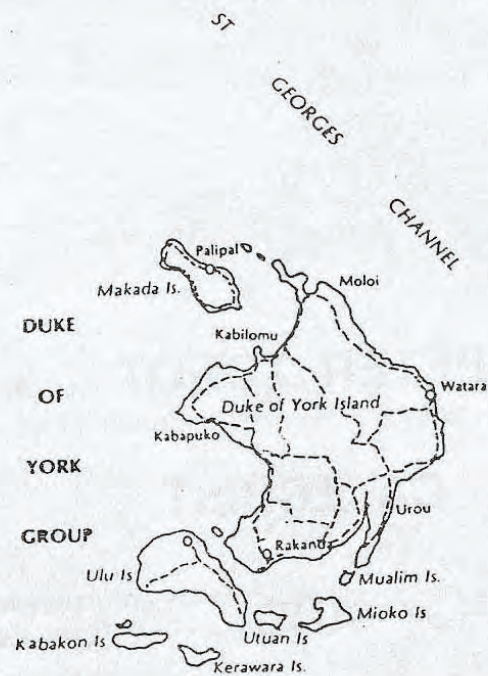
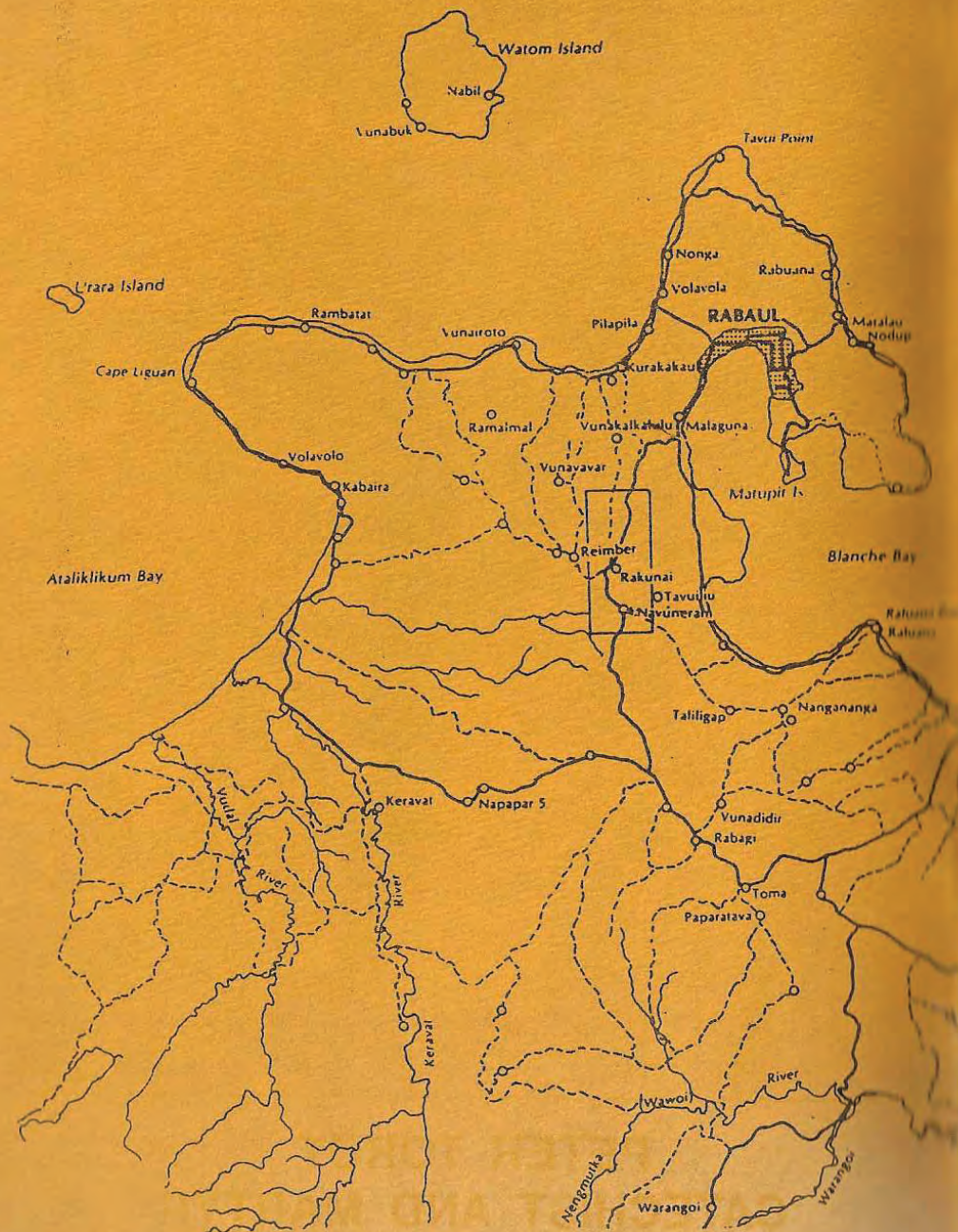
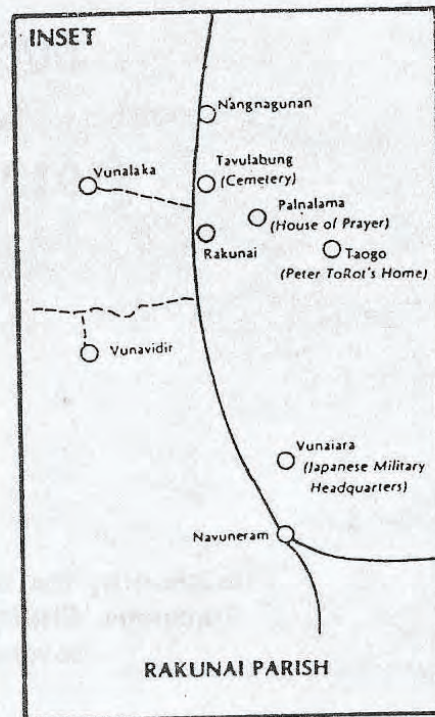




PETER TOROT
CATECHIST AND MARTYR
(1912 - 1945)



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PETER TOROT
CATECHIST
AND
MARTYR
(1912 - 1945)

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FORWARD

On January 23, 1942, a terrible darkness descended upon the people of New Britain, the darkness of war. And with it came the inevitable darkness of despair, destruction and death.

But in that darkness there shone a light, a light that spoke to an oppressed and deprived people of their God and of his love for them: a warm and comforting light, a courageous light, a light that the darkness could not overcome.

And that light was the faithful lay-catechist of Rakunai, Peter ToRot.

We rejoice that the Universal Church has recognized the blessedness of the life of this son of Papua New Guinea, this devoted husband and father, this courageous catechist-martyr, this light of Rakunai.

That you might come to know the servant of God better I present this booklet. In it you will find:

- a short history of his life written by Fr. Caspar To Vaninara MSC;
- a summary outlining the steps leading up to his beatification;
- the assessments of two of the eight theologians who examined the theological merit of his cause;
- decree concerning the Martyrdom of Peter ToRot

On May 9, 1985, the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands forwarded a letter to Pope John Paul II, requesting that the Church officially recognize the blessedness of the life and death of Peter ToRot. In this letter they wrote:

"Official ecclesiastical recognition of the blessedness of the life and death of the Servant of God, Peter ToRot, will not only be a source of grace and continuous inspiration to the Tolai people, but also to:

- (I) all people of the young nation of Papua New Guinea, among whom the reputation of the Servant of God has spread far and wide;
- (II) the lay apostolate of the universal Church, and missionary lay apostolate everywhere;
- (III) men and women, young and old, throughout the world, challenged to preserve the Catholic Faith."

Let us do all we can to bring before our peoples and the people of other nations the blessedness of the life of our faithful catechist-martyr, Peter ToRot. And let us rejoice and give thanks to the God who makes it all possible!



Archbishop Karl Hesse M.S.C.
Archbishop of Rabaul.

THE LIFE OF PETER TOROT
CATECHIST
CHURCH LEADER AND MARTYR
BY
FR. CASPAR G. TO VANINARA MSC

SECOND EDITION

ERRATUM

Page 08	Line 10	Word 02	" hungry "
Page 08	Line 10	Word 06	" steal "
Page 08	Line 16	Word 12	" serve "
Page 08	Line 20	Word 11	" climbed "
Page 17	Line 07	Date	" 1936 "
Page 36	Line 12	Word 08	" possessing "
Page 37	Line 08	Word 12	" and "
Page 37	Line 23	Word 01	" imprisonment "
Page 37	Line 28	Word 04	" former "
Page 39	Line 18	Word 08	" her "
Page 51	Line 20	Date	" 1944 "

INTRODUCTION:

IN 1945, on the day of the Assumption of our Lady, peace was declared. In the Rabaul area the Second World War had come to an end, leaving behind destruction of homes, houses and many dead. The people sighed again with relief and forgot their misery - sickness, hunger, death, the bombing, the frightening machine guns, and approaching bombers. They built new houses and made gardens. They produced more children to increase the population.

Between 1942-45 numerous people died. Among them was PETER TOROT, a young handsome and dedicated Tolai Catechist. ToRot died in 1945 just before the Second World War finished in August. The exact date and hour of his death are not recorded.

After the war the people of Rakunai went to Ramale Concentration Camp near Bitagalip to inform his parish priest and the other missionaries kept there that ToRot had been killed. They told them that they buried the late Peter ToRot in the cemetery near Rakunai, at the foot of the cross guarding the cemetery.

Peter ToRot was not killed by a bomb or shot by a gun. The Japanese killed him because he disobeyed their order to stop Christian worship and practice, and in particular because he spoke many times against the Japanese who allowed polygamy (the practice of having more than one wife at a time). As a devoted catechist, ToRot continued with the teachings of Christ, baptizing, witnessing marriages, teaching catechism and leading prayer meetings and church worship among his people at Rakunai. The missionaries had been arrested and put in prison.

CHAPTER 1

PETER TOROT AS A CHILD

PETER TOROT was 30 years of age when the Japanese invaded New Britain with warships and planes in 1942. He was born in 1912 in Rakunai, about 12 miles from the town of Rabaul. His father was Angelo ToPuia, who was the 'big man' or 'luluai' of his people. ToPuia was respected highly. The people obeyed him because he was a good man and a capable leader. Maria laTumul was the luluai's wife and mother of Peter ToRot. She was kind and gentle.

ToPuia and laTumul lived happily together and had six children. They were Teresia laVarpilak, Joseph Tatamai, Peter ToRot, Gabriel Telo (died in 1947) and the two last born who died during childhood.

Angelo ToPuia loved ToRot very much. He liked him more than his other children because ToRot was more obedient and respectful towards him and laTumul than his other brothers and sisters. The luluai identified his son's character with his own. He thought to himself that ToRot would be a great leader or luluai among his people some day. However, ToRot turned out to be a zealous spiritual leader and not merely a traditional leader.

ToRot's first teachers were his own parents, especially his father. ToPuia taught him to be obedient to his parents and those in charge of him. He was instructed to show great respect and reverence for the village leaders and elders and to be kind and generous to his neighbours. He was taught to say his morning offerings and evening prayers. Sometimes he disobeyed or did not behave well and ToPuia would get angry with him and even beat him if necessary. ToRot was a happy boy and listened to corrections with respect and a willingness to improve.

When he was old enough ToRot began to go to school. He attended school every single school day and never missed a day except when he was really sick or had a big sore. Every morning he arrived early to serve Father during mass. In evenings he came before time to join in the evening prayers. Many people knew Peter ToRot from childhood and some who attended class together with him made remarks about him. Someone said, "Peter ToRot was always the first student to put his hand up to answer questions asked by our teacher". Another reported, "During Religion classes, sometimes the catechist asked the class if anyone could repeat the section from Holy Bible he had done with them the previous day. ToRot always put his up his hand to answer first. His answers were usually correct and the catechist praised him for excellence

in Religion". He received the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion before the usual age.

The luluai's son never obeyed or did things just to please his parents, or his teachers or his parish priest. No, he was sincere and honest with himself. In class, or at home or in the garden, he always worked even when nobody was watching him. While still a small boy ToRot already showed signs of maturity and leadership. He led other young boys in work and recreation. They followed him and imitated his example as if he was their "luluai", and his leadership was good. Sometimes some of his friends felt hungry and wanted to steal food, especially Father's coconuts. ToRot stopped them and went himself to Father to ask his first for whatever they wanted. The boys made jokes and had fun and Peter ToRot joined them. If they went to the extreme of talking about impure things then he simply left them.

ToRot was often willing to make sacrifices in order to help others. In 1926, Fr Ulrich came to Rakunai parish. He asked for volunteers to serve him at mass for a whole week including the holidays. ToRot was the only one who volunteered to serve the priest. Most of the old men and women admired the boy for his gentleness and kindness and his willingness when asked by others to do them a favour. He climbed 'kulau' and betelnut trees for them. The people wondered about him since he was the son of a luluai, a child to be honoured and served. ToRot instead went against this tradition by humbling himself to serve people.

Twelve noon was the hour school was dismissed during ToRot's time. The other boys and girls wasted a lot of their time on their way home. Their parents expected them to return quickly and help them in gardening and in the home. The future catechist showed them good example. Straight after school Peter would walk hastily home to help ToPuia and laTumul in whatever task they did. ToPuia admired ToRot for his ever readiness to help. Many times they would sit down and talk over ToRot's school work.

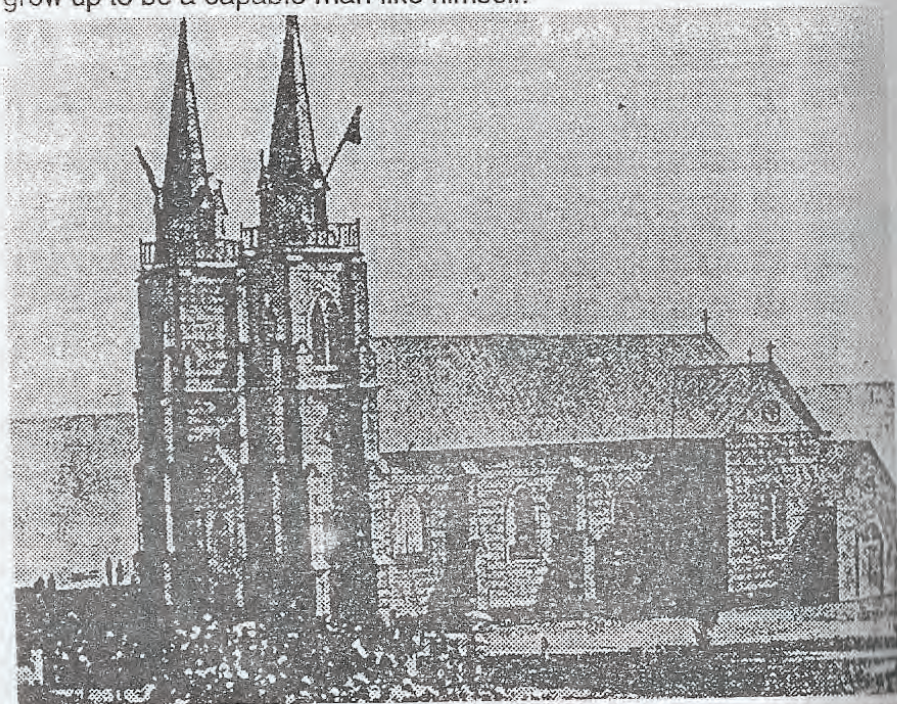
Honesty was a virtue ToRot was known for. A friend of his, ToBurangan who knew him as a boy, relates two incidents in which ToRot proved himself to be an honest person. One day while they were in the classroom ToRot did something foolish. The teacher Jakobi hit him for it. ToRot did not complain or run away like the others used to do. He accepted the beating gratefully, admitting that he was (the cause) and deserved to be punished. Another time in the classroom, ToRot wrote a message on his slate and showed it after school to one of the girls, Teresia laVinevel. The

girl went home and reported the matter to her parents. Later ToRot was asked about the message and he admitted quickly that it was true. Here again we see that what he did in the second case was serious. Yet ToRot did not escape punishment by defending himself.

By now ToRot had grown to be a young man. He was to leave school then, but continued on until he was sent to Taliligap Catechist School.

In 1930 Fr Laufer took over the parish of Rakunai from Fr Ulrich. Fr Laufer and ToPuia talked over ToRot's future and Fr Laufer suggested that he could study for the priesthood. After careful consideration, ToPuia replied, " Father, I do not think the time has come yet for my son, or any of these other young men to become priests. However, if you want my son to be a catechist, you can send him to Taliligap to train."

ToRot prepared to go to the Catechists' College. Fr Laufer blessed Peter and said, " be well and good". Hearing this ToPuia assured the priest, " Father, do not worry; ToRot will be good because he is my son". Here the luluai was not proud or silly. He knew his son was not holy enough yet. But he had disciplined him well and taught him to be a good, decent living gentleman later on. ToPuia was confident that his son would grow up to be a capable man like himself.



The Church at Vunapope destroyed by the Japanese on 11th February 1944.

CHAPTER 11 PETER TOROT IN TALILIGAP

ToRot went to St Paul's Catechist College in Taliligap, about 5 miles beyond Rakunai. He found his new home and friends interesting. The other students came from other parts of New Britain, some from New Ireland and others from the other surrounding islands. After his arrival, Peter became anxious to learn about his new neighbours quickly. He inquired about the rules in the place because he wanted to follow them too. They were explained to him and the eager young man felt happiness and peace within himself. ToRot saw that he and his colleagues trained to be catechists with one mind, one heart and one aim - to serve Christ. This reality gave him greater zeal in his different school activities.

And now ToRot was a grown up man, handsome and energetic. He saw the meaning of his training: God wanted him to serve Him in a special way, different from clan tradition. In class, in the garden, during games and recreation, at Mass and in prayer sessions, Peter ToRot felt God calling him. He took part in all activities with good will and gratitude. During class he paid special attention and completed his work. At times he joined the others in fooling around while the teacher was not there, but not for long. His teachers corrected him occasionally in his behaviour and studies. No words of complaint or anger ever came from his mouth; he was always grateful for advice and corrections.

Working in the garden was not a new experience for him. Ever since he was a small boy, ToRot had worked confidently while helping his parents in gardening. He had small gardens too and worked them without help from his brother and sisters. Peter had learnt that work is a good thing. It is sacrifice and an offering to God for His great love for us. It is a penance for the sin of mankind. The catechists worked for food in their gardens every afternoon, from Monday to Saturday, except Wednesday afternoon. In spite of the hot blazing sun while his friends sought shelter in the shade, ToRot continued weeding, or ploughing or cutting grass. The teachers and the other students admired him very much for his ability to work hard. Moreover, they talked of him as one who did not miss a working period in the whole time of his stay in the College. On Wednesday afternoons the catechists went to the beach to wash and fish. Some Saturday afternoons they worked in their private gardens.

Peter ToRot possessed a great love for prayer. He indicated his devotion by his deep respect and reverence in the Church, and by his constant thought of God. His manner of praying was singled out from

among his brother catechists. Apart from the community prayers ToRot loved private prayer. In his free time he would go to the Church to spend some time with his Master. Before and after games, work and class he visited the Blessed Sacrament. After meals he visited Our Lord to thank Him for the food he had eaten. Peter ToRot chose Our Blessed Lady to be his special patron in his life. Often he said his rosary and asked Mary to guide him in his study and work and protect him from temptations and dangers. ToRot was proud of his ability to pray but he never looked down on his colleagues. He saw the truth that he was just as weak as the rest of men are, and could not overcome his temptations and difficulties without Our Lord's grace. ToRot worked as if everything depended on him, and prayed as if everything depended on God. Frequently the young catechist received the Sacrament of Confession and he attended Mass and received Holy Communion daily.

ToRot threw himself into sport and enjoyed games with the others just as he gave himself fully to gardening or learning or praying or whatever he did. Sport is a good thing to refresh the mind and body of man. ToRot saw God's will in it and could not abuse it by avoiding it. He was punctual for it just like he was always punctual for the other different activities. In other forms of recreation Peter participated. However, sometimes when some of the students began to argue he would leave them.

In all these activities ToRot could not hide the peace and happiness in his own heart and mind. He expressed them in the many jokes he made up to make others feel good and happy and become normal again. On occasions two of his colleagues would start to argue bitterly; the peace maker would then apply the healing remedy of humour and crack a joke. The enemies then would laugh and forget their differences. The catechists and their teachers liked Peter ToRot very much and admired him for his good qualities.

One time during their recreation the trainees were walking along the road when an argument arose among them. One of them made the rest angry and they were determined to teach him a good lesson. They grabbed him and tied his hands and feet and left him in the middle of the road to suffer his penalty. ToRot saw what was happening and ran quickly into the bush to hide.

After the other catechists had gone he appeared and untied the bonds on the legs and hands of the bighead. ToRot kept close to him to defend him from the unkind remarks of the others until they stopped teasing him.

If he saw some catechists lonely or unhappy he would go to them and console them, talking to them gently and kindly. These people were not in a good mood and the temptation was to give up and run away from College. ToRot realized the danger and did not want it to happen. He wanted them all to complete their training well and become good and holy catechists dedicated to their vocation.

ToRot's teachers at Taliligap were: Fr Lakaff and Fr Culhane; Br Muller and Br Petri. These two brothers later died at Vunapope, the Catholic Mission Headquarters of the Rabaul Archdiocese. The priests died under the hands of the Japanese during the Second World War. Prior to that they worked separately in New Britain and New Ireland.



Staff and Students of Taliligap Catechist College.

CHAPTER III PETER TOROT AS A CATECHIST

ToRot was happy with his teachers and fellow catechists at St Paul's College, Taliligap and did not want to leave. He had just completed two and a half years training in all the sciences needed to help him become a learned and zealous leader of God's people when a request came from Rakunai.

Fr Laufer, the parish priest there needed a catechist to help him with the parish work. He asked Fr Joseph Theler who took over from Fr Lakaff as principal of St Paul's College for help. ToRot's studies had included a course in teaching, oratory, music and in particular singing, and art form which most Tolais love and are proud of. Because of his good reports, Fr Joseph Theler allowed and indeed assigned him to work under his own parish priest at Rakunai. Father blessed him and presented him his catechist medal and ToRot left to start his apostolic work.

At Rakunai Peter worked with two of the older catechists whom he respected and obeyed, as they were experienced men in their field. As the son of a luluai and one who had received better training than they, ToRot did not in any way disregard them or despise them. Nor was he proud of his deep knowledge. The people saw that ToRot was a wise man, a true and capable leader and a true servant, especially during the war after their parish priest had been arrested and taken prisoner by the Japanese. They were alone and ToRot offered his talents, time and knowledge to them. He respected them and helped them in their worries and difficulties.

Many times at night ToRot went to Fr Laufer and sought advice. The Priest and the catechist often discussed school matters, and the apostolate they were engaged in. Peter was not satisfied with the little knowledge he gained at Taliligap and so he was very interested to learn more things from Fr Laufer who was very learned himself.

ToRot spent most of his time teaching in the school. He taught the young men and women catechism, prayers and singing; he taught reading, writing, English and Arithmetic, which he had learnt during his studies. He loved teaching very much but sometimes the catechist was put to the test when Fr Laufer asked him to teach some students again after school was over. However, ToRot never said 'no', but willingly obeyed. Besides class Peter conducted the church choir, led prayers, instructed converts and preached to the people.

In the evenings and days on which he was free of teaching, ToRot went to the villages of the people to visit them, especially those who were sick. On Sundays when certain men and women did not show up for Mass, he would ask about them. Those who were sick he would immediately visit, and if they were very sick he gave them medicine and prayed with them.

ToRot only became angry when the people were not living up to their faith, when they stayed away from Sunday Mass for no good reason. The people understood him as a good shepherd caring for his sheep and preventing them from going astray. They listened to him and imitated his example. Tata who replaced ToPuia as luluai of Rakunai praised ToRot: "His example moved the hearts of many men and women to follow his true Christian way of life."



For those who had grown weary of the Church's obligations such as going to Mass on Sundays, and receiving the Sacraments, ToRot had deep sympathy. He sought them out and explained how much God loved them and how He was ever ready to forgive them when they repented. He brought back many lost sheep into Christ's sheepfold. He respected Fr Laufer and never had any bad will against him. At times the people tried to argue with Father on customs and beliefs but ToRot defended him and cleared up the misunderstandings according to the Church's teachings.

The people experienced the zealous catechist's kindness, gentleness and humility towards them. They listened and obeyed his teachings and instructions. An observer, ToUratun, said this about ToRot: "There was nobody to be compared to Peter ToRot. His knowledge was great and his manner was different from the ordinary people." ToRot felt and thought with the heart and mind of Christ, seeing Him in them and they in Him. There never came a sudden flash of anger from him. Many times the people argued among themselves and wanted to fight. ToRot pleaded with them and once more brought them to reconciliation. He was Christ's 'true instrument of peace' seeing that his people lived happily together.

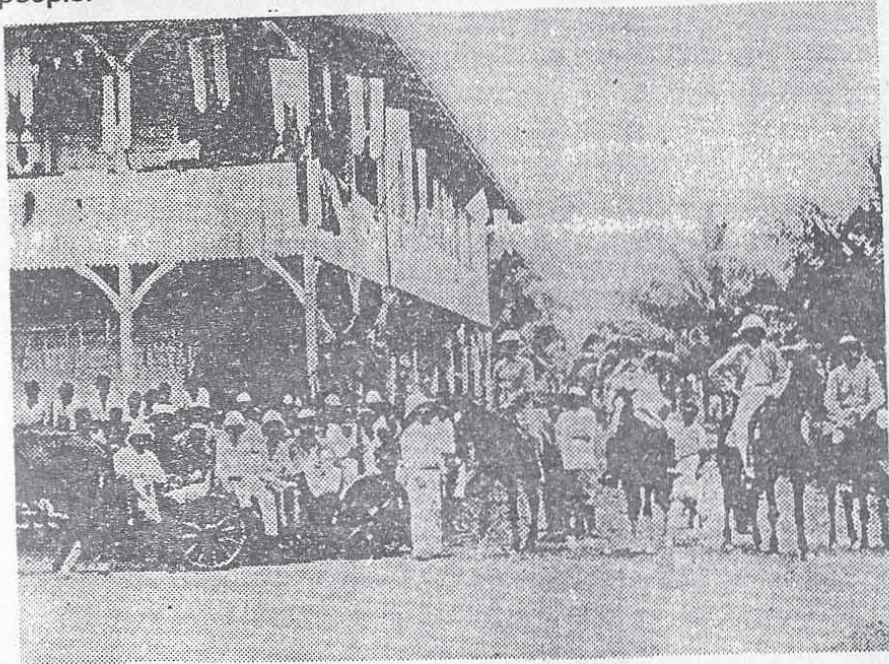
ToRot always followed his conscience when judging different people and things. He defended the Catholic faith and teachings against some of his local traditional rituals. On one occasion he received information that the people of Vunadidir, one of the four villages comprising the Parish of Rakunai, were smuggling certain elements for 'papait' or magic ritual into their village. One night ToRot went to the village with some men to search for the hidden magical material and destroy it because the Church had already forbidden it. He accused the men very severely by saying they were not true Christians yet. They pretended to be devoted Catholics by going to Mass on Sunday and by receiving the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, but back in their village they were acting as real pagans.

Fr Laufer was helped by the catechist ToRot to collect people's traditional dances and songs. They preserved some of them: (a lili, a etel, korkor, arumu, a kangal, a palara). They forbade others that were considered as being connected with pagan beliefs.

On September 14, 1937, his father ToPuia died. ToRot was worried about his own mother laTumul and cared for her. The former responsibilities of ToPuia in house affairs now had to be carried by ToRot.

ToRot's strong faith motivated him to his life of prayer. The communal prayers and hymns he had with his people and priest in Mass and his frequent communions were not sufficient. He believed that if he was to persevere successfully in his apostolate, especially after Fr Laufer had been removed from Rakunai, he had to be united with his Master, in an intimate relationship with Him. Therefore ToRot always prayed privately in the Church and in his home.

One of the older catechists, ToLabit said: "All of us were familiar with ToRot's character. He was very humble and he possessed a burning love for Christ in the Eucharist". When the Japanese first arrived to arrest the parish priest of Rakunai, Fr Laufer did not remove the consecrated hosts from the tabernacle in the Church because he thought that he would come back very soon. Peter feared that the Japanese might return and ruin the tabernacle. He took the ciborium of hosts from it and brought them into his house, and lit a lamp and put it near the ciborium. He prepared the people well for receiving Our Lord. He wrapped the two fingers he used for holding the hosts with a piece of clean white cloth because he feared holding them with his bare fingers. Then he distributed the host to the people.



Bishop G. Vesters (1923 - 1939) visits Catechist College.

CHAPTER IV

PETER TOROT A MARRIED MAN

Paula laVarpit became the wife of Peter ToRot. She was born at Ramalmal Catholic Mission on June 27, 1920. laVarpit was a pretty woman and she completed her schooling at Rakunai, the original home of her mother. ToRot was teaching at Rakunai and his future wife was one of his students. The bride price was paid and the news spread that laVarpit would be the catechist's wife. On November 11, 1963, ToRot and laPaula were married at Rakunai Church.

The love laPaula had for ToRot was definite even when he was still teaching her. She studied hard and did not miss school or waste time during class. Sometimes she failed to pay attention in class but the teacher did not spare her. He gave her the usual punishment of kneeling down on the cement.

The young couple prepared well for their marriage and after their wedding they lived very happily together. laPaula was broken-hearted when her loving husband was killed. She promised that she would not marry again and gave her reason: "I do not think I will ever find another man as great and loving as my late Peter ToRot". Later after the war, laVarpit changed her mind to marry another husband. She was still young and beautiful and their two children were still very young. No one objected to her decision.



We must not think that ToRot's marriage was different and joyous all the time. No, the difficulties and hardships which marriage brings, set into his marriage sometimes. His wife told an instance of this: "in the first few months that we lived together, we used to argue a lot. I was the cause because of my disobedience and laziness in doing certain things. Once only in our whole life my husband gave me a solid beating because I refused to weave mats from coconut leaves for our kitchen".

In relating the incident laVarpit laughed; she knew her mistake and did not want to blame ToRot. She was proud and boasted of the fact that her husband beat her only once. This meant that laVarpit herself learnt quickly from it and subjected as his obedient wife from then on.

ToRot loved this wife very much and respected her. He listened to her complaints and was kind and helpful to her in every way, particularly when she became sick. The two of them prayed together in the morning before they started their work and at night before they slept. ToRot revealed his thoughts and worries to laPaula, especially during the Japanese occupation of Rabaul when most people forgot the Church. His own brother Tatamai was not on his side.

The catechist found comfort and support from his wife who listened to him and shared his feelings in the time of crisis. Occasionally laPaula feared that her husband's labour as a catechist might bring harm to his own life and to his family as well. ToRot's only reply to these fears was: "That is none of your business to stop me from my work. It is only fitting that I suffer and die for the sake of the kingdom and my people". ToRot dearly loved his wife and two cute little children. But in his mind, God was always his first thought above them all.

On December 5, 1939, laVarpit gave birth to their first child, a baby boy. They named him Andrew ToPuia, his surname being his grandfather's name. ToBurangan, a close friend of ToRot said: "ToRot loved his family and often prayed for them, especially the first born son, Andrew ToPuia. He carried him in his arms and played with him. ToRot did not let laPaula be burdened with their kids by herself alone all the time.

The Japanese had already occupied the Rabaul region by the time ToRot's wife delivered their second child. This time, it was a girl whom they named Rufina laMama. She is still alive today but her brother ToPuia died when he was six years old. The third child was born after ToRot was killed, but shortly after the successful delivery the baby died.

Everyone was aware that ToRot respected marriage very much. As a Sacrament or meeting with Christ, ToRot in his preaching compared the union of husband and wife to that of Christ and the Church. While still a

single man ToRot had often defended matrimony. He straightened out broken marriages and prevented others from breaking up. As a married man he continued his teaching and work with married people. He led a noble chaste life and avoided circumstances that would upset and embarrass his holy married life. He encouraged other married couples and advised those who were to be married on the true meaning of married life. His own example inspired many to be faithful to one another.

Tarve the luluai of Navunaram and uncle of Peter ToRot commented on his nephew's tremendous reverence towards marriage: "The firm belief and stability in his marriage caused the catechist to defend the Church's teaching on marriage. "During the war when there was no priest among the people ToRot spoke in the name of the Church and condemned the practice of polygamy, the practice of having more than one wife at a time. The Japanese encouraged this practice and some local people became excited about it. ToRot strongly went against it and even forced men to stick to their lawful wives. As a result he was imprisoned and killed on the issue, but he loved God more than his own life, wife and children.



CHAPTER V PETER TOROT A TRUE LEADER AND GUARDIAN

In 1942 the Japanese landed in New Britain. Bishop Leo Scharmach of Rabaul had transferred Fr Laufer from Rakunai to Vunapope to teach in the Seminary at Kiniginuan, near Vunapope. Fr A. Wendl replaced him. He stayed in Tavuilu to look after both parishes, Rakunai and Tavuilu.

The Japanese kept the missionaries at Vunapope and there was no more schooling in Kiniginuan. Fr Laufer asked the Japanese for a special identification card so that he could return to Rakunai. However, it was not long afterwards that the Japanese Navy took over from the army in Rabaul and Fathers Laufer and Wendl and the Sisters staying in Tavuilu were all sent by the navy to Vunapope prison camp. The people were deserted without a spiritual leader.

Before being interned, Fr Laufer called Peter ToRot and solemnly commissioned him to look after the people of God. Realising his great responsibility the catechist promised to do his best.

The people of Rakunai and their catechist ToRot were very sorry to lose their parish priest.

ToRot courageously raised his voice among his people and said, "If there is no priest the catechist must be the pastor to care for the sheepfold of Jesus". His pity for the people, especially those who were suffering from sickness, imprisonment by the Japanese, anxieties and worries from the fighting, sprang up from his deep faith and confidence in God. ToRot was not thinking of his own relatives and clan members only. He felt that everyone needing help was a son of God and brothers of Jesus and needed his help as he was now taking the place of the priest. He believed that if he did not fulfil his task faithfully God would judge him for it later when he died.

ToRot did not have any ill-feeling or hatred towards the Japanese, nor did he act foolishly to rouse their anger. Some nights he used to go to them to talk over Church instruction, just like he did to Fr Laufer. Such meetings also gave ToRot a chance to learn the Japanese language. Every Sunday, ToRot called the people for "Lotu", the prayer service. He led prayers and hymns, read the Gospel and gave a sermon. On week days he taught the children in school. He baptized new born babies and witnessed the marriages of young couples. Those who died from bombs, or from natural causes, had their burial services conducted by Peter ToRot. Many times he urged the men to follow him to Bitagalip, near

Vunapope for Confession and Holy Communion from Fr Junemann. At Bitagalip the priest had escaped Japanese arrest. Many men followed ToRot to receive the Sacraments.

By the end of 1942 the catehist saw that things would get worse and he, therefore, asked the people to transfer goods from the Church and Father's house and hide them in their homes, for the Japanese would soon raid homes and houses. The year was not over and the enemy had pulled down two buildings. They made smaller houses from them, which they set up all over the place in the bushes. ToRot urged the men to build a "Kunai" house out of bush materials at Palnalama, a short distance away from the Mission ground. It was completed quickly and ToRot used it to teach his students. These activities he continued as if Fr Laufer was still with him. The people praised him for his wonderful organization and work.

The Japanese forced the people from their homes. The people fled and lived in houses and tunnels. On Sundays only did they assemble at Palnalama for lotu, for prayers and hymn - singing conducted by Peter ToRot. Soon afterwards the Japanese found out about the Sunday lotu service. They forbade it and the kunai house at Palnalama was left desolate. It was only used once and that was in 1943, on Christmas night.



The difficulties caused ToRot to make newer plans for the apostolate. He moved around to the different places in the bush where the people took refuge to visit them. He strengthened their faith in Christ Jesus and in the kingdom of God. He encouraged them not to lose faith in God and to keep the teachings of the Church. Whenever ToRot found a person sick he prayed with him or her. If another he found dying, he prepared him well for a happy death. When he received news that someone had died, he left quickly to perform the burial service.

Later the Japanese again found out that the catechist was still continuing with Church services. They tried to definitely put an end to them by ordering ToRot to stop the prayer meetings. He ignored their command, but took care to carry out his apostolate in the night time only because he did not want to provoke the Japanese. He did not want any spy to catch him in his catechetical work. That would mean a report back to the Japanese and ToRot would be severely punished for disobeying the command. but ToRot's guiding thought to continue preaching the good news was Our Lord's first and greatest commandment: "You must love God with your whole heart, mind and soul, and your neighbour as I have loved you". This conviction pushed ToRot to continue his duty in spite of the difficulties and dangers he faced. He said. "If I die, it will be for God's sake alone. (Tumu ina virua, ina ga virua upi Deo ko).

Some days ToRot went secretly all the way to Vunapope to bring Our Blessed Lord in the consecrated hosts back to Rakunai. He distributed the hosts to the aged, the sick and the dying people. On these days too, he asked the faithful living around his home to come to adoration - to meditate and recite prayers and sing hymns before the Blessed Sacrament.

Today, witnesses of ToRot agree that in his catechetical labour, ToRot did not only concentrate on his own village, Rakunai. His work extended and he visited his brother catechists and their people of the other villages of Vunalaka, Vunavidir and Nangnangunan or Raluan No. 2, as it is known today. These villages together with Rakunai village make up the parish of Rakunai Roman Catholic Mission. On such visits ToRot encouraged the people to live their faith. He baptized babies and gave marriage instructions before legally witnessing marriages. Tolura, the catechist of Vunavidir or Kadakada, related that afterwards the fighting between the Japanese and the Allies became so fierce at times that not many people walked around very much. At such times ToRot sent letters to the other three villages to let the people know how the fighting was going on.

We are delighted when we learn of ToRot looking after his people during the dire time of war, and are more surprised when we hear of his generosity and kindness to prisoners kept in jail by the Japanese.

ToRot did not forget his confessor in Vunapope prison camp. During the night he went to the village among the people to beg eggs, fowls and available foodstuff. Secretly during the day he brought these to Fr Laufer and the other needy missionaries at Vunapope. Numerous bombers continually flew over Vunapope and dropped bombs. As a consequence the missionaries were transferred to a new camp site at Ramale, about five miles from Vunapope. ToRot heard of the transfer and his heart was deeply moved with pity for the starving priests, brothers and sisters who were mostly Europeans. More than ever he urged his people to contribute foodstuffs as well as blankets and other clothings. ToRot asked for the loan of an army truck from the Japanese and soon the vehicle was heading for Ramale concentration camp fully loaded with pawpaws, bananas, pineapples, fowls, eggs and numerous other types of food, as well as much clothing.

It was a great sadness for Peter and his people when the transport reached Ramale, for the Japanese police confiscated the goods. The food and clothing never reached the prisoners.

On Christmas day of 1944, Peter ToRot received word that four M.S.C. nuns had just arrived in Vunaiara in Navunaram. He left at once to visit them. There he found the four of them: Sr Dorothy, Sr Gertrude, Sr Helena and Sr Lucia. The Japanese arrested the sisters at St Paul's Bainings, and were escorting them to Ramale. Here at Vunaiara, where another prison was set up, the convoy rested after the long walk from the Bainings. ToRot gave the sisters food to eat and asked the people to give them whatever help they needed. Sr Gertrude later talked of the experience: "We stayed for seventeen days at Vunaiara and did not run short of food, soap and medicine. Every day of our stay the people came there to supply us. Before we left, our donation was already too much for us so that it could be given out to other more needy people as well". At last they left for Ramale Concentration Camp. ToRot passed his regards to Fr Laufer through them. He also gave them the record of his work to be delivered to Fr Laufer: the number of marriages, deaths and baptism services he had conducted during Father's absence.

At Vunalaka Village the Japanese kept some Indonesian soldiers. When ToRot heard that they were being starved by their captors, he killed chickens, dressed them and roasted them. He brought them with other kinds of food to the soldiers to eat. They were very happy and thanked him

for his generosity and kindness. The Indonesian soldiers became very sorry when they received news that Peter ToRot was assassinated by the Japanese at Navunaram, because they liked him very much.



MSC and OLSH Sisters leaving Ramale Camp.

CHAPTER VI

TOROT DEFENDS MARRIAGE

Just like the rest of his people, ToRot was a firm believer in the Sacrament of Matrimony. It was respected as something holy and noble even when there was no priest among the people. Married couples remained faithful to each other and others wanting to be married came to ToRot for him to witness their bond of love and ask for God's blessing.

The Japanese administration in Rabaul offset the harmony of Christian marriage. The whole issue was complicated - it provided the main cause for Peter ToRot's martyrdom. When the Japanese took control of Rabaul they established their government known as Minzebu. One of the Minzebu administrators was a certain man called Kueka who was posted at Vunakalkalulu, on the north coast of Rabaul. Vunakalkalulu was the place where the most important chief, or nabawan luluai, ToPoe, presided over court cases and gave decisions for the people. During the war, however, ToPoe himself was appointed by the Japanese as one of their judges.

In the month of June, 1942, Kueka called all the luluais of that area together for a meeting. Two of ToRot's luluais also attended this meeting. They were ToLapar, the luluai of Nangnangunan and ToVue, the luluai of Vunalaka. During the meeting, Kueka told the luluais that it would be a better thing for the men to marry a second wife. Some luluais silently favoured the idea and did not give their views on it. ToLapar, however, strongly opposed Kueka, and ToVue backed him up. The news went around and some men gave into the temptation when the pagan way of marriage was encouraged. They were weakened because there were no more masses, confessions and communions to strengthen the people against such a powerful challenge. ToRot heard of Kueka's unscrupulous decision and thought to himself: "Now the time has come for me to stand up for the faith of my people, to fight this pagan decision and defend Christ's Sacrament of Marriage, even if it means losing my life".

The first man to take advantage of Kueka's decision was ToM....., a police boy working for the Japanese at Vunaiara. He was not a Catholic, nor was he from Rakunai. ToM attempted to abduct laMentil, a Catholic woman and wife of ToVinau. ToPlangia, a Methodist and father of laMentil, together with Peter ToRot prevented laMentil from unlawfully marrying the police boy. This incident happened to be the first weapon used against Peter ToRot and his catechetical work among the people of God.

A couple of other men took advantage of Kueka's evil order. They were ToKabang, the 'tultul' or messenger of ToLapar, the luluai of Raluna No. 2, and ToA, the tultul of the luluai of Rakunai village. ToRot, ToLapar and Tarue, the luluai of Navunaram, charged the two tultuls for illegally running away with two married women. They persuaded them to give up the women because such an action was immoral. It was against God's law and the teachings of Mother Church to run away with somebody else's wife. The men deliberately ignored what the catechist and the luluais were trying to explain.

Tarue lived close by the police depot at Vunaiara. He reported that the men intended to have second wives firstly approached ToM to present their requests to the police master Meshida. The men received approval this way because they knew that ToM had a strong desire for laMentil and that he had hatred for ToRot who went against the practice.

ToRot was much more careful in his apostolate. Undoubtedly he realised that if the enemy caught him at his duty and reported him he would be killed. Meshida had ordered a halt to Church worship, and Kueka had allowed polygamy. He went against these two pagan edicts. He explained: "I am not a bad shepherd who runs away from his flock once a wolf appears. The good shepherd remains to protect his sheep and is even prepared to lay down his life for them. The hired shepherd deserts the sheep because they do not really belong to him".

ToRot did not act in a harsh way by rejecting or by hating the people who had contracted these marriages. No unkind remarks of criticism or condemnation came forth from his mouth. However, he was not silent in the affair; with the mouth of John the Baptist, ToRot reminded them: you must not marry your brother's wife (Koka una al pa ra vavina kai turam). ToM kept thinking of marrying laMentil and told Meshida about it. Meshida sent for the woman, her husband ToVinau and her maternal uncle ToPlangia, since he was a police boy also. The police master tied ToVinau to a pawpaw tree and after two days punishment he was released.

The news of ToVinau's punishment reached the catechist of Rakunai. He sent word for laMentil at Navunaram to come to Rakunai. ToRot together with the traditional chief or luluai Tata, advised laMentil to obey God in the Sacrament of Marriage: that she should remain faithful to her true husband ToVinau, and not consent to ToM's seduction to marry him. The advisors feared a forced marriage between laMentil and ToM if laMentil returned to Navunaram. They asked her to remain at Rakunai for

a while until ToM's passion for marriage had calmed down. It became apparent to ToM that ToRot was the cause of his failure to marry laMentil.

The luluai of Rakunai, Tata, in spite of his great defence of marriage with ToRot, nearly betrayed himself. He wanted to have a second wife also. ToRot rebuked him for it and pointed out the great scandal he would bring to the people. Tata admitted his wrong intention and praised the catechist: "ToRot did not respect me, nor was he afraid of me. He strongly persuaded me to give up this woman and come back to the true faith". Today Tata still exalts ToRot: "He was an excellent man, and very holy. ToRot was not worrying so much about a man's bodily care but his soul: that is why he was not fearful in the eyes of the rich or the luluai".

What about his own elder brother J. Tatamai who was tempted to divorce his wife and have a different partner, we might ask? Did ToRot say anything about it? Was he silent? Not at all. ToRot faced up to Tatamai. When his brother defied his advice, he forced him to leave their home, Taogo. A Japanese spy confirmed that Tatamai went to Navunaram to ToM and reported on his brother. ToM saw Meshida about ToRot's strong anti-feelings about polygamy.

Tatamai never turned out to be a bad man altogether. Afterwards he returned to Taogo and lived happily again with his real wife laTili. When the Australian government paid money compensation to the people for "war damage", Tatamai freely handed his whole share to his parish priest. It showed his sorrow and repentance for his sins and weaknesses during the war. He was more sorry for his disloyalty to his brother who represented Christ among them during the crisis. After confession he lived a happy married life until about eleven years ago when his wife laTili died.

When the people heard that their catechist ToRot had been arrested, they rightly concluded that it was because of his strong opposition to polygamy. If he was only reported on leading church services, he would never have been arrested and killed. And today, of course, ToRot would still be an active catechist helping in the spiritual needs of his people.

One of the older catechists, ToLabit, agreed that ToRot was reported and arrested because of the marriage issue. The tultul, ToKabang, who ran away with another man's wife, came to ToLabit and told him to stop Church worship and preaching to the people. A few days later, the Japanese military police arrested ToLabit and another catechist, ToVema, and gave them a sound warning: "If you two do not stop leading the people for prayers and rituals, we will put you in jail and execute you". They were released and it was obvious that the local police boys or spies had reported them.

It is not surprising that the military police often called ToRot to court. He was the only catechist who wilfully refused to accept the Japanese edict: there were to be no more prayers, baptisms, marriages and men could take more than one wife if they wanted to. However, ToRot intended to continue with Christ's teaching until he died.

The policies of the Japanese administration were not the same throughout the whole of the Gazelle Peninsula. On the north coast near Rabaul, at Volavolo and the surrounding places near Rabaul town, the Japanese forbade the catechists and the Methodist ministers to function among the people in their apostalate. In Reimber, Rakunai and Tavuilu they were not forbidden, except for Peter ToRot. It must, therefore, be a fact that he was secretly reported, arrested and killed.



CHAPTER VII

PETER TOROT DEFENDS THE CHURCH

The Japanese military police called ToRot many times to court for conducting religious services. The first call occurred after the Japanese had stayed in Rabaul for a short while. The luluai Tata accompanied ToRot to Rabaul during the first court hearing. ToRot was asked if he was conducting religious services with the people. ToRot honestly admitted that he was.



ToKeto helped ToRot in the first court case. ToKeto came from Matupit Island, near Rabaul. He studied in the Seminary and knew how to speak English. When the Japanese first arrived in Rabaul he met them and introduced himself as the luluai of the Tolais. His intention was to help his people against the cruelty of the Japanese. In the Kempitai camp, ToKeta was employed by the Japanese police as an interpreter; and he also knew the language fluently.

Later ToKeta became the chief interpreter and middle-man in transactions between the Japanese and the Tolais. Often he was the interpreter in the many court cases that were held. He instructed his own people in what to say and often succeeded in having them released or receiving only a slight sentence. ToKeta, as he won favour with the Chief of Kempitai, was feared by some of the Japanese soldiers. Sometimes he would punish Japanese who stole food or chickens from the local people.

In ToRot's first court case, ToKeta was the interpreter when ToRot was questioned about the religious services he held with the people. ToKeta helped him and told him what to say in court. ToRot was allowed to return to Rakunai as the edict banning all religious services had not been made yet.

The Japanese did not definitely forbid Church worship, but only made it conditional. The people were to gather only in the morning for their service and in small groups. This was due to the constant sudden bombing of the Rabaul region by the Allies.

ToRot led his people in Church services on Sundays at Palnalama. The attendance was small since only the Rakunai villagers came. The Sunday services were held only in the morning.

The allied air forces continued to bomb the Japanese positions in Rabaul excessively. A second time ToRot and his luluai Tata were summoned to court. They did not go to Rabaul this time, but to Rakakalok or Ramata (Tunnel Hill) where the Rabaul Observatory stands today. The Japanese police asked Tata if ToRot was a catechist and was continuing to lead the people for religious services. Tata agreed and the Japanese told them that from that day onwards there were to be no more religious services. "The Christian Church is causing this war to drag on- it cannot finish quickly", the police told Tata and ToRot. The Japanese thought that the local people were praying to God and asking Him to push them out of New Britain. In reply to this ToRot gave them a distinct explanation. "The Church and the war are two completely different things. The Church will not interfere with your war, but will strengthen the people in this time of fighting to obey you..." The police interrupted his talk and told him to keep

quiet. "No more Church services are to be held starting from today", they told him.

Tata and ToRot returned to Rakunai. ToRot regarded the Japanese command as against God's law. He did not accept it and continued his spiritual activities. At the same time he did not want to cause any harm to his people from the Japanese. He told his people: "We are being forbidden by the Japanese to continue with any kind of religious services, but I must fulfil my duty as a catechist."

The catechist no longer gave his instructions, classes and prayer services in the kunai house at Palnalama. With the help of Tata and other men, a cave was dug and prepared in his own home Taogo. The cave was divided into three sections, and the people had to be gathered into three groups in order to use the three chambers for their prayer meetings. ToRot himself took care of one of the chambers. he also visited the other two and in this manner he was able to help the three groups of people in their "lotu". He continued to teach children in one of the chambers.

To Rot advised his people: "You must all pray everyday, but only in the morning and inside the caves". In making such a warning. ToRot was thinking of the continual bombing of the area. He also remembered the numerous spies working for the Japanese; they roamed the countryside like hungry wolves to catch any religious sects practising their beliefs and reported them to the military police.

The catechist himself was even more careful. The police boys and others whom he confronted for wanting more than one wife, watched him very carefully in order to catch him at his work and report him.

Meshida, the police master in charge of the Vunaiara Japanese military police depot, called the leaders - luluais - together for a meeting. To them the police master issued the edict which said that all religious ceremonies must stop. ToRot and his brother Tatamai went along to the meeting and listened in silence. Later Tatamai reported that every single luluai in the meeting consented to Meshida's announcement, except Peter ToRot who kept silent. The brothers returned to Rakunai and ToRot told the people: "I will neither leave you nor ignore you. You must come in the morning only." Strong in his belief that he should obey God rather than man, ToRot went quietly about his duties. However, his activities could not be hidden.

Then came ToRot's third call to go to court. It came from Rabaul Japanese Police. ToRot and Tata went to Rabaul but on the way they were met by American bombers. The two men took cover, and did not go to Rabaul, but returned to Rakunai.

The catechist Tolura related that the Japanese thought that ToRot was the leader of all the other catechists in the area. On one occasion the Japanese police called all the luluais together for a court hearing. The police also sent a letter to ToRot asking him to bring the other catechists along with him for the court case. Since ToRot knew the Japanese tongue, the Japanese questioned him in Japanese. ToKeta, the interpreter, acted as a go-between the Japanese and the other catechists. Sometimes ToRot went to court by himself. One time he did not return after going to court. He told Tatamai later that he was forced by Japanese to dig a cave and thus he was not able to return.

ToRot was called before the court many times. His enemies could not suppress his faith and confidence in God. He knew of the dangers he faced day and night in his apostolate. ToRot had been warned that he would be executed if caught conducting religious services. But the catechist had no fear of suffering or death: "I have to fulfil my duty as a Church witness of Christ Jesus". He encouraged the people to say their prayers and the Rosary privately in their homes, in family groups or individually. ToRot himself visited the sick secretly and at night prayed over the dead. During the day they were buried without any prayers.

A man, ToLoio, the brother of ToBunangan, came back to Rakunai from Toma area of the Gazelle Peninsula with a serious sickness. He was working for the Japanese when he became sick and died soon afterwards. ToRot asked the people not to talk about him. They buried him at Tavulabung cemetery, near Rakunai Mission Station, without saying any prayers over him. They prayed for him privately in their homes.

One thing which ToRot did not forget and stop doing until his final arrest before his death, was the Sunday service. In spite of the numerous warnings and dangers of being spied upon, ToRot continued to call the people for the special service. He was the only catechist left after all his other brother catechists had stopped holding Sunday "lotu".

Tolura talked to ToRot saying that on these occasions when the fighting became fiercer, and he could not visit him and his people at Kadakada, he used to send letters. In them he encouraged Tolura to be more concerned with the sick and the dying. Tolura was to pray with them and help them to make a good act of contrition before they died. ToRot even informed Tolura not to bring the people together for prayers in one group. He was to divide them into smaller groups as he had done with the people at Rakunai.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER TOROT IS BETRAYED

Up until now ToRot had continued working as a catechist in spite of the edict, but only tried to do so more secretly in the tunnels. To ensure that all their orders were enforced the Japanese employed local people as police boys or spies. One of these spies, ToM spied on ToRot and heard that he was officiating at marriages. He informed the Japanese and ToRot was arrested and imprisoned at last.

The Japanese feared the God whom the people worshipped. They commanded the local people to stop praying to Him. ToM, whom ToRot had prevented earlier from unlawfully marrying laMentil, was still burning with anger and hatred for ToRot. As a spy he saw the Japanese edict as an opportunity to punish ToRot and take his revenge.

Every single Sunday ToM, would come to Palnalama where ToRot's kunai house for prayer and study stood, and patrol its surrounding bushes. But ToRot had stopped using the buliding for preaching and teaching as he was secretly carrying them out in the tunnels at Taogo.



Peter ToRot's wife, la Paula, holding picture of her husband.

One Sunday morning, the catechist officiated at two marriages in the caves. The married partners were: ToRuga and laTeret, and ToLauren and laPraide. About midday the catechist Tolura arrived from Kadkada bringing another couple, ToMetin and laMaul to be married by ToRot also. ToRot was angry with them because they came at the wrong time. He thought of the spies who were on duty. Tolura should have come in the morning with the couple. However, ToRot could not send them back since they had come a long way; the marriage took place.

It was while they were on their way to find ToRot that Tolura and the young couple met ToM on the road. ToM was on his usual Sunday mission. "A bona Keake" (Good day), the spy greeted them; "Where are you going?" ToLura replied: "To Peter ToRot to witness a marriage". Imagine how delighted the traitor was. Soon after receiving the information he wanted the police boy, ToM, returned immediately to Vunaiaara. He reported the incident to Meshida, the police master. Of course the catechist and the young couple did not know that ToM was one of the spies used to enforce the Japanese edict, and that in particular he was spying on ToRot.

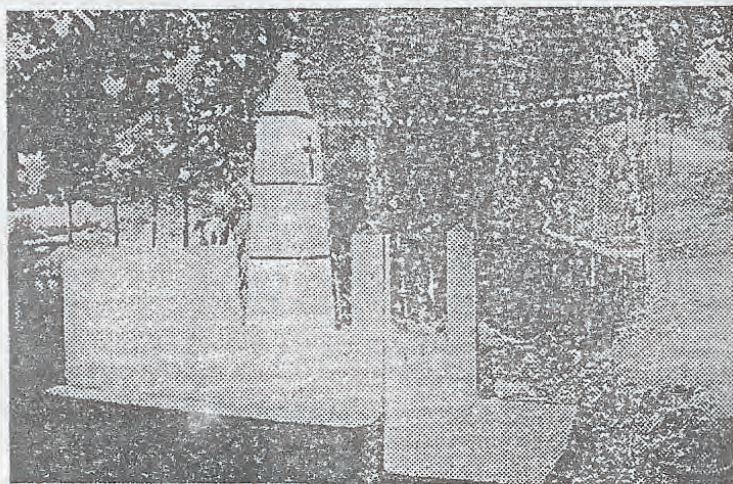
The next day, on Monday morning, Tolnui was sent from Navunaram by Meshida to bring Tatamai to Vunaiaara. Meshida questioned the brother of ToRot. "Is it true that ToRot conducted lotu yesterday for the people?" "It is true", replied Tatamai. "Did you take part in the service?" was Meshida's second question. "Yes" Tatamai replied shortly. Thirdly Meshida asked him, "Did you know that your brother was not to hold any more religious services?" Tatamai again said "yes" to the Police Master's question. Then Meshida hit his head strongly with a piece of stick and sentenced him to one month's jail.

After Tatamai's court hearing, Meshida and ToM left for Taogo, ToRot's home. They raided the cave where ToRot conducted his religious services and the houses of the three brothers - ToRot, Tatamai and Telo as well. They broke their suitcases and took different articles. Meshida took ToRot's books: a bible, a catechism book and two register books - one for marriages and the other for baptisms. He also took his two crucifixes. From Tatamai's house the police master and his police boy took a rain coat. In Telo's house Meshida found an Australian bank book and added it to his collection. They also saw Australian money in the houses of Telo and Tatamai.

After the raid Meshida and ToM called for ToRot who was working close to Taogo for some Japanese soldiers in the garden. He was planting kaukau, taros, bananas and tapioca. As he arrived, they forced him to carry the different things they had confiscated and follow them to Vunaiaara for a court hearing. Telo was left behind as he was sick and could not accompnny his brother ToRot.

At about 2.00 pm the convoy reached Vunaiaara. Meshida told ToRot to follow him into the cave for questioning. Meanwhile Tatamai remained outside listening. Meshida asked the catechist: "Did you conduct a lotu service yesterday?" ToRot admitted fearlessly that he did. With a piece of stick the police master began to strike him hard on the head and continued hitting him from his chest to his throat. He then sentenced him to two month's imprisonment.

After serving his jail sentence (although he was never to be freed alive) ToRot told his uncle Tarue about the hearing preceding his imprisonment. He narrated: "Firstly I was asked about the religious rituals I held with the people. Then I was questioned about my attempt to stop men marrying more than one wife. The second charge was the major cause of my arrest and jail because it gave support to the first charge". ToRot told his wife laPaula the same details he related to his uncle on the day he was arrested and questioned. But he added: "In today's hearing I was on my own. Neither Tata nor ToKeta came with me to defend and help me out of jail".



Monument erected by the Tolai people near the place where Peter ToRot was imprisonment and murdered by the Japanese.

According to Tarue, if it was not for the second charge on ToRot's opposition to Kueka's idea of having two wives, ToRot would not have been put into jail. Meshida imprisoned him and refused to free him in order to please his helpers, the police boys. ToRot's last arrest occurred at the beginning of 1945. After the court hearing, he was locked for the day inside a dungeon in the centre of the cave where the court cases were held. His brother Telo was later sent for, charged with spying for the Australians, since Meshida found an Australian bank book in his house. For his penalty he was tied to a pawpaw tree and bashed up very severely until he became unconscious. The beating was so harsh that Telo was weakened for the rest of his life. Telo was never a spy for the Australians at all. Tatamai was also charged with prssessing Australian money, but he was not puschished.

In the evening the guards let ToRot out of the dungeon to rest for a while outside the cave. After working Tatamai came to him and the brothers talked together. ToRot said to him: "It is bad for a person to die from a bomb or machine gun fire, but it is good to die for the sake of the kingdom of God. His reward in heaven will be greater".



Many different people were confused as to why ToRot was apprehended and put in prison. ToRot's uncle Tarue thought that the Australian money Meshida found in his nephew's houses was the cause. He came to the prisoner one evening and tried to find out. ToRot explained to him: "I was not accused of keeping money but because I was holding Church services. My brothers were accused for keeping Australian money in their houses. I am in jail now because of my work for God. I am not afraid and I will not give up God, and my work for Him, and follow man's decision. Even now I know that the Japanese will not let me out alive. I know their manner of punishment and they will certainly kill me". Tarue went to Meshida and pleaded with him for the release of ToRot. Meshida agreed that he would let him out later. It was a lie, for ToRot was never released from prison until he was murdered.

In the prison cell ToRomano, a catechist from Malagunan who went to jail before him asked Peter why he was in jail. ToRot answered him: "I witnessed marriages and conducted prayer services with people".

Another two prisoners. ToVarmai and ToBinabak, both Methodists, were sent to jail after ToRot had been placed in prison; they asked the spies why ToRot was kept in prison. They told them that ToRot had been jailed for keeping the Church active and alive at Rakunai in spite of the Japanese warnings and edicts.

The people of Vunalaka Village heard about ToRot's arrest and imprisonment. They gave many different opinions on the issue. Some thought that he would be emancipated very soon because he befriended many Japanese soldiers who were not policemen. They became doubtful about this when they heard that Tatamai too had been placed in prison. The people also heard of ToM whom they had heard of and seen roaming about in ToRot's former preaching place at Palnalama. They suspected rightly that he must have spied on ToRot's work and informed the Japanese police. ToUvave, the Catechist of Vunalaka, said that if there had not been the positive encouragement to marry several wives, there would have not been any opposition from ToRot and today he would still be alive.

A month lapsed and Tatamai was released from jail. The Rakunai chief, Tata, went to Meshida at Vunaiara and asked him if ToRot could also be freed from prison. Meshida replied: "This ToRot is a real bad man. He forbade the marriages of two wives and called the people together for lotu because he likes praying a lot. Do you know that ToRot is a real bad man?" Tata denied that ToRot was a bad man. His request was useless.

CHAPTER IX

PETER TOROT PREPARED FOR HIS DEATH

Before his murder, ToRot had to serve a jail sentence first at Vunaiara prison. The jail house was a small bush hut with kunai roof and was built in a small valley. It was built above ground level and had a verandah. The hut could hold eight people. At the back of the bush hut stood a small kitchen, also made out of bush material.

The Japanese police station stood opposite the prison, about seven yards away. It was another kunai house. Under the building was the cave in which court cases were held. ToRot was also charged in his last court hearing in the same court. The tunnel was hidden from the air. ToRot served his first day of imprisonment in the cave and later was killed in it too. On a small hill overlooking the police station and the prison cell stood the house of Tarue, the luluai of Navunaram and uncle of ToRot. During their sentence ToRot and Tatamai built a pig fence for the Japanese and cared for the swine. Later ToRot was appointed to cook for the prisoners and he stayed at home. Tatamai did some gardening and planted bananas, kaukau, yams and other garden crops for the Japanese and the prisoners. Telo, after the harsh lashing, became very weak and could not do any hard labour.

The police station and the prison were surrounded by banana trees. Relatives and friends who came to visit the prisoners feared the Japanese policemen and their spies whom they called 'police boys' and never came to the cave. The visitors and the prisoners only met in the banana field or in Tarue's home.

After the first day of imprisonment in the dungeon, ToRot was transferred to the small bush hut where he remained for several months. His relatives and friends came to visit him very often, especially his mother, laTumul and his wife laPaula. They visited him every day to bring him cooked food and to talk to him. ToRot was arrested and thrown into jail in the beginning of 1945.

On one such visit his sister laVarpilak, his sister-in-law laTali (the wife of Tatamai) and his mother laTumul arrived and saw the three brothers near the prison cell sitting around a fire warming themselves. The sight was so pathetic for their mother that she began weeping bitterly. ToRot tried to console her: "Mother, do not cry; pray because I am in prison for a good purpose. These two are here because money was found in their houses." ToRot imagined that the money charge was not serious and so the Japanese would let his brothers out of prison afterwards. He turned

to his mother and said: "Maybe all of you will be arrested very soon also so that all of us can be in prison together".

The relatives came back another day with payments for the release of Telo. Meshida consented and let him free since he was very weak and could do no heavy work.

ToRot himself tried to pay for his own release so that he could return to his wife and children. He sent his brother Telo to Vunavidir or Kadakada to ask for presents from the catechist Tolura. Telo came back to Vunaiaara bringing with him fowls, eggs and some garden foodstuff. However, Meshida would not let ToRot leave prison.

A month had passed and Meshida released Tatamai from jail. Torot thought that he would leave prison too. However, he soon realized that there was no more hope for his survival and said: "I am now certain that I will be killed." He did not give up the faith, nor his trust in God's providence. He did not deny it or weaken it by giving any false excuse so that he could be freed from jail.

Luisa laKatai (now Sr M. Adriana F.M.I.) often visited ToRot at Vunaiaara. In his arrest before jail ToRot told: "I will be jailed for the sake of the Church." Now that he had spent a long time in jail, the catechist pleaded with her again: "I will lay down my life for the sake of the Kingdom. Please, tell my people to pray for me." Another day again ToRot told the future nun: "If the Japanese ask about the cave, tell them that it was I who led prayers and Church services for the people, and taught the children in it. Even if I am already dead, do not be upset and have doubts about it. I will die for Christ's Church. If God allows my enemies to persecute me; I will die for the Church. I am a man of faith in God's goodness and love. I am willing to die for Him in gratitude, obedience and love, for Christ's sake and His people in the Church."

ToRot had spoken openly to his brother catechist about his condemnation. To ToVarmari he said: "The Japanese will free you soon. As for me, I do not know exactly what they will do with me." And to another prisoner ToRot remarked: "It is better for them to kill me as a catechist because I am a defender for the Church."

While in jail ToRot did not stop from encouraging his brother catechists to continue in their faith. The Japanese military police allowed a big "singing" celebration to be held in honour of the people of Painalama, where ToRot formerly held his services. ToRot was permitted by Meshida to see the dancing and feasting but under close watch of police guard in case he escaped (although he never intended to do so). The event took place at Painalama itself. On that occasion ToRot met ToUvae and called

him aside; they went inside his cave and he confirmed him in the faith: "Continue with the faith and stand firm in your catechetical duty". ToVarto who took his place as catechist of Rakunai also met ToRot. He described the prisoner as being still fresh and healthy without much difference in his physical appearance. ToVarto asked him: "Are you free, ToRot?" The prisoner kept staring at one of the dancers and replied in a very low voice: "No".

After the singing was over the guards escorted ToRot back to Vunaiaara. His fellow prisoners reported that he was well and in good condition and quite happy. However, he caught a cold and his uncle Tarue asked Meshida to let the catechist sleep in his house for a while.

ToRot was visited by his mother laTumul and Lusua laKatai. ToRot urged them to go home quickly: "You must leave at once and tell the people not to assemble together again for lotu. Each person and family must pray privately in their homes". ToRot was very concerned about his people. He did not wish them to suffer and die like him. ToRot continued: "You must go now; tell Tatamai, Telo and laVarpilak to pray for me". His mother was shocked by what her son had just said. She peered into her son's eyes and face with great pity and heartbreaking sorrow. ToRot stood bowing his head and urged the women to go home at once.

A day later his wife laPaula came to visit ToRot. As usual she brought some food for him. ToRot asked her to bring his shaving equipment, his new white laplap and rosary beads, his catechetical crucifix, his white shirt and tie. laPaula was to collect them from their house, wrap them up with a kupepe (betel-nut frond) and bring the parcel to him at Vunaiaara.

On the following day, Friday morning, laPaula arrived at Vunaiaara with the articles. She also came along with their two young children, Andrew ToPuia and Rufina laMama. The wife gave food, fowl and yams to her husband to eat, but he ate a small amount and refused to eat anymore. A sudden fear crept over laPaula at that moment; she could not understand why ToRot was acting in this unusual manner. She pleaded with him for the last time to give up his work as a catechist and to live just like an ordinary man. In reply ToRot told her: "This not your business. It is fitting that I die for the Name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"... and he made the Sign of the Cross as he named the Three Persons,... "and for the sake of my people". The family talked together for a while longer before ToRot bade them to return home quickly to Rakunai.

On the same day laTumul also came to visit him. She brought food - kaukau, breadfruit and vegetables and left them in Tarue's home. ToRot told his mother: "The police told me that a Japanese doctor is coming in

the evening to give medicine. I do not understand this because I am not sick." ToRot thought to himself that the doctor's treatment would be an excuse to get rid of him. ToRot revealed the same news he told his mother to ToBinabak.

laTumul hastily walked back home and told her daughter laVarpilak: "ToRot told me today that the Japanese will bring him back to dungeon where he spent his first day of sentence. While in there a Japanese doctor will give him Medicine."



CHAPTER X PETER TOROT DIES A MARTYR

After their talk with Meshida, Tarue went to see ToRot. This is what he saw: ToRot was lying on the verandah. He faced upwards but was leaning to one side slightly. One of his hands lay under his head with the four fingers bent; the thumb only stood straight. One of his legs was bent and put under the other. Tarue also observed pieces of cotton wool in his nephew's ears and nostrils, and a piece of red ribbon bound around his head. There was a big blister and a swelling on ToRot's throat. These indicated that ToRot must have been choked to death. The Japanese laid a piece of timber or solid wood across his throat and laid weight on it. Tarue thought that the vomiting sound he had heard was ToRot's effortless attempt to survive.

A herald, a police boy, was sent from Navunaram to Rakunai to Tata reporting: "Your catechist has died". The luluai asked him: "Why, what happened to him?" The messenger replied: "He died from a small sickness".

Tata blew his tavor (cone shell) to call his people together. As they arrived, he revealed the sad news of ToRot's death. Two men, ToBurangan and ToAnot ran to Vunaiaara and found ToRot still lying in the same position on the verandah.

They saw the different signs showing his death, the pieces of cotton wool in his ears and nostrils and the blister on his throat. As they peered, they observed a kind of wax pouring out from the dead man's mouth, ears and nose. They also saw an injection mark on his left arm.

ToBurangan and ToAnot carried ToRot's body from the bush hut to Tare's home. According to the witness, ToBurangan, the body was still warm then and was not yet stiff. He thought that ToRot still had life in him.

Another herald Tului ran to Taogo to tell the wife of ToRot, his family and relatives that ToRot had died. They all went quickly to Vunaiaara with Tata and the Rakunai parishioners to see the late Peter ToRot in Tarue's home.

Luluais, catechists, relatives and friends unanimously related the similar facts confirming that Peter ToRot was in fact murdered by the Japanese in his noble work as a true defender of the Church, and a true shepherd guiding his people towards God's kingdom: "No greater love than this that man lays down his life for his brothers". One by one the witnesses reaffirmed: "We believe that our catechist was murdered. We saw cotton wool plugged into his ears and nose to prevent him from

hearing and breathing. From his mouth, ears and nose flowed out what looked like white candle wax. It smelt like an awful stinking medicine - "like a mango leaf" said Tatamai, the brother of ToRot. As we stood around him to wash and dress him for burial, we saw the injection mark of a needle of his left arm. We also saw that his throat had been flattened by a heavy stick or piece of timber. These different marks indicated to us that ToRot was murdered in cold blood by the Japanese.

Tarue speculated that the talk about the doctor's coming to give him medicine, the piece of red ribbon around his face, the injection mark on his left arm were deliberate signs of deceit to prove to the people that ToRot was really sick and as a result had died. "None of us knew of any sickness that ToRot had. All of us could see clearly that our beloved Peter ToRot was wilfully murdered by the Japanese. Tarue continued: "Peter ToRot had died for his knowledge", he added in a low voice: "For his Church's knowledge". The remarks Tarue made about ToRot surprised the bystanders, most of whom were Catholics, because he was a Methodist himself.

ToBurangan also commented: "We knew ToRot even from his early childhood. He was strong, energetic and healthy. He never had a serious sickness in his whole life. When we found him dead, we rightly concluded that he was killed. From Vunaiaara, Navuanaram, the Rakunai people brought ToRot's body back to Rakunai. After a pre-burial ceremony conducted by his fellow catechists, the late Peter ToRot was buried at Tavulabung cemetery, a distance of about three to four hundred yards from Rakunai parish church. The people of ToRot continued to meet for prayers and they were justly proud of the heroic death of their catechist.

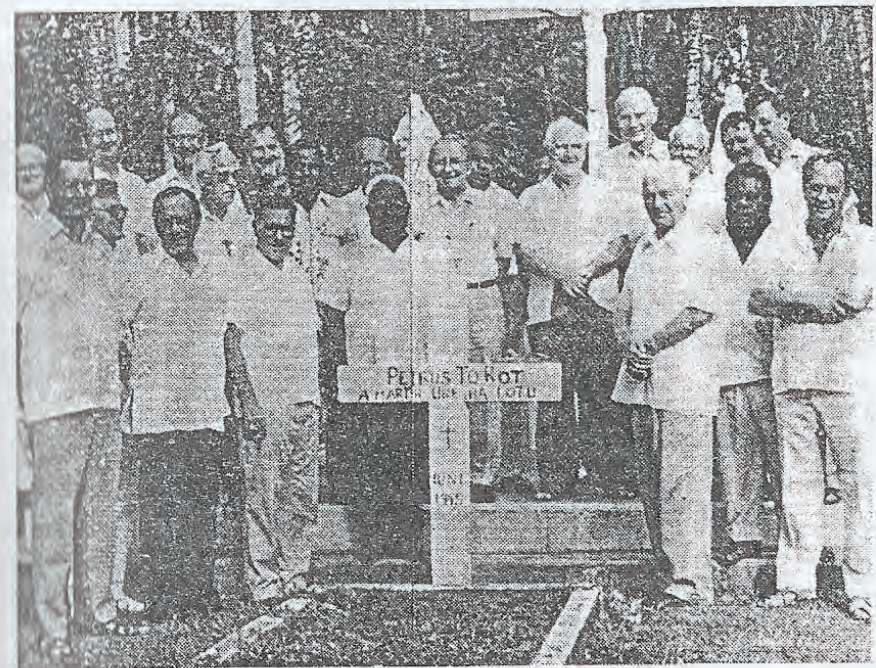
Today the people of Rakunai speak often of Peter ToRot as his memory lingers on with them. The people whom he married, those he baptised, others whom he taught, the catechists who worked with him and those he stayed with in prison continue to talk about him. They spoke of what a wonderful personality ToRot was. The soldiers, missionaries and people he contacted during his life-time mourned his death when they heard of his murder.

Peter ToRot can be a model for the Christians of Papua New Guinea. In our different walks of life as catechists, or teachers, religious or government officials, we should work for the common good of our people, day in and day out. By personalizing our activities - seeing God's will in what we are doing in this particular place and at this particular moment - we could spread Christian love and increase peace to promote unity

among the islands, the coastlands and highlands. A true united Papua New Guinea will be achieved through co-operation among the citizens and their higher authorities. Co-operation comes in line with obedience to Civil and Church authorities who represent God in our land. In short - "forget your dignity, assume your responsibility".

On August 20, 1965, a new catechist institution was opened at Kabaira on the north coast road of Rabaul. It was named after the zealous young catechist Peter ToRot. After St Paul's Catechist College was closed down at Taliligap by the Japanese in 1942, there was no active catechist training until 1965 when the PTR (Peter ToRot) College resumed the work.

The PTR College was transferred from Kabaira to Vuvu, near Rabaul, in 1969. Then in 1972 the college was again transferred from Vuvu to Kininigunan, near Vunapope. Today the Peter ToRot College is doing a promising job in training young catechists to help spread the Kingdom of God in our land.



The Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands at the grave of Peter ToRot.

**A SUMMARY
OUTLINING THE STEPS LEADING UP
TO THE
BEATIFICATION
OF
PETER TOROT**

JUNE 18, 1983:

Special Committee to promote the Cause of Canonization of the Servant of God, Peter ToRot, established by Archbishop Bundervoet.

Members: Paschal Lukara (President)
Melchior ToMot (Vice - President)
Dominic Mainge
Blasius Tumarum
Simon ToBaining
Ambrose Torua
Mathias Rorome

NOVEMBER 20, 1983:

Committee appoints Fr. Lucio de Stefano M.S.C. Postulator of the Cause;

APRIL 11, 1984:

Committee writes to the Bishops of Papua New Guinea requesting their prayers and the prayers of their people for Peter ToRot's eventual canonization;

JANUARY 13, 1985:

Archbishop Bundervoet, at the request of the Postulator, officially opens the cause of Canonization of Peter ToRot;

MAY 9, 1985:

The Bishops of Papua New Guinea write to Pope John Paul II declaring their full support of the Cause of Canonization of Peter ToRot;

NOVEMBER 21, 1985:

Archbishop Bundervoet writes to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to seek their approval or "*nihil obstat*" to begin canonical proceedings for the Cause of Canonization;

JANUARY 14, 1986:

The requested approval or "*nihil obstat*" is granted by the congregation;

JANUARY 21, 1987:

Archbishop Bundervoet sets up canonical tribunal.

members: Bishop George Bata - Delegate President

Fr. Alois Escher MSC - Promoter of Justice

Sr. Rose Hill OLSH - Notary Actuary

JANUARY 21, - MARCH 6, 1987:

The work of the tribunal is carried out. Twenty six witnesses, chosen from among close relatives, fellow villagers, fellow prisoners and non-catholic acquaintances of Peter ToRot, proclaim with one impressive voice that the catechist from Rakunai village was determined to continue his pastoral activity even at the cost of his life and that he was murdered by the Japanese precisely because he did not stop that kind of activity;

The papers or "acts" of this inquiry are sent to Rome to be examined from a judicial point of view.

NOVEMBER 25, 1987:

Archbishop Bundervoet appoints Fr. John Dempsey MSC as historical expert;

Fr. Dempsey's job is to illustrate by means of a printed volume ("*Positio super Martyrio*") the martyrdom of Peter ToRot from the historical and theological point of view;

MARCH 30, 1989:

Father Dempsey's volume or "*Positio super Martyrio*" is completed;

DECEMBER 3, 1990:

After having been thoroughly examined by the Relator of the Cause, permission is given for the "*Positio*" to be published;

JANUARY 23, 1991:

The "*Positio*" on the Martyrdom of the Servant of God is officially presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints;

JUNE 26, 1992:

A special committee of eight theologians meet and issue their assessment of the theological merit of Peter ToRot's Cause:
"*Relation et vota*"

The assessment of all eight theologians is very positive and favourable;

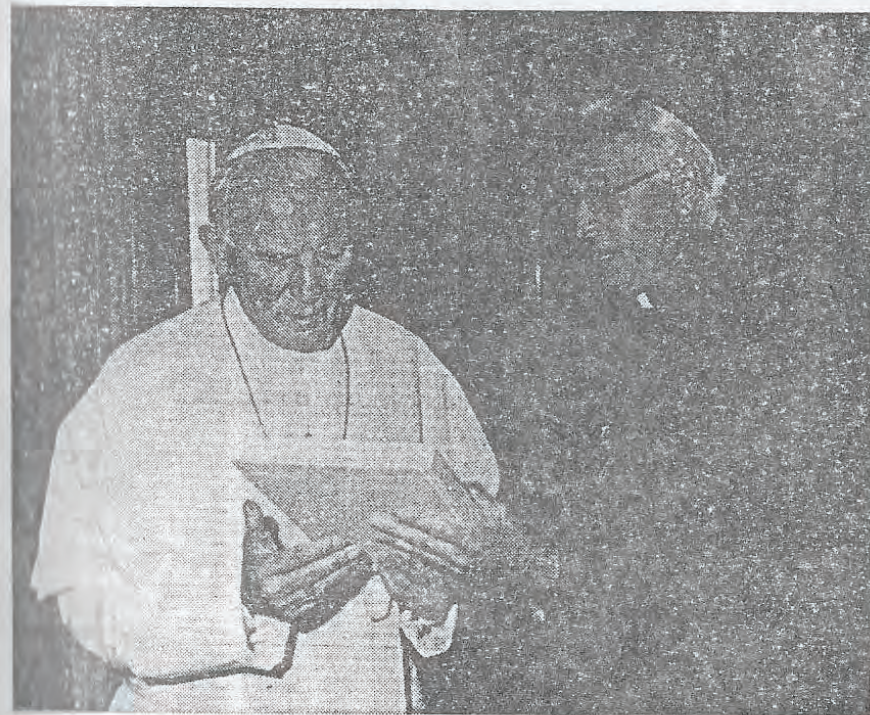
DECEMBER 1, 1992:

A special committee of nine cardinals and four Bishops, all members of the Ordinary Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, give their unanimous and most favourable assent to Peter ToRot's Beatification.

APRIL 2, 1993:

The **Apostolic Decree** recognizing the Martyrdom of Peter ToRot signed by Angelus Cardinal Felici, Prefect of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints in the presence of Pope John Paul II.

With this decree Peter ToRot becomes the Venerable Peter ToRot and his Beatification is now assured.



The Archbishop of Rabaul, Karl Hesse MSC, hands the "POSITIO" on the Martyrdom of Peter ToRot over to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II.

ASSESSMENTS
OF TWO THEOLOGIANs REGARDING THE
MARTYRDOM
OF
PETER TOROT

Relatio et Vota, Congressus Peculiaris
super Martyrio.
Rome, 26th June 1992

First Assessment

Peter To Rot, a lay catechist, was born and lived in the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, part of modern Papua New Guinea. The year of his birth - 1912 - is conjectural, since all the local records were destroyed during the Second World War. However, it is supported by what seems convincing evidence (*cf. Informatio, pp. 13-14*). Peter's father was a respected chief in his native village of Rakunai, and among the first inhabitants to be baptized in 1898. He was a man of staunch faith who gave continued assistance to the first missionaries. Thus his son grew up in what was regarded as a model christian family.

Peter attended school regularly and was remembered by those who knew him as a boy with a peaceable and gentle nature. He became a daily Mass attendant and regular server at the altar. At the age of eighteen he entered a Training College for Catechists. The testimonies that have come down to us concerning the two and a half years he spent in this College speak well of him: his devotion to the Eucharist, his prayerfulness, his peace-loving nature, his virtues, especially those of obedience, humility, charity, loyalty and diligence.

In the year 1933, Peter began his work as a catechist in his native village. From the accounts given by witnesses, it appears that he was a man of deep faith, a kind and conscientious character and a person loved by all in the community he served (*cf. Informatio, pp. 32-33*).

On November 11, 1936, Peter married Paula la Varpit. She came from a Catholic background. The To Rot family was a happy one, exemplary in their christian duties. Three children were born of this marriage: two died in childhood, one is still alive. The only point that would startle Western observers is Peter To Rot's occasional chastisement of his wife for minor disobediences, by beating her. However, as is explained in the *Informatio (cf. p. 37)*, this was a custom understood and accepted by the Tolai society of the time, even expected of the father of any family in order to show that he was given the respect due to him and that he knew how to safeguard the authority that fell to him in the domestic household. The Servant of God would later apologise to his wife - a thing unheard of in their culture.

The next event of importance that took place on the island of New Britain was the invasion by the Japanese in January 1942. The territory was occupied by force, and the enemy garrison was to remain for three and a half years. It was a time of trial, tension and suffering for the inhabitants. Peter ToRot's family was deeply affected by this event. It was to be the circumstance that showed the man of mettle he was: his loyalty to Christ, his deep faith, his personal courage. In October 1942, the resident priest, Fr. Laufer, was ordered to leave. Peter ToRot was then in charge of the missionary station. He continued to do what was possible and gained the grateful respect of the whole community. His wife testified that he continued with his work during the war years, baptising, performing marriages, giving religious instructions, caring for the sick (*Summ.*, p.7, p. 13-14).

With regard to freedom for religious practices, things began to deteriorate gradually. In the Spring of 1943, the local Church was demolished. The reason given was that it was an easy target for air raids and that it attracted numerous gatherings of people. The Servant of God had another church built and organized prayer meetings, this time in smaller numbers.

In 1939 a total ban on religious activities was enforced by the occupying forces. Peter now had recourse to the daring action of digging an underground prayer room on his own property. Here he continued to give instructions in the faith, lead prayer meetings and officiate at marriages (*cf. Summ., Doc. 9, pp. 148. 152*). The next step taken by the Japanese was to legalize polygamy, supposedly to win the cooperation of the local chiefs, but really to offset the power of the christian religion. ToRot's continued insistence on christian moral principles jeopardized his life still further. And in fact, the following year (1945) he was arrested, threatened and held in custody for a while. Once free, he continued his customary catechetical duties. Again he was arrested, and a second time set free. Then there followed the third arrest, despite the precautions he took, and imprisonment for two months.

Peter ToRot was kept under strict surveillance and was given the task of cooking for the other prisoners. His two brothers were imprisoned with him, but were released after a month's detention. Peter however was kept in prison for two months. Then one day in July 1945 it was announced that a doctor was coming to the camp to give him medicine although he was not ill. He rightly sensed that the end was at hand. The day of his death, the local chief, Anton Tata, visited him and spoke of the fear he had for

his life, since he had pleaded in vain with the Japanese officers shortly before that on Peter's behalf. The Servant of God answered calmly and reassuringly with words that reveal his inner disposition and admirable courage: "Do not worry. I am a catechist and I am only doing my duty. I'll stay here" (*Summ.*, p. 16, q. 15).

Despite the efforts made by the military officers to keep the prisoners away from the scene of Peter ToRot's death, one prisoner did manage to witness the merciless execution (the injection, the drink, the suffocation) from a neighbouring hillside from which he could see through the window into the lighted room where the Servant of God had been led to the doctor (*cf. his testimony in Summ.*, pp. 25-26. q. 16).

The witnesses

The testimonies of the judicial diocesan inquiry of 1987, collected in the *Positio*, can be considered fully satisfactory: 26 in all; 25 of them *de visu*. One of them, as already mentioned, witnessed his execution. They come from the circle of his own family and relatives, from among his school companions or pupils, from people of the same village or from fellow prisoners. There are also three non-Catholic witnesses. This wide spectrum of people who knew the Servant of God in a close and familiar way for years, cover the whole of his life, spiritual dispositions and heroic death. They speak in plain and simple terms, but their words are touching and convincing.

Moreover, the testimonies collected at a preliminary inquiry in 1952, although non-judicial in a strict sense, have a considerable value and authority all of their own. They were given under oath, recognized as canonical by the then Apostolic Vicar of Rabaul and pronounced only seven years after the death of the Servant of God. A number of these witnesses, providentially the seven most important ones, lived to testify again at the 1987 judicial inquiry (*cf. Informatio*, pp. 69-74).

The only question that might be asked would concern the different form of words used by a crucial witness, Arap To Binabak (the man who witnessed the execution of the Servant of God from the nearby hillside), in 1952, when he spoke sparingly and did not even mention how he witnessed Peter ToRot's final moments, and those he spoke in 1987, when he gave a more extended and decisive account, especially of the execution itself. The elucidation given by the Relator and his assistants clarify this point and show how the reticence of the 1952 statements is explained by fear (ten years prior to this date, such enquiries often led to

imprisonment and execution), timidity and a certain antagonism at the time between the Catholic and the Methodist communities on the island. However, everything that this witness claimed, has received independent confirmation from other sources (*cf. Informatio*, pp. 72-74).

A genuine martyr for the faith

The material aspect of martyrdom, namely, the actual execution of the Servant of God, is obvious. The surprising and providential testimony of Arap ToBinbak, a fellow prisoner who, unknown to the military, saw the brutal ritual from a surrounding hillock, is clear proof (*cf. Summ.*, pp. 25-26, q. 16). The Japanese police themselves admitted that Peter ToRot was given an injection (*cf. Summ.*, p. 14, q. 16), but claimed that death came from natural causes, from a minor illness (*Summ.*, Doc. 9, p. 160, No. 8).

Those who washed the body for burial all testified to the marks of the needle used for the injection in the upper arm, the white foam that issued from mouth, nose and ears, and the wound on the throat (*cf. Informatio*, pp. 100-195). A violent death at the hands of the Japanese military is clearly established.

That the violent execution of Peter ToRot was performed in odium fidei, as required for formal martyrdom, is also demonstrated in the pages of the *Informatio*, *cf.* pp. 106-130. Although it may not have been the sole motive, or the motive the people publicly reported, it certainly appears as the dominant one. The first indication of anti-Christian bias came when all foreign missionaries were put in prison or expelled. Then religious practices were curtailed, and not long later they were totally prohibited. Catechists were arrested and imprisoned for disobeying these orders. Religious ceremonies were banned "as it was considered that prayers were causing the war to be prolonged" (*Summ.*, Doc. 9, p. 159, No. 5).

Some statements adduced by witnesses show how they perceived the motives behind the military ban on religious ceremonies:

"All forms of religious and Christian expressions were forbidden. The people felt that the Japanese were against religion: 'No more Christo'... The Japanese believed that we were praying for things to go badly for them" (*Summ.*, p. 10, q. 13; Doc. 9, p. 159, No. 5).

Moreover, when the police authorities legalized polygamy, the Servant of God spoke out fearlessly in an effort to dissuade people, especially Catholics, from such a practice. He incurred the anger and opposition in particular of a native policeman who tried to take a married Catholic

woman as his second wife: "Because of this ToMetapa (the policeman in question) set out to destroy P.T.R." (*Summ.*, p. 15, q. 14). And it was, in fact, this man who led to the final arrest and imprisonment of the Servant of God, by reporting the circumstances of a marriage ceremony he had performed (*cf. Summ.*, Doc. 9, p. 160, No. 7).

The real animosity of those responsible for Peter ToRot's arrest and execution is manifested in the fact that his two brothers were released after a month's imprisonment, whereas his sentence was not remitted. On the contrary, it was brought to its gravest consequences by having him put to death. Furthermore, the oppressors themselves revealed their real intentions: ToMetapa who denounced him, said when asked why Peter was sent to prison: "It was because he had been leading prayer meetings and performing marriages" (*Summ.*, p. 29, q. 15); and the Japanese officer, in answer to a similar question by a village chief:

"ToRot is a very bad man. He is preventing people, who want to do so, from having more than one wife. He calls the people together to pray because he is a prayerful person himself. Don't you realise how bad a man ToRot is?" (*Summ.*, Doc. 9, p. 160, No. 8).

And the Servant of God was aware of this motive himself:

"I am here because of those who break their marriage vows, and because of those who do not want to see God's work go forward. That's it. I shall die" (*ibid.*).

It is clear then that Peter ToRot was arrested and killed because of his fidelity to Christian duties as a catechist, because he continued to hold prayer meetings, officiate at marriages, oppose polygamy, because in a word he remained staunchly faithful to Christ. He was not engaged in any other activities that could be seen as politically opposed to the Japanese supremacy on the island. On the contrary, it appears that he was on rather good terms with them, for he had learned some words of their language, a fact which impressed the invaders and made them kindly disposed to him (*cf. Summ.*, Doc. 9, p. 155, No. 5; p. 168, No. 4).

This conviction is strengthened when we come to analyse the Servant of God's own attitude of mind and his voluntary acceptance of imprisonment and death, precisely on account of his faith in Christ and of his love for Him.

Peter ToRot's willing acceptance of what came upon him is unmistakably manifested by his conduct as a catechist. With full knowledge of the danger in which he placed his life, he courageously refused to put an end to his catechetical ministry, despite two imprisonments and repeated threats from the police. "I will not abandon you" he heroically said to his people (*cf. Summ., 9, p. 151, No. 5*). He even consoled his wife and elderly mother on a visit to him during his third imprisonment: "Stop crying. Pray. I am here in a good cause. I am quite happy about it- for I am here on account of my Faith" (*Summ., Doc. 9, p. 152, No. 2*).

This steadfast attitude of faith is evident all through the two months of his final imprisonment. On the first evening, he said to his brother, Joseph:

"It is bad when one is killed by bombs or machine gun bullets, but it is good to die for one's faith. You get a great reward in Heaven" (*Summ., Doc. 9, p. 149, No. 6*).

One month later, he spoke as follows to a chief from a neighbouring village:

"I am here purely because of religion, and because of my work for God... I am not afraid. I shall not give up on God. I am fully aware of what the police will do. I shall never be released from prison" (*Ibid., pp. 168-169, No. 3*).

Anton Tata, another local chief, was the last witness to see the Servant of God - a matter of hours before his execution. His last known words, then, are a striking profession of untarnished fidelity to duty, to the faith, to his Saviour: "Do not worry. I am a catechist and I am only doing my duty. I'll stay here" (*Summ., p. 16, q. 15*).

It is no wonder that from the day of his burial, the people of the island spontaneously regarded Peter ToRot as a martyr for the faith: "a free and spontaneous conviction at all times" (*Summ., p. 18, q. 34*). They have held his name and his grave in veneration down to the present time.

The outstanding witness to the faith given by the Servant of God is a relevant example and a fresh inspiration to lay catechists, to missionaries and indeed to all believers. It is obvious that his beatification would have remarkable impact on the Catholic population of Papua New Guinea. His life shows how an ordinary yet fervent accomplishment of Christian duties can lead to holiness and even to the supreme witness to Christ, the expression of the 'greatest love' laying down one's life for Jesus. We hope that the name of Peter ToRot will soon appear as another gem in the glorious pages of the Church's martyrology.

Hence in response to the query *An constet de martyrio...* I say willingly and with a clear conscience: affirmative.

I. Introductory Observations

1. Concern for historical precision and exact detail is characteristic of our Western culture, especially when it is a matter of scientific historical research. The frustration which the compilers of this *Positio* must have experienced is understandable. As trained historians they found themselves faced with apparent complete disregard for detail and precision. It was bad enough that the people had little use for remembrance, with accuracy, of such things as birth dates (*Informatio, p. 14*). It must have been even more frustrating that much of the documentary evidence, such as it was, should have been destroyed or irretrievably lost by the ravages of war and weather. I don't think, however, that the authors owe anyone an apology. I stand in admiration of their untiring efforts to compile everything that could serve as potential evidence, despite the political situation, the effects of war, the ecological environment and different cultural standards of the people of New Britain. I think it is safe to assume that no evidence which might be discovered in the future, for example, a transcript of the actual trial of Meshida and Gunto, the two Japanese officers responsible for the death of the Servant of God, could alter the force of the argument presented in the *Positio*.

In brief, the authors are to be highly commended for their painstaking and conscientious efforts in a very frustrating situation. They combined two rare charisms: brevity and concrete realism. I found their honesty and forthrightness most refreshing; e.g.

"...some of the witnesses' replies appear brief and perfunctory, while in fact they were genuinely realistic answers, coming from unlearned and simple people, unaccustomed to both the European and the abstract way of reasoning" (*Summarium, p. 3*).

I appreciated their trust in and respect for the probative force of unadorned truth. If they had followed some hermeneutic of suspicion, their task would never have been completed and our assignment would have been rather tedious.

2. Theologians and Canonists demand that two essential elements be established to warrant a firm judgment that martyrdom has occurred: first, that death was inflicted by a persecutor out of hatred for the faith; secondly, that such a death was accepted willingly by the person who chose to suffer for the faith rather than purchase his life at the price of obdurate faith or failing to bear witness to it by carrying out the responsibilities of his state in life.

The reasoning which underlies this traditional theological position is that given by St Thomas Aquinas in his treatment of the virtue of courage or fortitude, found in his *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qq. 123 and 124. I think that it would be well to recall some salient points of his reflection as a help to appreciate the heroic quality of the life and death of Peter ToRot.

To demonstrate that martyrdom is an act of virtue, Thomas reminds us that:

"The function of virtue is to preserve a man in the good proposed by reason. Now reason's good is twofold: truth held as its proper objective, and justice as its proper effect. Now it is essential to the nature of martyrdom that a person stands steadfastly in truth and justice against the assaults of persecutors. Clearly then martyrdom is an act of virtue" (IIa-IIae, q. 124, a.1).

He then applies this argument to the virtue of courage:

"The role of courage is to strengthen a man in the good virtue, most of all in the face of danger of death and chiefly death in warfare. Now obviously in martyrdom a man is firmly established in the good proposed by virtue, when he does not abandon faith and justice because of immediate danger of death with which persecutors threaten him in what amounts to a personal battle" (IIa-IIae, q. 124, a.2).

In reply to the objection that martyrdom is merely a matter of endurance, not of courage, he recalls from the previous question, q. 123, that

"endurance is the more important of the two acts of courage. To endurance and not to aggression, which is courage's secondary action, martyrdom is linked. The patience of the martyrs is praised along with courage, because it ministers to courage in its primary act, namely endurance" (IIa-IIae, q. 124, a. s, ad 3).

Next Thomas asks. "Is martyrdom an act of the highest perfection?" His reply takes us to the very heart of the matter:

"Of all acts of virtue martyrdom exhibits most completely the perfection of charity. For a man's love for a thing is demonstrated by the degree to which, for its sake, he puts aside the more cherished object and chooses to suffer the more hateful. Now obviously, of all blessings of life a man loves himself most, and on the other hand hates death most, especially when accompanied by the pains of physical torture from fear of these even brute animals are deterred from the greatest pleasures, as Augustine says. In this sense it is clear that of all human actions martyrdom is the most perfect in kind, being the mark of the greatest love. As St John says. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15. 13) (IIa-IIae, q. 124, a. 3., c.).

This theological argument of St Thomas was appropriated and amplified by Prospero Lambertini in his classic work, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, Book 3, chap. 11-13 (*Op. O. III*). It assumed a quasi-official status when Lambertini became Benedict XIV. I found it very helpful to in mind his classic work as a background while reading the Cause. His teaching has been summarized conveniently for us by Ignacio Gordon, S.J., in his comprehensive article.

"De Conceptu Theologico-Canonico Martyrii", in *Ius Populi Dei: Miscellanea in Honorem Raymundi Bidagor*, Vol. I, pp. 485-521 (Roma: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1972); and also by Robert J. Sarno, *Diocesan Inquiries Required by the Legislator in the New Legislation for the Causes of the Saints*. Roma PUG, 1987, pp. 74-77. I will draw from these two convenient sources.

Lambertini defined martyrdom to be "volontariam mortis perperessionem alicuius tolerantiam propter fidem Christi vel alium virtutis actum in Deum relatum". He considered two elements as essential: one material, the other formal. The objective material element is physical death inflicted by a persecutor. Death, however, can be inflicted either directly and immediately, or indirectly and mediately. Lambertini concludes: "... inter martyres esse recensendum, qui ex odio in fidem coniectus in carcerem, aut exilio ex causa mulctatus, moritur ex aerumnis carceris vel exilii". The formal element of Martyrdom is the cause for which martyrs suffered death, as St Augustine noted centuries before: "Martyres non facit poena sed causa" (*Enarrat. in Ps. 34: PL, 36, 340*). This cause is twofold: "in persecutore est fides ut exosa, in martyre autem ut vehementissime dilecta". A final observation will be pertinent to our Cause:

"Satis est ad martyrum, si revera persecutor seu tyrannus ab odio in fidem moveatur, licet aliam causam omnino disparatam praeseferat, propter quam se mortem inflixisse dicat".

Gordon adds:

"Causa praetensa a persecutore... una eademque semper est, nempe, crimen aliquod per mendacium Servo Dei imputatum; tamen facies eius multiplex esse potest" (loc. cit., p. 498).

3. When a military power occupies a territory and terrifies its people, the grip which that power tries to maintain remains always a precarious one. Anything which threatens its illegitimate authority and unstable power can be considered political and even treasonous. Any Religion, which traditionally struggles to safeguard the dignity and freedom of a people, must inevitably be considered so closely intertwined with the political situation as to be virtually inseparable from it. Tyrants have not been known to make neat distinctions between religious and political activity; they tend to lump everything together under the heading of treason. Consequently, the death of the Servant of God at the time it was inflicted or viewed in retrospect might appear to have been inflicted for political or military reasons which were mixed with religious consideration. For the purpose of establishing the fact of authentic martyrdom, what is significant is that although non-religious considerations may have entered into the motivation of the persecutors in their executing of the Servant of God, the primary, predominant, crucial motive was hatred of the ministry which he was exercising as part of his Catholic faith. The matter of motivation in human activity is far too complex ever to expect that we can isolate some chemically pure, unmixed motive. This is all the more true when we are faced with a mixture of fear, hatred and power accountable to no one. Odium fidei can take many forms.

II. The facts

The Positio marshals its evidence in a clear and orderly manner. I think that it has established beyond any reasonable doubt that both the material and the formal elements essential to martyrdom were present in the putting to death of the Servant of God, Peter ToRot. It also provides ample evidence that his reputation for martyrdom is a perduring one.

A. Martyrium Materiale:

The three priests commissioned to conduct the investigation have pieced together all the evidence that points to the firm conclusion that the Servant of God suffered a violent death. The fact that Peter ToRot was put to death by lethal injection administered by a Japanese doctor under the orders of two Japanese officers, assisted by a native policeman, has been proven as conclusively as possible under the circumstances (*Informatio*, pp. 99-105).

B. Martyrium Formale ex parte Persecutoris:

As I have already noted in my Introductory Observations, it is difficult to establish motivation in complex human situations. I think that the Positio has proven, with moral certainty, that the predominant motive for the murder of this lay catechist was odium fidei. There was clearly a connection between the reason given for his death and his profession and practice of the Catholic faith. He felt a responsibility as a catechist and refused to desist from ministering to the needs of his fellow Christians, (*Informatio*, pp. 106-130).

C. Martyrium Formale ex parte Martyris:

It is clear that the Servant of God recognized that he might be asked to witness to his faith by dying for that faith. His simple words to his brother Tatamai are most eloquent: "It is bad if someone is killed by machine guns or bombs; but it is good to die for the faith. He who does so will be greatly rewarded in heaven" (*Summarium*, p. 138). The testimony of his fellow-prisoner, Arap ToBinabak, who providentially was not a co-religionist but a Methodist, guarantees not only the actual death inflicted at the hands of the persecutor but also that he freely accepted death and persevered in his fidelity unto his very death (*Summarium*, pp. 20-26). As the authors of the Positio observe, internal perseverance may legitimately be deduced from the positive signs of his external perseverance (*Informatio*, p. 141).

The Servant of God evidently had a presentiment of impending danger and even of his imminent death. We are told that there was an understandable feeling of uneasiness and a loss of appetite, but no fear (*Informatio*, pp. 58-59). His cousin, Bernadet laOget, remembers that he was calm and peaceful when he said to his visitors: "Don't be sorry for me;

"I die for my faith. You go home and pray for me" (*Summarium*, p. 13). And to another witness: "Do not worry. I am a catechist and I am only doing my duty. I'll stay here" (*Summarium*, p. 16). One of his classmates remembered him as one who stood out from all others by practicing what he preached in an exceptional way (*Summarium*, p. 46). His repeated request for prayers indicated to me that he was a man who believed in the power of prayer as well as a man who was aware of his human fragility. He was far from being foolhardy or courting disaster. On the contrary, he was careful to protect his pastoral ministry and not allow it to be jeopardized by a show of bravado (*Informatio*, pp. 135-136).

I concur with the conclusion expressed at the end of this careful exposition:

"We believe that we have sufficiently and adequately proved that all Church requirements for martyrdom are fully verified in the murder of the Servant of God" (*Informatio*, p. 141).

III. Can the Servant of God Serve as a Contemporary Model?

A passage from Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 42, reminds us of the enduring quality of the Church's traditional teaching regarding the witness-value of a martyrdom:

"Since Jesus, the son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and his brothers (*cf. 1 Jn. 3: 16; Jn. 15: 13*). From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon - and some will always be called upon - to give this supreme testimony of love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, therefore, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the highest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master, who freely accepted death on behalf of the world's salvation; he perfects that image even to the shedding of blood".

Among the many reasons why the Servant of God would make an excellent model today, I would list the following as especially appealing.

1. Evangelization: Peter ToRot proclaimed the Gospel by his life and death. Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation of December 8, 1976, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stated most emphatically that:

"Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclaimer of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one" (n. 21)

He repeated this same point several times:

"As we said recently to a group of lay people 'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses'" (n. 41).

And finally,

"It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty. These 'signs of the times' should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud - but always forcefully - we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you like what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching" (n. 76).

One pupil who attributed his faith-commitment in adult life to the religious education which he had received from the Servant of God, testified: "Peter ToRot's teaching and his life were one" (*Summarium*, p. 31).

2. The simplicity and basic character of his life and activity: According to the testimony of his blood sister, who was the eldest of six children, he was an "extraordinary" ordinary man. She was not aware of any extraordinary phenomena in his life (*Summarium*, p. 6). His wife remembers him as

a patient and loving father to his sons. She knew of no extraordinary phenomena except for the time when he had mislaid the key to the tabernacle door and then found the door "mysteriously opened" (*Summarium*, pp. 7-8). In regard to extraordinary phenomena, we might note in passing that a witness related that in the early years of marriage, he and his wife had no children. They prayed to the Servant of God about this and eventually a son was born to them. The witness said: "I received this child from God; I give him back to God". The son is now a priest (*Summarium*, p. 32; cf. also p. 194).

3. Importance of the Laity: The Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Papua New Guinea has written:

"In a country where communication was made difficult, not only by the topography of the country and the lack of development but by the variety of languages, the catechists were indispensable. The canonization of Peter ToRot would be seen as a public recognition by the Church of the heroic missionary work the lay-catechists, both men and women, have performed since the beginning of the Church in these Islands until now. His canonization now would also be timely as new emphasis is being placed on lay ministries in the Church, and it is obvious that the Church can't and should not try to function without such active lay apostles" (*Summarium*, pp. 192-93).

The portrait of the Servant of God depicted by the testimony of those who knew him personally is that of a fervent, humble layman, inspired by Christian principles and totally dedicated to apostolic activity. This young teacher-catechist engaged in what can be called a very fundamental ministry: blessing marriages, baptizing, visiting the sick, consoling the dying. We are told that he went after lapsed Catholics to get them back to their faith, but always with gentleness and kindness, never harshly (*Summarium*, p. 20). In this respect he acted "foriter sed suaviter" - a model and an inspiration for all of us priests, religious, and laity alike.

4. Ecumenical considerations. A number of the witnesses who testified to his exemplary life, and especially the key witness to his perseverance in faith and to his actual murder, were Methodists (*Informatio*, pp. 68, 71, 74).

5. Devotion to the Eucharist. This aspect of the Servant of God's spirituality was especially noteworthy. His daily reception of the Eucharist and his frequent visits to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament may well have been what sustained his happy, peace-loving nature, gave him the ability to counsel and console others who had become discouraged, and finally persevere courageously unto death (*Informatio*, pp. 22, 27, 27; *Summarium*, p. 194).

IV. Conclusion.

Omnibus rite perpensis, I think that we can come to the conclusion that the Servant of God was put to death because of hatred for the Christian faith on the part of his persecutors, and that the motive for which the Servant of God laid down his life was love for God, for the Church, and for his neighbor. "He knew how to put God first, above love of family, friends and his own life" (*Summarium*, p. 192).

Catechists, during the time of their training, were reminded that: "Those who lead the many to justice shall shine like the star forever" (*Dan* 12, 3). I think it fitting that the Servant of God, Peter ToRot, be recognized for what he was: an "extraordinary" ordinary Christian, a gift from God, to the Church and to the world of all times.

I concur with the considered opinion of the petitioners, which is beautifully supported by the letter from the Bishop's Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, and the letters from a number of Major Religious Superiors.

"... official ecclesiastical recognition of the blessedness of the life and death of the Servant of God, Peter ToRot, will not only be a source of grace and continuous inspiration to the Tolai people, but also to: (i) all peoples of the young nation of Papua New Guinea, among whom the reputation of the Servant of God has spread far and wide; (ii) the lay-apostolate of the universal Church, and missionary lay-apostles everywhere; (iii) men and women, young and old, throughout the world, challenged to preserve the Catholic Faith" (*Informatio*, p. 2; *Summarium*, pp. 190-195).

I would like to conclude this theological evaluation as the Positio does, with the letter signed by 150 lay-catechists:

"We, the undersigned, Catechists of the Diocese of Mendi, of Papua New Guinea, wish to express our wholehearted support for the Cause of Beatification of Peter ToRot, a fellow Catechist of the Archdiocese of Rabaul, who manifested heroic holiness both in his ministry as a Catechist and in his Christian life, and finally in offering the supreme sacrifice of his life to God in fulfilling his service to God's people as a Catechist. We are praying that soon Peter ToRot will be raised to the honour of Blessed and eventually as a Saint of our Catholic Church" (*Summarium*, p. 196).

To the question proposed: "An constet de martyrio et fama martyrii in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur?" I reply wholehearted affirmative, constare sub aspectu formale et materiale, s.m.i.



The Archbishop of Rabaul, Karl Hesse MSC, presents a picture of Peter ToRot to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II.

DECREE CONCERNING THE
MARTYRDOM
OF
PETER TOROT

Rome, 2nd of April 1993

ABOUT THE QUESTION, WHETHER IT CAN BE PROVEN THAT
THE FACT OF THE MARTYRDOM, AND ITS ALLEGED REASON,
WERE ACTUALLY AS THEY HAVE BEEN CLAIMED?

The recent Ecumenical Council, Vatican II, in its Dogmatic Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*" ("The light of the Nations") strongly urged the lay people to strive, with all their strength and spiritual gifts, to make Christ's Church present and active everywhere. This duty, the same Document affirms, is the special vocation of each and every lay person, especially in places and circumstances where the Church can be an instrument of salvation, only by the activity and witness of the laity:

"The laity... are given the special Vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth. Thus, every lay person, through the gifts given to him/her, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (*Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium*, 33)"

If the life and the zeal of the Servant of God Peter ToRot is looked at, it is evident that before its time, this urging by the Council had been fully accepted and carried out, by this layman of our days. For truly, after some ten years of a busy and fruitful life as a Catechist in his village, circumstances demanded of him, not to hesitate to give up his life for defending and propagating the Faith.

Peter ToRot was born in 1912 in Rakunai village, on the Melanesian island of New Britain, nowadays a Province at the east of the independent state of Papua New Guinea. The Christian Faith was brought there by the missionaries, at the end of the last century, 1882.

His parents, Angelus ToPuia and Maria IaTumul, were baptized as adults. They were among the first group of Catholics in the region. Angelus ToPuia was a "big man" in the village and after his baptism became a zealous helper of the Missionaries. The Servant of God grew up in a healthy family, and was a keen student in the school and church of the Mission. By nature gentle, and generous, he showed from his youth an inclination towards a pious and virtuous life. As a result of this, the Missionary was thinking of urging him to start preparing for the Priesthood. But Peter's father, thinking that it was too early at that time to pursue such a goal, advised the Servant of God, to become rather a Catechist.

In 1930, when he was 18 years old, Peter was enrolled in St. Paul's College, which the mission had started to form Catechists. These catechists would become full-time assistants to the Missionaries in the work of evangelization. Peter was very successful in all his studies, and in 1933 he received the Diploma of a Catechist. He was appointed as the Catechist at the Mission Station of Rakunai village.

In 1936, he married a young Catholic woman, Paula IaVarpit. He led a good married life with her, and she bore him three sons. His family duties did not diminish his usual Catechetical activities. But once the events of the Second World War reached New Britain, in 1942, they greatly affected his apostolate and even the outcome of Peter ToRot's life.

After the military occupation of the island, the Japanese put all the missionary personnel in prison camps. Then on his own initiative, Peter ToRot led the faithful of Rakunai village in prayer meetings, instructed them in the Catechism, administered Baptism, cared for the Eucharist, distributed it to the sick and dying, and consoled and helped the poor. But alas after allowing this for a short time, the Japanese gradually forbade the people to practice their religion. In May 1943, they summoned the Servant of God and ordered him to reduce his pastoral activities. A year later, when the military situation had further worsened, the Japanese summoned again the Servant of God, and completely forbade him to perform any religious duties.

The position of Peter ToRot became even more difficult when the Japanese authorities permitted polygamy, so that the "big men" of the village would better cooperate with them. Perfectly aware of the grave dangers to which he exposed himself, the Servant of God kept at his work as a Catechist just the same. He continued his pastoral work, and he encouraged the faithful not to practise polygamy.

Because of this way of acting he was arrested during the months of April and May, 1945, following a report made by a Public Servant of his own place, who worked for the Japanese. He was accused of having presided at the Celebration of two marriages, and was therefore condemned to prison for two months. When the time drew near for his release from prison, on a Friday in July, 1954, Peter ToRot was killed by two army officials who had taken him from prison. The killing of the Servant of God was made with the help of a military doctor, also a Japanese, who injected a deadly poison into him. And so within a short time Peter died.

When the death of Peter ToRot was made known to the villagers of Rakunai they were all convinced that he had been killed because of the faith. So after the end of the war they wrote in the Tolai language, on the stone cross above his grave in the village cemetery these words "Peter ToRot, a martir ure ra lotu," that is: "Peter ToRot, a martyr for the faith".

As the years passed, this simple and spontaneous fame continued and spread more and more. So, from 21st January 1987 to 30th March 1989 a canonical examination was carried out in the Archdiocese of Rabaul. Its judgment and decision were approved by the Congregation for the cause of the Saints, which Decree was promulgated on June 2nd, 1989. Because of this happy result, on June 26th, the Special Meeting of the Consulting Theologians was held, presided over by the Promoter General of Faith, the Most Revd. Antonius Petti. After this, the Ordinary meeting was held on December 1st of the same year, at which Cardinal Simon Lourdasamy submitted the Cause. The Cardinal suggested that it should be agreed that the Servant of God was a true martyr of the faith. The Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, was told about all these matters through a report signed by the Cardinal Prefect. The Pope accepted and ratified the wishes of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, and ordered that the Decree on the martyrdom of the Servant of God be written.

Today, after all the above has been done, the Holy Father called the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, who submitted the cause, and also myself, Bishop-Secretary, and all those who are usually called for such occasions. They declared before them all that: "There was no doubt about the martyrdom of the Servant of God, Peter ToRot, the lay Catechist killed in 1945, nor about the reason for it, that is, out of hatred of the faith. Both of these took place as has been claimed."

His Holiness wanted this Decree to be published and be included in the Acts of the Congregation for the Cause of the Saints.

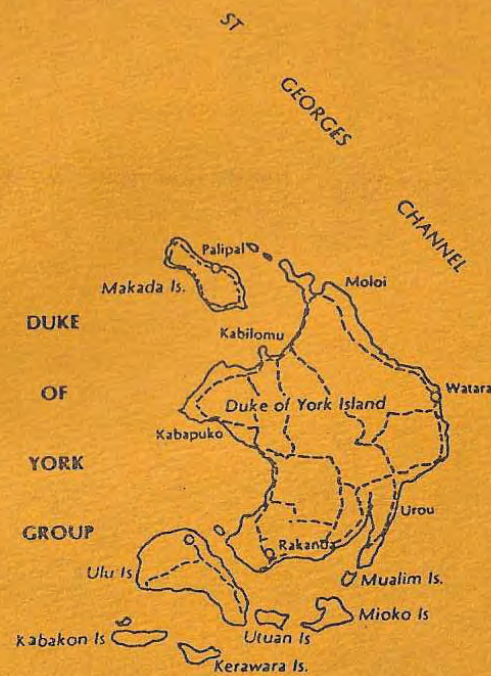
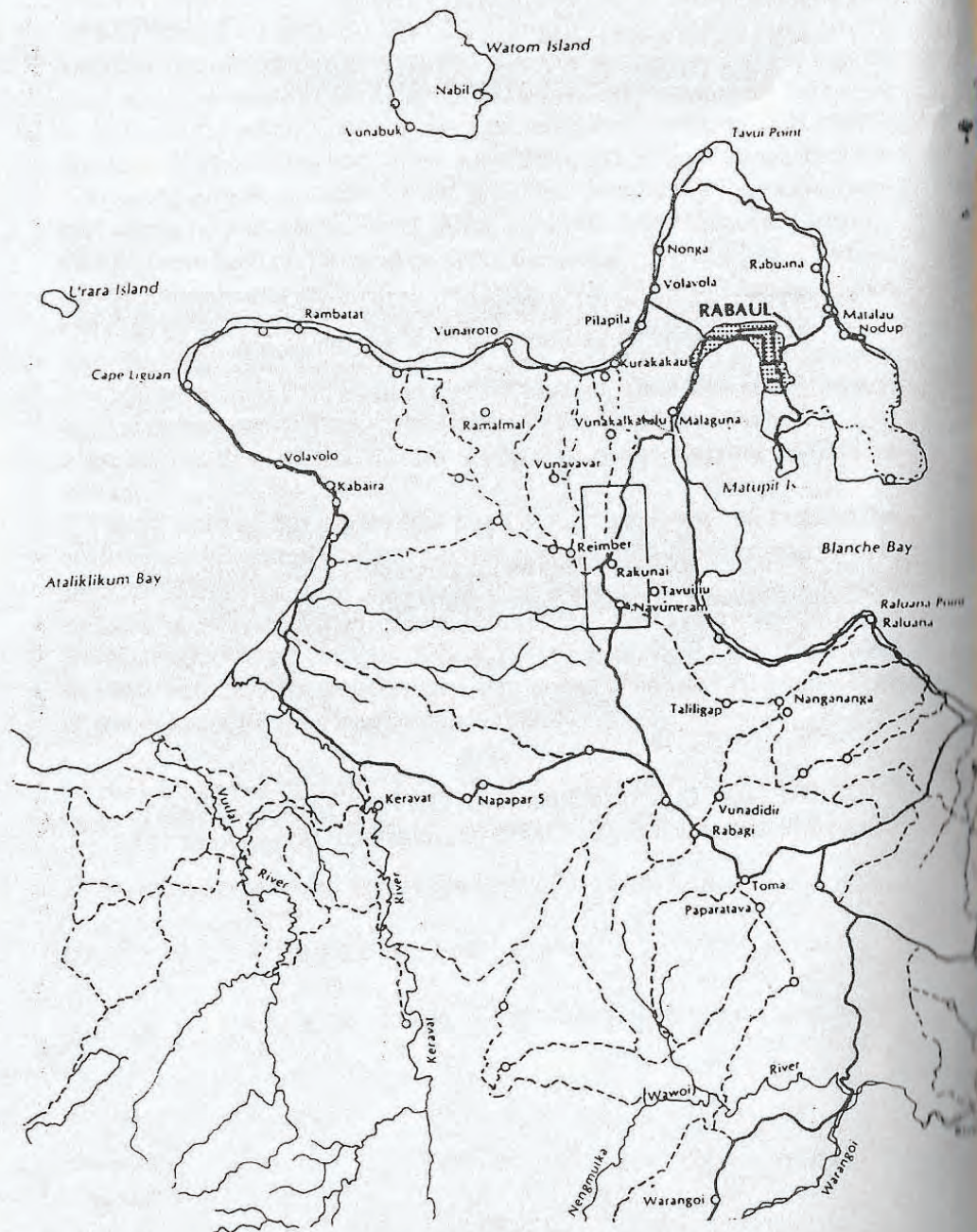
Given at Rome, April 2nd in the year of the Lord 1993.

Angelus Card. Felici, Prefect

+ Edward Nowak, Titular Archbishop of Lun, Secretary

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Pigeon Is. Big Pigeon Is.
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