

⁵³ *Occasional Paper*, 59 (1919), 8.

⁵⁴ *Uiaku Log Book*, 2 Aug. 1917, 23 Mar. 1919, Box 25, AA.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Adelbert Servaru, Agnes Imasan, Frederick Bogara, Guy Kimanu, and Christopher Maiya of Uiaku village, 1982-83.

⁵⁶ *Uiaku Log Book*, 18 May 1918, Box 25, AA. For an analysis of the influence of the Anglican Church on Maisin death rituals see John Barker, 'Missionaries and mourning: continuity and change in the death ceremonies of a Melanesian people', in Darrell L. Whiteman (ed.), *Anthropologists, Missionaries and Cultural Change*, Studies in Third World Societies No. 25 (Williamsburg 1985), 263-94.

actions with the villagers became increasingly erratic. In the midst of a Communion service one Sunday, for example, wailing broke out in the village upon the death of a man. The mourners refused to be quiet despite several requests from Jennings. 'Later in the morning Mr J. went over and quietened them with a stick,' he tersely scribbled in his log. 'There was no more howling afterwards'.⁵⁷ For the most part, however, the priest avoided direct confrontation; he concentrated disciplinary actions on the mission boarders and school children.

Jennings's worsening relations with the Maisin were compounded by factors outside his control. In the first place, tension was building between the villagers and the Resident Magistrate at this time. During Jennings's tenure at Uiaku the Administration passed ordinances setting a head tax for villagers and enforcing the planting of village coconut plantations. Maisin men simply refused to work on the plantations unless under direct supervision. The Resident Magistrate, F. Macdonnell, retaliated by arresting men—45 were in Tufi gaol by December 1919. The village men then took to hiding in the bush whenever a government boat hove into view and a stand-off situation obtained.⁵⁸

In December 1919 Jennings was forced to send the mission boarders home when villagers refused to sell him food.⁵⁹ Two months later he complained to Macdonnell,

that he was unable to buy any food, with the exception of a few measly bananas, for his school boarders, and that everyday he gave his boys tobacco, and they wandered around the village, in the hope of buying food, otherwise they would probably have to go to bed supperless. Mr. Jennings stated that even the parents of the school boys will not supply their children with food.

As he himself had just purchased 'a half ton' of food from some Uiaku women, Macdonnell suspected that the villagers were trying to play off the mission against the government. When the village women brought more food to the government rest house, Macdonnell ordered them to the missionary, who purchased their food with relief. 'The whole thing', Macdonnell wrote in his report, 'is that the MAISIN neither want Government or Missionary near them, and do everything that is likely to discourage either of the two bodies'.⁶⁰

During this same period many of the Maisin were also engaging in what one mission source describes as a 'strange snake cult', probably a variant of the widespread 'Baigona cult' that was first noted by Europeans in the Tufi area around 1911.⁶¹ Such religious movements have been very common in this part of Papua and very probably have deep roots in the past. *Sevaseva*, as the present

⁵⁷ Uiaku Log Book, 23 Mar. 1919, Box 25, AA.

⁵⁸ Barker, 'Maisin Christianity', 84-87.

⁵⁹ Uiaku Log Book, 16 Dec. 1919, Box 25, AA.

⁶⁰ Resident Magistrate North-eastern Division, Patrol Reports, 20 Feb. 1919, G91-NAO, Waigani, National Archives.

⁶¹ Barker, 'Maisin Christianity', 111-4; on Baigona and other 'cults' in the Northern District, see F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic* (Oxford 1928).

version of the 'snake cult' is known in Collingwood Bay villages, focuses on healing through the use of spirit familiars. Neither *sevaseva* today, nor the 'snake cult' of the past, shows any explicitly anti-European sentiments. But, as John Waiko has argued, they may still be understood in political terms 'as an instance of traditional response . . . associated with facing a challenge or any enemy'.⁶² Whatever the significance of the 'snake cult' to the Maisin, it does not appear to have constituted much of a challenge to the mission—at least the missionaries did not think so—but it did, according to oral accounts, generate a great deal of drumming. Such drumming was required both for contacting the spirits and building personal strength to communicate with them.⁶³ It is clear from the tortured reminiscences left by Jennings that it was incessant drumming, and not any direct repudiation of the mission itself, that finally drove him out of Uiaku.

Like other missionaries, Jennings saw some harmful aspects of traditional dancing, especially in the case of children who must attend school or church the following day: ('Small school children are painted & filthy, & covered with ornaments, & no one has his mind on his work—in fact, they are half asleep').⁶⁴ But he agreed, with most of his colleagues, that dancing itself was harmless. Jennings's problem was that he could not abide the steady sound of drumming. '[It] has such an effect on me, personally,' he confessed to the bishop, 'that *I cannot bear it!* At Uiaku I was on the verge of not only a nervous, but a mental, break-down, chiefly . . . to the incessant "pom-pom" which to me is unbearable and drives me frantic'.⁶⁵ When drumming took place, Jennings would leave the village or sit between two lit primus stoves, bearing the great heat in the hope of drowning out the steady thumps.⁶⁶ At first, the dancers were willing to oblige the missionary by stopping their activities at 10 p.m. instead of going all night, the traditional practice. When the Maisin refused to make even this compromise in 1920, Jennings fled 'for sanctuary to Wanigela'.⁶⁷

FOLLOWING the departure of Jennings, mission writers once again labelled the Maisin an intractable people who would require a firm white hand if they were to be properly Christianized.⁶⁸ Yet within a year of the crisis, the villagers came to terms with the government's programme and promised Fisher, once again

⁶² John D. Waiko, 'European-Melanesian contact in Melanesian tradition and literature', in Ronald J. May (ed.), *Priorities in Melanesian Development* (Canberra and Port Moresby 1973), 420.

⁶³ See descriptions of seances in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*. Interviews with Adelbert Sevaru of Uiaku, and Marcella Adeva of Ganjiga, 1982-83.

⁶⁴ A. P. Jennings to H. Newton, Boianai, 28 Jan. 1922, Box 21, AA.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Occasional Paper*, 133 (1956).

⁶⁷ Jennings to Newton, 28 Jan. 1922, Box 21, AA. Jennings went through a similar experience at his next post at Boianai. The bishop then found him a position at the drumless head station of Dogura. Jennings remained in Papua until shortly before his death in 1956.

⁶⁸ Wanigela Log Book, 26 Apr. 1921, 19 May 1924, Box 25, AA.

the district missionary, to give up the 'snake cult' and obey mission rules. High attendance in the village schools and baptisms of children and adults continued steadily through the 1920s. It is interesting that Jennings himself appears not to have criticized the Maisin. As the missionary at Boianai and later as Principal of the teachers' college at Dogura, he continued to support the mission careers of some of his Maisin protégés. He also made several return visits to Uiaku to administer Communion to the Christians there, always to a warm welcome. While the evidence is admittedly thin, it would seem to suggest that the crisis of 1920 did not mark so much a rejection of the mission by the Maisin as a contest for control over local affairs.⁶⁹

In any event, the departure of Jennings resulted in a *de facto* devolution of power into local hands; Melanesian and Papuan teachers, who could be more manipulated by local people than the white missionaries, and the Maisin church councils together became responsible for the upkeep of the local mission system and the administration of mission rules. White missionaries continued to administer the Maisin stations from Wanigela. But with increasing responsibilities as the mission consolidated its position in Collingwood Bay, they were able to provide less and less direct supervision of church work in the local villages. Ironically, the Maisin experienced the most 'tolerance' from their missionaries during this period of neglect. It was during the 1920s and 1930s that the new generation of Maisin, growing up as Christians, made some of the most significant adjustments to the customs of their ancestors, modifying or abandoning them to bring them into line with their understanding of Christianity and other concerns.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ See Barker, 'Maisin Christianity', 88-124.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, chs 7, 9.