

New Wine and Old Bottles:

The Latter-day Saint Conversion Experience in French Polynesia,

1843-1852

by

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Between 1843 and 1852 the Church's first foreign-language and foreign-culture mission was established in the Society Islands, today's French Polynesia. The task of the missionaries was manifold. They must learn a foreign language (not related to English), become acquainted with Tahitian folkways, and decide which harmonized with Mormonism and which did not. From their knowledge of Mormonism and experience in the Church as of 1843, they must select and phrase the message in terms understandable to the native mind and condition.

When the first Mormon missionaries landed in the islands in 1844, the native peoples were only a generation (more or less) away from the days of their worship of their ancient gods--an institutional religion complete with its own cosmogony, priesthoods, ceremonials, taboos, sacred persons, and sacred places. While the first Christian missionaries--representatives of the London Missionary Society--had arrived in the Society Islands in 1797, effective Christianization had not begun until 1819 when the leading chief of Tahiti was baptized, after he abandoned his family idols. Think what was required of a native with his institutional religion--with its emphasis on customs and ceremonials hallowed by tradition--to move to a conversion religion with its emphasis upon moral reformation, with a concept of sin, repentance, and redemption through the sacrifice of the Son of God.

Our consideration of the process of conversion will center on four questions. First: Who were the missionaries and what was their equipment and proselyting practice? Second: What was the religious condition of

the Polynesians when the Mormon missionaries arrived on the scene, just twenty years after the beginnings of Christianization? Third: What did the Mormon missionaries teach the natives and require of them by way of religious and social practices? What did it mean to be a Latter-day Saint in French Polynesia during the 1840s and 1850s? Fourth: What successes accompanied the efforts of the missionaries?

The narrative history of that mission, the struggle between the Mormon missionaries and the English missionaries, and the political relations of the Mormons to the French Protectorate government have been treated elsewhere and will not be repeated here, as they may be known generally.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that the Mormon missionaries landed in the Society Islands at a most propitious time, for the French had just taken the islands and declared religious freedom, and the power and influence of the English missionaries were on the decline.

#### The Missionaries

Four missionaries set out from Nauvoo, Illinois, June 1, 1843, on this mission. Called by their Prophet Joseph Smith, set apart and instructed by Brigham Young, president of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, Noah Rogers, named president, Addison Pratt, Benjamin F. Grouard, and Knowlton F. Hanks, made their way to the east coast and from New Bedford, took the Timoleon destined for the Society Islands. Elder Hanks died and was buried at sea. After seven months at sea, the Timoleon made its first landfall in the Pacific, the island of Tubuai, about 300 miles south of Tahiti. The native invitation was too strong to resist and Addison Pratt responded and took up residence there the first of May 1844. At Papeete, Tahiti, Elders Noah Rogers and Benjamin F. Grouard, began their labors under adverse conditions--the upheaval of society associated with the war between the French and natives, still in process, the bitter resentment of the English missionaries at losing their place in society due to the French occupation and now the intrusion of the Mormons.

After eleven months of discouragement and little success, Noah Rogers took ship and returned to the Church at Nauvoo. Elder Grouard left Tahiti for the Tuamotu Archipelago, beginning at the coral reefed island of Anaa. It is with Addison Pratt and Benjamin F. Grouard that we are most concerned, for they were the two missionaries who established

the Church in French Polynesia.

The missionaries were strangely prepared for this mission. Pratt and Grouard had been seamen in the American whale fishery industry, sailing the seas. Pratt had spent six months on Oahu, Hawaii, in 1822. Noah Rogers had been in the Church six years, Addison Pratt five, and Benjamin F. Grouard two. Each had performed short missions in the States. Each had experienced conversion and was well read, in time, in the scriptures, and of course knew the basic tenets of Mormonism.

They had no Mormon literature in the Tahitian language and depended altogether on the London Missionary Society's work for the Bible and hymnals. They took with them copies of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, Parley P. Pratt's Voice of Warning, and Orson Pratt's Remarkable Visions (an account of Joseph Smith's First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and other events in the Prophet's life coupled with an excellent exposition of the fundamentals of Mormonism, closely paralleling the Articles of Faith). These works were useful only to English-speaking people they met, and these books were in short supply.

Pratt's first task was to learn the language. He assembled with the people, sang with them, wrote down the words as he understood them. "They often laugh at me for talking Owyhe to them, and I fear this in some degree will be a disadvantage to me ... ." <sup>2</sup> With the aid of Americans on the island, he made progress and in five months was "tolerably understood." A year later he wrote Brigham Young: "... I can explain almost any passage of scripture after a fashion; but their language is so deficient, and the translation of the Bible is so imperfect, that it is hard to make them understand the plan of salvation. ... What knowledge we have obtained of the language is by hard study, and not by the "gift of tongues."<sup>3</sup>

Pratt's struggle with the language led to his first converts. The Americans on the island--they were building a schooner, salvaging parts from a wrecked ship--served as his interpreters on various occasions, including Pratt's informal gospel talk sessions at night. In time six of the seven Americans joined the Church. These six Americans formed the nucleus of the Tubuai congregation, organized into the Tubuai branch, the first branch of the Church in the Pacific, on July 29, 1844. In time the branch numbered sixty members, out of the 200 people on the Island.

As soon as there were enough members to form a congregation with

priesthood leadership, the missionaries organized the congregation into a branch. During Grouard's first eight months in the Tuamotus he organized eight branches with a combined membership of nearly eight hundred.

Following somewhat the pattern set by the English missionaries, the Mormons held each Sunday three preaching services, one each in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Baptismals were usually on Sunday, an hour or two before meeting. At meetings there was hymn singing, prayers, confirmations, ordinations, and preaching. The first Sunday of each month the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered; it was also administered upon the baptism and confirmation of converts. School was conducted weekdays, with lessons in reading and arithmetic, geography, and sometimes chapters in the Bible. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, Pratt held Bible study classes. The other evenings were usually taken up, sometimes until midnight, with discussions of doctrine and passages of scripture. "I have all I can attend to, to answer bible questions, while out of meetings and school."<sup>4</sup> When the families came to the mission in 1850, Sister Caroline B. Crosby was pleased at what she found on Tubuai, on Sunday, September 26, 1850:

... The bell rang for church at 7 o'clock, we all repaired to the Fare bure ra (or house of worship, where some 80 or a hundred persons were collected for worship.) We were highly pleased to see the decency and order which prevailed among the, almost all of them with bibles under their arms ready to follow the speaker where ever he might appoint them. They have 3 meetings and a school in the course of the day, besides our white brethren have one expressly for ourselves, which keeps us very busily employed through the day.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Religious Condition of the Polynesians as Met by the Mormon Missionaries

Through the extensive labors of the English missionaries, the natives had advanced far along the road to readiness to receive and understand the Gospel message brought by the Mormon missionaries, although Pratt and Grouard gave the English little credit and blamed them for many of the vices they found in the natives.

The English missionaries, at great expense in time and labor, had made considerable contributions without which the Mormons could have made little or no progress. Heathenism had been overthrown, the ancient idols

had been destroyed, and the maraes abandoned. Many of the ancient taboos were gone. The Tahitian language had been committed to written form, and works including the Bible had been translated from English into Tahitian. Native families had been encouraged to build and occupy homes of their own in an effort to abolish communal sleeping. Native costume had been modified by the introduction of cloth. Christian institutions of the family had been fostered but enforced with difficulty. Churches and schools had been established, and governments instituted along lines reminiscent of European political and judicial institutions. The English missionaries endeavored to enforce the Christian standards of sex morality. To aid in this they had prohibited native dances--altogether too suggestive to them. They also had been able to effect native laws prohibiting the importation and use of liquor on the islands.

The efforts of the English missionaries were felt most at Tahiti and some of the more populous islands. They only occasionally visited the distant, outlying, and thinly populated islands, whose people were entrusted into the hands of native missionaries. All of the natives of the Society Islands were not Christians, and throughout the islands there were frequent uprisings, disputes, backslidings, and retrogressions.

The English missionaries had native teachers on Tubuai for two decades. Pratt early observed that "They have many superstitions respecting devils and ghosts." During his first year there he was taken to their ancient worship centers, the marae, "the sacred place ... used for worship, where stones were piled up, altars erected, sacrifices offered, prayers made, and sometimes the dead deposited."<sup>6</sup> But it was a year before they told him more about the maraes, human sacrifices, and varua ino (evil spirits).<sup>7</sup>

When Elder Grouard was directed toward the Tuamotu Archipelago, and Anaa in particular, he had heard that he was going "among strangers and semi-savages ... as it was but a few years since that the Paumotu natives were wild, ferocious canibals; glutting themselves on human flesh."

My feelings, as I approached this strange land, and heard the wild shouts of these half civilizaed sons of the ocean, I can not easily discribe. It seemed to me as though I had got out of the world almost, and was on another planet among another race of people, or about entering among them. A different race of people they certainly were from what I had ever seen before, and as for being out of the world, I might almost as well have been, as it was a part of it seldome ever visited by anyone.

I had not however much time for reflection before we arived at the landing place, and leaping on shore, I was the next minute surrounded by some two or three hundred natives of both sexes of all ages: naked, half naked and clad; hooting, hallooing, laughing and jabbering like a legeon of evil spirits. They looked to me wild and savage; and hearing the frightfull savege noises thay made, and not being able to understand a word they said, I realy did not know but what I had become a victim for sacrifice in very deed. ...<sup>8</sup>

He was met by high chiefs, "large, well built, and of a noble mien, and well dressed in the native style. I was agreeably surprised to see such likely looking persons ... ." He was further encouraged by the fact that they could speak Tahitian "if they choose."<sup>9</sup> The chiefs were thoroughly satisfied with Grouard's defense of his coming to their island and encouraged him to stay. Out of a population of about 2,000, on the island of Anaa, "near one hundred" had been baptized by the English missionaries.

Of those who had been baptized, Elder Grouard considered that they had been introduced only to the outward forms without a thorough understanding of the Gospel.

They had all however become exceedingly holy ... so much so that a man would be tried and fined for walking out on the sabbath ... if it was considerable distance; but when Monday came their goodness was laid aside ... and lying, cheating, stealing, whoreing and almost every other abominible thing was considered no disgrace or crime ... . Their worship consisted of going to meeting three times on Sunday and wonce in the week, and praying in the family night and morning and even the biggest scoundrel, lyer, drunkerd, theif and whoremunger would be afraid to lie down to sleep without first praying or eat without first asking a blessing ... . Such was the idea thay had received of the worship of God from their teachers ... actions were nothing. ...

Furthermore, the war in Tahiti had given cause for the people to throw off all restraints, and "the utmost confusion and disorder prevailed. Sin in the most horrid form walked abroad in open daylight ... ." The chiefs regarded Grouard's coming providential--as a means to stabilize their society.<sup>11</sup>

Grouard and Pratt rejoiced at the reception they and their message received from these people. "... notwithstanding their ignorence and superstition: thay would always hearken to counsel, and pay the greatest respect to our teachings and authority, and sought advice from us in all

things, temporal and spiritual." Genuine satisfactions repaid their many personal "privations and hardships."<sup>12</sup>

... To hear them calling upon the Lord, who but a few short years before were the most ferocious savage canibals, and to hear them call too in the name of Jesus for God to roll forth establish and build up his latter day work, it caused more joy in my bosom than I can tell. Yes, but a few short years have past since their large double canoes, maned with from 50 to a 100 men, 15 and 20 in number would return from the adjacent Islands loaded with the skulls of those victims they had slain in battle and whose body's they had eaten. This is no fiction I assure you: there old marais or worshiping places are filled with the skulls now, where by scratching away a few inches of dirt you may have a full view of them. They were buried here in honor of their god, as trophies of their victories. Such were the people who are now rejoicing in the gospel. I have baptised three generations, namely father son and grandson, who have together set down to these feasts of human flesh, who are now faithful members of the Church of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Addison Pratt had the same experiences and rejoiced in the reformation taking place in the lives of the people. An interview with one "aged brother in the Church" is to the point:

... As I went up to his bed and spoke to him, he inquired who had come? They told him Paraita. He extended his hand and bid me welcome. I saw he was very weak and feeble. Said I you are very weak and low, and in all probability near your end, for I saw the lamp of life was nearly extinguished. "Yes," said he "I am," and what is to become of me? I have been a warrior and a man of blood. I have sacrificed the lives of many of my fellow creatures." Said I, You did it in a time when you was swallowed up in heathenish superstition and ignorance. You did it to revenge upon your enemies. And Paul says, Acts 17:30, "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent." And when this his word came to you in the gospel of his son Jesus Christ, you obeyed it, you have been adopted by baptism into his kingdom, and since that, you have kept his commandments, and now your trust must be in him whose blood is able to cleanse you from all sins. And now do not let your mind waver, but place your hope and faith on him, and he will lead you safely through the dark valley which you are now about to pass, to that blissful abode of eternal rest, prepared for all that love and keep his commandments. I left him, and in a few days he died, without any kind of sickness. But as a lamp that burns till the oil is all exhausted and goes out of its self, so departed he this life. ...<sup>14</sup>

During the summer of 1846, Elder Grouard, having built a large pahi paumotu, took an extended voyage, visiting and preaching on several of the coral reef islands of the Tuamotus. His experience among these rarely-

visited islands led him to believe that many of the ancient beliefs were still very much alive. He describes his experience and thoughts on Rairoa.

This Island, as well as all the rest of this group was wonce thickly populated, as is evident from the extensive Marais or idolitrous worshiping places scatered all over the Island. It is truly interesting to the contemplating mind, to wander among these monuments of satens kingdom; many of them still standing unimpared; and I have not a doubt, (though they are nominally thrown aside) but there are many who still worship at them, as when idolotry was the professed and only relegeion among them. Especialy among these lower Islands, wich are seldom visited by vessels, they still regard, their Marais as sacred as ever, and would no more dare abuse them in any way, than they would dare cut their fingers off, and some they dare not so much as enter, they having been dedicated to some particular god who is remarkably jelous of his dignity. One in particular on the Island of Tiahau, the natives came to me, even those who were with me who I had batpised, and cautioned me, not even to go to look at this wonderfull place, lest the rarth of their ancient God should overtake us for trespassing upon their sacred ground. If I had no curiosity before to see this particular place, of course this friendly caution would awaken it in me; to break down and distroy their foolish prejudice and superstition if for nothing els. I first however preached to them from Epe 2 1-2-3 and gave them a severe lecturing for their superstition. ... After this, we all, who felt a curiosity, went to see this wonderful place. ...

The people of these Islands were exceedingly zealous idolotrous worshipers, and they tell many wonderfull stories about their exploits when assisted by their gods. ... It can not be wondered that they still are very superstitious, since it is so recently they were idolators. Three generations at least are still living, who worshiped heathen gods, and their monuments of heathenism still standing so thickly around them, it is almost a wonder they are so free from superstition as they are.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding their concerns about the survivals of heathenism, in one form or another, the Mormon elders found much in the native character to praise, encourage, and build upon. They appreciated native generosity and kindness, their sincere and deep religious faith, their altruism. Their childlike character and readiness to be taught and to obey were commendable. There is no doubt but that Pratt and Grouard loved the natives sincerely for their many virtues besides for their soul's sake. Their dedication to the natives was profound, and their devotion enduring.

### What Did the Mormon Missionaries Teach the Polynesians?

One must keep in mind that the Mormon elders left Nauvoo June 1st 1843, and that they had been in the Church but a few years. Obviously they taught the Mormonism they knew and learned from the few books they had with them. Reading their journals and letters, and the journals and letters of the English missionaries who encountered them and their teaching, one is impressed with the scope of the Restored Gospel they possessed and how remarkably on target they were as to what Mormonism was and came to be.

If there was any attempt upon the part of the Mormon missionaries to equate native pre-Christian beliefs with any aspect of Mormon doctrine or teaching, the diaries and letters are silent on the subject. Considering that almost all of the natives reached by the missionaries were at least nominally Christian; it rather fits with the expressed statements of their teaching that they proceeded on that foundation to clear it of "sectarian" views and practices, and build the structure of their own message.

An official statement by the missionaries required by the French governor in 1850 is in general terms:

1stly. To preach the everlasting Gospel. ...

2ly. To teach the people by precept and example the habits of virtue and industry. ...

3ly. To observe and keep the laws of evry land wherein we dwell, ... and to teach and admonish the people to observe and keep the laws of their land.

In short: "We preach to, and admonish the people, to keep all the commandments of God, and strictly to obey the laws of the land wherein they dwell."<sup>16</sup>

In October 1844, on Tubuai, Elder Pratt accepted an invitation to speak to a visiting ship's crew:

I ... prepared a discourse on the first principles of the Gospel. I took it from the foundation up, and set it forth with all its officers, gifts and blessings. I talked as fast as I could for 2 hours. I told them, they could plainly see that the Church of Jesus Christ, as sat up by him and his Apostles, differed with evry sect under Heaven at the present day, but the Church I belonged to, and that is precisely after the original pattern. They told the brethren the next day, that such preaching was new to them, but they did not see how any boddy that believed in the bible could get around it for it was all Scripture, none could deny.<sup>17</sup>

Frequent reference is made to their preaching "the first principles of the Gospel" meaning, we may presume, faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>18</sup> Baptism by immersion was perhaps the most distinctive Mormon practice to the natives. The English missionaries adhered to sprinkling, and the natives had never seen baptism by immersion. At times, hundreds of natives came to the shore to witness the ordinance. The elders were quick to take advantage of the situation and held preaching services, defending immersion from the Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> And while the English missionaries called the Mormons ma mai ia (fools, crazy) for baptizing by immersion, the natives soon learned their Scriptures and countered with biblical proofs.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes persons were baptized for their health, and sometimes they entered the Church through baptism in order to receive administration with consecrated oil for the healing of a sickness. In such cases the elders were cautious and tested for faith and repentance.

There are many references in Pratt's daily account of his administering to the sick, especially at Anaa in the Tuamotus and at Tiarei, Tahiti. Many are his testimonies of the sick being healed under his administration. But whenever he sensed a lack of faith, he declined to administer a blessing by that means.<sup>21</sup>

On the island of Anaa the elders faced a special problem with regard to the health of the members--varua ino (evil spirits) possessing their bodies. In July of 1845, Elder Grouard was summoned to the bedside of a sick sister.

... I laughed when the messenger told me she was possessed of a devil, but he asured me it was true, and entreated me to make haste. Knowing the natives were very superstitious, and never having seen a person actually posed of a devil, I did not believe it, but thought some severe pain had taken the person; cholic or something of the kind: but when I arived where the person was I received a sensation that told me it was something more than cholic. Such a scream I never had before witnessed, and it rather starteled me: but after looking on the person a few minuits my fear left me: I then laid hands on her and in the name of Jesus Christ I rebuked the evil spirit, and he immediately left her, when she arose in her right mind and called for some drink, and in a few minuits was as well as ever.<sup>22</sup>

Elder Pratt had similar experiences from shortly after he landed on Tubuai, attesting to the Latter-day Church having the same gifts as the primitive Church.

Today [November 13, 1844] I administered some consecrated oil to Br Pilot. He had been sick several days with a rheumatic affection in his legs and feet. They were very much swollen and very painful. They had been doctored by the native doctor, but said they were no better. Before administering, I asked him if he was willing to dispense with doctoring and put his trust in the Lord. He said he was. I first washed his feet thoroughly in cold water, then anointed and laid hands on them. I called the next morning and the knee and foot that was swollen the worst and the most painful, was entirely well, but some pain in the other, tho it was much better. ...

Cases involving varua ino (evil spirits) appeared more frequently in the Tuamotus; evenso, Elder Pratt had many testimonies on the efficacy of the power of faith in healing by the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands for a blessing.<sup>23</sup>

Mormon teaching and practice was also distinguished by the Word of Wisdom. Since Pratt had been a strong advocate of the temperance movement before joining the Church, it can be imagined that he emphasized this teaching. In the islands, liquor had ever been a plague imposed upon the natives by European and American seamen. The English missionaries had induced some islanders to enforce laws against the landing of liquor and in some places for some times it was effective. But on some islands there were resident whites who ran grog shops and every ship that stopped dispensed, if it could, quantities to the natives. The Mormon elders made observance of the Word of Wisdom one of the tests for membership. Wrote Grouard in June 1845, on Anaa:

Those who I had baptised, 19 in number had all thrown away the use of tobacco and spirits a truly cheering evidence to me of their sincerity; tobacco in particular having been what constituted almost one half of their living, and employed them about one half of the time in preparing it for use: in a word they were servile slaves to it. Walk through the villige what time of day or night you would you would see 4 or 5 companies of 10 or 12 each squated around a small fire with a pipe or cegar passing it from one to the other taking one or two puffs each, swallowing the smoke and emitting it from their noses: even duering the short half or three quarters of an hour meeting thay many of them would have to go out and have a smoke, in fact it was made a business by some one or more to see there was a fire convenient to the meeting house. Those who I had baptised however as soon as I told them it was contrary to the Lords will for them to make use of such useless and hurtfull trash laid it aside expressing a firm resolution never to take it again. ...<sup>24</sup>

At the May 18, 1851 conference of the Church at Huauau, Tahiti, it was learned that the native elders preaching among the Tuamotu Islands "had been very rigid regarding it, cutting off members without mercy, who were known to make use of it in any degree." Elder Pratt reported his discussions with Church leaders in Salt Lake City:

... the word of wisdom was not to be enforced upon any one, but it was to be a matter of choice with those belonging to the Church, and with promise if they kept it. And to those that kept it not, the Elders would have no faith in administering to them in cases of sickness or distress. Br Pratt also recommended to the Elders not to ordain any to the Priesthood, who would not observe the word of wisdom.

Among the Tuamotuan saints there had arisen "much contention" over the "practice of eating dogs." After quoting some scriptures, Elder Pratt observed "that he thought it should be left to their own option what they should eat."<sup>25</sup>

On Tubuai, Pratt had been pressed with another difficult question put to him through his interpreter. He wrote:

... Several natives called on us today to see what would be required of them if they should join the Church. Among the questions that were asked, one of the women asked if they must leave off eating fleas and lice? Br Hill told her she must (as he was interpreter). What must we do with them, when we catch them? she asked. Kill them and throw them away. It [is] a pity to throw them away when they are so sweet," she said. Tho I thought her partly in jest. ...<sup>26</sup>

The Mormon missionaries were very emphatic in their requirement of moral chastity. Addison Pratt wrote that "the sin of lycentiousness is the crying sin of these Islands, and they commence it when small children. This sin I never cease to warn them against, both old and young." When young people came to him for baptism he bore down on the subject: "I talked much with them at the time they offered themselves, and told them what would be expected of them ... . At the water side, after singing and prayer, I talkt to them again."<sup>27</sup> And while Grouard was defensive of the native character, he believed their vices had been taught them by the white man, "except licentiousness, that is an abomination as natural to them as for them to breathe, an old heathen practice: and the english missionaries, if they have taught them better by precept, have not by example, or at least a part of them, as their illegitimate half cast progeny among these

Islands fully prove."<sup>28</sup> Still, Pratt did not despair, notwithstanding the difficulties.

It is but a small part towards making saints of them to get them no farther than to barely baptize them. They are so established in their old sinful practices, that like the children of Israel that went out of the land of Egypt, they that were twenty years old and upwards never reached the promised land, (two excepted.) But still, I know that<sup>29</sup> faith and patience work wonders, and I am not yet discouraged.

As already noted the English missionaries had effected the prohibition of the native dance, hence little is heard of it. The Mormons agreed with the English on this score. Pratt entered in his journal, July 19, 1846: "... in the evening tried and suspended some members for dancing and smoking, which are contrary to the rules of the Church, and also dancing is not allowed out of the Church." But under the French, the laws were relaxed and the dances reappeared. And when it came time for the Mormons to launch the schooner Grouard and others had built, they could not launch it without the help of the entire population of Tubuai. And in Pratt's absence, many had fallen away, "and those out of the Church refused to help, unless we would give them the privilege of having a native dance." There was nothing else to do but allow it. The islanders took days alternating between feasting, dancing, and pulling the schooner to water.<sup>30</sup>

While there was a prohibition on dancing, there was positive encouragement of singing. Addison Pratt spent much time in teaching hymns and translating words for hymns.

... All of the Pacific Islanders have a great desire for learning psalm, and hymn tunes. They have verry strong and clear voices, not verry high, nor verry low. They have not that aptness for music that is so natural to the Africans, but have an ear for music peculiar to themselves. They are remarkable for keeping time as they sing the different parts. Do not catch sounds quick, but when they once learn a tune, are never tired of singing it, will collect at a neighbours house at dark and sing a new tune over and over, till mid night. On this account they annoy Br Grouard verry much as he has not much patience to drill upon a tune, and they frequently send for me to come up to his end of the Island to learn them tunes. But I am verry much relieved from this task by Sister Telii, whom I had learnt many tunes before we left Tubuai. And until her stock is exhausted, they will leave me pretty quiet.<sup>31</sup>

Included among the positive and practical teachings of the Mormon missionaries was the work ethic. An officer of the government on Anaa came to Elder Grouard and inquired, "If any person comes into your church must they leave off work? No, said I, but to the contrary must become more industrious. What, enquired he, may one do all manner of work? Yes, said I, if it is but honest. Well then, said he, I have an office in government and in case I should be baptized what should I do with that, lay it aside? No, said I, but you should be more carefull and diligent to act in truth and righteousness in it."<sup>32</sup>

From a very few passing references it is evident that the missionaries were well acquainted with the broader spectrum of Church doctrine and that the natives were introduced to these principles: "the apostacy of the primitive Church" ... "this 'dispensation of the fullness of times'" ... of "Prophets" in these days ... that the Latter-day Saints "are not wholly dependent on the bible for their knowledge, but they have also a more sure word of prophecy" ... the Book of Mormon ... and hence the restoration of divine authority (though hardly mentioned as such) and a lay priesthood (operative in regularly established branches of the Church).

The elders' teaching on Mormon philosophy of history as relates to Israel and America was hardly understood by those who commented on it. English missionary Charles Barff heard Noah Rogers on Raiatea, November 1844, and journalized: "Mr. Rodgers the Mormonite preached for the 2nd time here to the foreigners and was endeavoring to prove that the natives of North America were the descendants of Ephraim! but the congregation he was addressing was at a loss to know what advantage that was to them when proved and refused to hear him again."<sup>33</sup> Nor was Addison Pratt any more successful in proving his point to a ship's captain: "all of this he withstood without a groan, but when I come to prove from Jacob's blessing to a demonstration, that, America was the verry land, he promised Ephraim and Manasseh, and that Old England had nothing to do with it! He took his hat and steered for the door soon as possible."<sup>34</sup>

But the doctrine of gathering, that Zion was to be built upon the American continent was more readily understood. From 1844, Addison Pratt referred to the gathering and wrote Brigham Young asking him to make some preparation for gathering the Island saints as soon as possible, suggesting "some place appointed on this side of the Rocky Mountains for a resting

place for them. When we speak to them about their gathering, they say, many of them, 'We are ready to go now!! But how are we to get there? The only answer we can give is, The Lord will open the way.'<sup>35</sup> But if the Polynesian Saints could not gather to America, they could gather to an island Zion. William Howe, English missionary, wrote, December 11, 1850:

... Whether the Mormons have got the notion that Jerusalem is to be found somewhere about our missions, I do not know, but they are pouring in fast upon our out stations in considerable numbers. [a number not decipherable] men women and children have landed at Tupuai, and have obtained permission from the Governor to locate themselves there to commence an agricultural establishment. They have made considerable progress in baptizing the people at the Paumotus.<sup>36</sup>

Efforts to have the Church establish a gathering place for the Polynesian Saints in California did not materialize.<sup>37</sup>

While there is no evidence that the elders taught principles associated with the temple and salvation for the dead, it should be pointed out that Addison Pratt was baptized for some of his deceased relatives before he left Nauvoo. That the missionaries were knowledgeable is clear from an entry in Grouard's diary when he is lamenting not hearing from the Church, especially at "... a time of such intense interest ... when so much is anticipated--the 'temple'--the 'endowment'--the prosperity and adversity of this great and glorious work ..."<sup>38</sup>

These, then, are extracts from the letters and diaries which give us an idea of what the missionaries taught. That they knew more than they taught is obvious. That they simplified their presentations to meet the understandings of their listeners is also obvious. The situation must have been challenging, to teach basic Christianity, the first principles of the Restored Gospel, and clearly show the added truths, the restoration of the priesthood and elements of Church organization, as well as some of the practical teachings relating to every day living.

#### The Success of the Missionaries

Just how successful were the missionaries? Tubuai and the Tuamotus were the centers of greatest success, and there most of the islanders were converted to the Church. There was backsliding, to be sure. Without white missionaries to tend the flock constantly, it is a wonder that the converts remained as true as they did. Let a ship remain long, and there was

backsliding. And then there were some who were just tired. Wrote Pratt: "Another woman wisht to have her name taken off of the Church record. Said She was tired of trying to serve the Lord. Said she wisht to go and serve the devil with her whole heart. And these natives know how to do that with their might."<sup>39</sup>

But the successes far outweighed the failures. Pratt and Grouard would have been pleased to hear their work complimented by others. George Platt, an English missionary, wrote in May 1855 (three years after the Mormon missionaries had left the field): "The Paumotu group seems to be entirely give up to the Mormons. And the [Catholic] priests. ... the Mormons & priests, have no books with which to teach but our own. It was my wish they should be well supplied with books, as the Mormons teach them to read. ..."<sup>40</sup> And William Howe, another English missionary called at Tubuai when Pratt and Grouard were absent: "I ought here to state there are three foreigners, two Americans and one Englishman, residing on the island, the excellence of whose conduct is such as to produce the happiest effect upon the people. This is a very unusual statement I make; but a very delightful one, and I earnestly pray that such cases may multiply. ..."<sup>41</sup> And lastly, an experienced ship's captain, an English missionary, and the American consul told Pratt in September 1846: "... they said there had never been a mission started in the Pacific Ocean that had met with the success that this had, and when our means and encouragement from home were considered it was a wonder."<sup>42</sup>

NOTES

Abbreviations:

- AP Addison Pratt, Journals. In possession of S. George Ellsworth. Microfilm, Archives, Church Historical Department, 50 East North Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- NR Noah Rogers, Diary. Archives, Church Historical Department.
- BFG Benjamin F. Grouard, Journal. Archives, Church Historical Department.

<sup>1</sup>S. George Ellsworth, Zion in Paradise: Early Mormons in the South Seas (Logan: Utah State University, Faculty Honor Lecture, 1958). Also, S. George Ellsworth, "Missionaries and Politics: Mormon Experiences in French Polynesia," unpublished paper.

<sup>2</sup>AP, 12 May 1844.

<sup>3</sup>AP to Brigham Young, 20 February 1845, Times and Seasons, VI (November 1, 1845), 1019-1022; Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star, VI (January 1, 1846), 14-16.

<sup>4</sup>AP, 17 Feb 1846.

<sup>5</sup>Caroline Barnes Crosby, Journals, 26 September 1850. Archives, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

<sup>6</sup>[John Davies], A Tahitian and English Dictionary ... (Tahiti: Printed at the London Missionary Society's Press, 1851; AMS reprint 1978). AP, 24 July 1844; 5 September 1844; 12 October 1844; 16 November 1844.

<sup>7</sup>AP, 5 November 1846; 1 October 1845 [Hutu Tree]; AP to [George A.] Smith, Great Salt Lake City, [March or April, 1849], Frontier Guardian (Kanesville, Iowa), June 13, 1849, and Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star XI (August 15, 1849), 249-52.

<sup>8</sup>BFG, 23 April 1845.

<sup>9</sup>BFG, April/May 1845.

<sup>10</sup>BFG, May 1845.

<sup>11</sup>BFG, Summer 1845.

<sup>12</sup>BFG, January/February 1846.

<sup>13</sup>BFG, Summer 1845. AP and BFG "To the Presiding High Council of the Church ...," Chain Island, or Ana, South Pacific Ocean, October 19, 1846, A.L.S., Archives, Church Historical Department.

<sup>14</sup>AP, 6 October 1846.

<sup>15</sup>BFG, Summer 1846.

<sup>16</sup>AP, 12 August 1850, 11 November 1850.

<sup>17</sup>AP, 2 October 1844.

<sup>18</sup>AP, 17 January 1847, 15 August 1844; BFG, September 1845.

<sup>19</sup>AP, 21 October 1844, BFG, 10 August 1844, 22 and 25 May 1845, June 1845.

<sup>20</sup>AP, 23 February 1847.

<sup>21</sup>AP, 28 June 1844, 13 November 1844, 29 June 1846, 17 July 1846, 11 Sep 1847, 16 October 1846, [22] January 1847, 4 February 1847, 5 February 1847, 11 February 1847, 23 February 1847, 7 March 1847, 24 November 1850, 8 September 1851. The English missionaries observed the practice among the Mormons: "There are also a number of Mormonite teachers now going amongst the people, professing the gift of healing by anointing with oil, but as they can only exercise on those who have been baptized into their faith, they present a strong inducement to those who are afflicted with [a sickness?] to unite with them, & if they once do so, there is generally, some means found for retaining them altho' the pretended miracle be not wrought." Alexander Chisholm, letter, Papara, Tahiti, March 21, 1851, London Missionary Society, South Seas Letters, Box 24, 1851, Folder 1; Film BV 5, Reel 124.

<sup>22</sup>BFG, 8-10 July 1845.

<sup>23</sup>AP, 28 June 1844, 13 November 1844, 29 June 1846, 17 July 1846, 11 September 1846, 29 September 1846, 16 October 1846, 11 November 1846, [22] January 1847, 4 February 1847, 5 February 1847, 11 February 1847, 23 February 1847, 7 March 1847, 24 November 1850, 8 September 1851, 2 November 1851.

<sup>24</sup>BFG, June 1845.

<sup>25</sup>AP, 18 May 1851.

<sup>26</sup>AP, 3 September 1844.

<sup>27</sup>AP, 21 November 1844.

<sup>28</sup>BFG, May 1845.

<sup>29</sup>AP to Brigham Young, Tubuai, February 20, 1845, Times and Seasons, VI (November 1, 1845), 1019-22; Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star, VII (January 1, 1846), 14-16.

<sup>30</sup>AP, 3 February 1851, December 19, 1851.

<sup>31</sup>AP, 17 February 1846.

<sup>32</sup>BFG, May 1845.

<sup>33</sup>Charles Barff, Journal, Papers of the LMS, South Seas Journals, Box 10, 1845-1871, Film BV 5, Reel 93.

<sup>34</sup>AP, 3 October 1844.

<sup>35</sup>AP to Louisa Barnes Pratt, Tubuai, September 17, 1844, in Times and Seasons VI (May 1, 1845), 882-5; Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star, VI (June 15, 1845), 57-60. AP and BFG "To the Presiding High Council of the Church ...," Chain Island, or Ana, October 19, 1846, A.L.S., Archives, Church Historical Department.

<sup>36</sup>William Howe, letter, Papeete, Tahiti, December 11, 1850, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 23, 1850, folder 3, Film BV 5, Reel 123.

<sup>37</sup>AP, 4 May 1851, 22 December 1851, 6 April 1852. An English missionary talked with a Mormon convert. "One man asked me, Where Zion was? Whether it was not in America. I told him he read in the Scriptures of one Zion, and symbolical of another. I knew of no other. He said they were going to Zion. I replied, it would be well if they were found in the Heavenly Zion. He said they were going to America." George Platt, letter, Raiatea, January 16, 1849, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 22, 1849, Film BV 5, Reel 123.

<sup>38</sup>BFG, September 1846. It may be worthwhile to point out areas of the Restored Gospel that were apparently not touched in their teaching. While mention is made in Noah Rogers of the natives holding a day of fasting and prayer during the French and native battle, there are no explicit statements in the missionary diaries or letters on fasting, speaking in tongues, fast offerings, tithing, or other forms of contributions, though it is obvious that the natives were most kind to the missionaries with food offerings. Polygamy was not known to the missionaries, and had been eliminated by the English, a position staunchly supported by the Mormon elders. And while there are suggestions of teaching that these are the latter-days or last days, there is no evidence to suggest teachings concerning the end of the world, the millennium, or the nature of existence at the end of the earth's history, though mention is made of the Second Coming, the resurrection, and a judgment and associated admonitions to righteousness and personal preparation.

While in no way conclusive, it is somewhat helpful to our understanding to record that the following passages in Pratt's Tahitian Bible were marked by him: Genesis 34; Genesis 28:10-17; Numbers 22: esp. 34; Numbers 11:31-35; Isaiah 52:2-24; Joel 2:28, cross referenced to Acts 2:16-17; Micah 3:1-4; Malachi 3:16-; Matthew 11:2-6; 23:36-37; 24:29, 32-33; 25:44-46; 27:24-25; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:16-17, cross referenced to Joel 2:29; I Corinthians 15, esp. 31-32, 41-43; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Thessalonians 5:1-5; Hebrews 8:7-; 10:22, 35, 39; James 2: esp. 14-16; I Peter 3:18-20; 4:6; Revelation 6:7-8.

<sup>39</sup>AP, 6 September 1846.

<sup>40</sup>George Platt, letter, Raiatea, May 15, 1855, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 25, folder 5, 1854 [1855?], Film BV 5, Reel 125.

<sup>41</sup>William Howe, Papeete, Tahiti, August 14, 1847, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 20, 1847, folder 3, Jacket Letter A, Film BV 5, Reel 121.

<sup>42</sup>AP, 14 September 1846.