Chapter 3

Church Growth in Tonga: Historical and Cultural Connections

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Tēvita Muli Kinikini (1905–84) was a Tongan Latter-day Saint pioneer of great faith.[1] His father, Taniela Kinikini, was a member of the Free Church of Tonga and also a man of mighty faith and spiritual gifts. Muli married Le'o Tukui, whose father was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Touched by the Spirit while listening to the missionaries, Muli announced his intention to be baptized. In response, his parents threatened a double suicide, and his uncle, one of the nobles of his island, threatened to take away Muli's land. Muli answered him: "Do as you please with my land. Take it away. I will go to Tongatapu, Vava'u, Fiji, or Samoa and get an inheritance of land, but the inheritance in Heaven will not be gotten in any other church but The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."[2] The intense persecution was short lived. The mocking stopped when Elder George Albert Smith's public prophecy was fulfilled: Muli and Le'o were blessed with a baby girl. Muli was later reconciled with his parents and his uncle.

Muli had only a few years of primary school education and was not wealthy. However, he worked hard to provide for

1. To read a fuller version of Kinikini's life story, see Eric B. Shumway, "Tēvita Muli Kinikini: Portrait of a Tongan Pioneer," in *Voyages of Faith*, ed. Grant Underwood (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 311–38.

2. Shumway, "Tēvita Muli Kinikini," 314.

his family and was able to send his children to the Church-owned Liahona High School, where his son eventually became a teacher. Muli stated that he became spiritually self-sufficient when all the foreign missionaries had to leave Tonga in 1939 due to the impending world war. When the American missionaries left, Muli and his young family were called on a full-time mission to the Tongan island of Vava'u. Through his many years of Church service, including two full-time missions and many positions of responsibility, Muli became a capable leader in the Church. His faith is legendary in Tonga, where he is known for the miracles he performed, including raising a 105-year-old woman from the dead. In many ways, writes Eric Shumway, "Tēvita Muli Kinikini's personal legacy is at the heart of the grand legacy of faith among the Tongan Saints."[3]

Muli's personal history characterizes many aspects of the Church's growth in Tonga. In some ways, Church growth in Tonga is without parallel. With over 45 percent of its population belonging to the Church (the highest of any country in the world), Tonga represents a stunning success in Church growth. This begs the question, why has the Church been so accepted in Tonga? Many articles and several books have been written documenting the extraordinary faith of the Tongan people, and undoubtedly this faith is an important part of the reason for the Church's growth in Tonga. However, little has been written about other conditions, past and present, that contributed to this growth.

Though conversion is a spiritual phenomenon which cannot be fully explained through historical or cultural factors, there are five significant issues that helped the Tongan people be particularly receptive to the gospel. They include (1) the Christianization of Tonga in the early to mid-1840s; (2) the impact of the Church's educational system in Tonga, specifi-

3. Shumway, "Tēvita Muli Kinikini," 336.

cally Liahona High School; (3) the powerful, pure faith which has been well documented and seems to be inherent in the Tongan people; (4) a distinctive moderation regarding worldly concerns; and (5) the opposition which the Church and the gospel experienced from the very beginning.

Church Beginnings in Tonga

Tonga is an archipelago made up of 169 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. Modern Tonga was established as a Polynesian kingdom in 1845. In 1875, King Taufa'ahau, later known as George Tubou I, drafted a constitution which granted many freedoms to the Tongan people, including freedom of religion.[4] There are currently 52,421 members of the Church in Tonga out of a total population of 120,000 people.[5] However, the Church has not always been so successful in this island nation. The missionaries who served in Tonga for the first several decades experienced a very different situation with significant persecution and opposition.[6] In spite of early difficulties, the missionaries' "humble efforts . . . eventually paved the way for a vibrant, growing Church membership," according to one historian.[7]

Brigham Smoot and Alva J. Butler were the first Latter-day Saints to attempt to bring the gospel to the Tongan islands. They landed on July 15, 1891, at Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu. Their arrival seemed well timed, as the Tongan legislature was holding its annual meeting. Leaders had gathered from all three

4. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 432.
5. *2007 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2006), 467.
6. For a detailed account, see R. Lanier Britsch, "Beginnings in Australia, New Zealand, Samoa, and Tonga," in *Unto Every Nation: Gospel Light Reaches Every Land*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 160–80.
7. Eric B. Shumway, "Tonga: A Heritage of Faith," *Ensign*, August 1995, 36.

island groups.[8] The two missionaries met with many important national and local leaders and ultimately received permission to proselyte from King George himself. However, after six years of sustained effort, including the establishment of Church-run schools and the preaching of the gospel on all three island groups by many missionaries (Tongatapu to start, Haʻapai in May 1893, and Vavaʻu in September 1895), only sixteen Tongans were baptized. As a result, "the First Presidency recommended that the Tongan Conference be closed," and the missionaries departed from Tonga on April 18, 1897.[9] The facts surrounding the growth of the Church in Tonga from such inauspicious beginnings in the nineteenth century to having the highest percentage of members of any country in the world in the twenty-first century are therefore quite remarkable.

The Introduction of Christianity

Groundwork for the Church's success in Tonga was originally laid by those who brought Christianity to Tonga, not by LDS Church members. Modern Tongans speak of the coming of Christianity as "'the coming of light,' against the *poʻuli*, or nighttime of warfare, punitive chieftain rule."[10] At about the same time that the Prophet Joseph Smith was restoring the fullness of Christ's gospel to the world, Christianity was gaining a strong foothold in Tonga. On August 2, 1831, an important Tongan chief, Taufaʻahau, was baptized. Taufaʻahau took the Christian name Jiaoji, or George, and was instrumental in the Christianizing of Tonga, a process largely complete by the 1840s.[11] Chief Jiaoji became king of Tonga in 1852. "Tradition

8. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 431.
9. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 434.
10. Tamar G. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 27.
11. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 431.

says that he committed the islands of Tonga to God by scooping up a handful of soil and lifting it heavenward in prayer."[12]

Christianity proved to be a disruptive influence in Tonga. Long-held beliefs and cultural connections were broken and new ones created. Historian R. Lanier Britsch wrote: "Virtually all aspects of life, including the old socio-political structure, kin groups, and so forth, were affected. The abandonment of polygamy disrupted many once-stable families. Misuse of chiefly powers caused hardships for Tongans who were not part of the aristocracy."[13] However, as time passed, many of the original traditions which were at odds with Christianity gave way or adapted to the newly introduced religion. Christianity became the accepted belief system which influenced culture, traditions, and even the laws of the land. The Tongan constitution, which was heavily influenced by the Christian missionaries who worked with King George, legislated Christian morality. As one author wrote, "Tongan morality and Christian identity rested on the Bible."[14] This meant that many aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ were already part of the Tongan culture before Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in Tonga. Many of the cultural obstacles which would have required change for the Tongans to accept the Church fell by the wayside as the Tongans embraced Christianity.

Before Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in Tonga, there was already strong support for such Christian ideas as Sabbath observance; scripture study; purity in language, dress, and behavior; and honesty.[15] Even though the roots of many of these

12. LaRene Porter Gaunt, "Tonga: A Land of Believing People," *Ensign*, September 2001, 42.
13. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 432.
14. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 39.
15. Sosaia Hakaumotu Naulu, "Incidental Effects of Church Activity on Development, Landscapes and Culture: An Example from Tonga" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1990), 77–78.

values were already embedded in the indigenous culture, they were strengthened and Christianized through the work of early Christian missionaries. Modesty, for example, was already valued to some extent before the Christians came but took on new significance with the adoption of biblical values. Other practices such as Sabbath observance and scripture study were completely new to the Tongan people but became socially accepted and encouraged behavior. Some Christian values adopted a Tongan flavor. For example, in most Western nations, taking something which does not belong to you would be considered dishonest. In Tonga, however, it would be considered dishonest only if the thing taken was needed by the owner. If something is not needed, others are free to use it.[16]

Along with the more behavioral aspects of Christianity, most Tongans already shared a collective belief in the Bible by the time the restored gospel was introduced. As members of a now-Christian nation, Tongans did not have to be introduced to many of the basic aspects of the Latter-day Saint plan of salvation. They already believed that there was a God who sent His Only Begotten Son to earth to atone for the sins of man. They already believed that the sacrifice of Christ was necessary to bring us back to the God of heaven. They believed that God worked through prophets in the days of the Old and New Testament and that what these prophets taught was often written down in the form of scriptures. They believed that we are children of God with a common purpose to return and live with Him someday. This Christian background allowed Latter-day Saint missionaries to build on these shared beliefs and add the further light and knowledge restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. As one teacher at Liahona High School

16. John H. Groberg, *The Fire of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 52–53. This and several other aspects of Tongan culture are changing with the continued influence of foreign culture.

said, "When Tongans become Latter-day Saints, the gospel just refines their already good values. . . . For them, it's like a double dose of the gospel."[17]

However, the fact that a nation is Christian does not necessarily speed its acceptance of Mormonism. There are many nations in the twenty-first century who have been Christian for centuries in which Latter-day Saint missionary work is much less successful than in Tonga, including most European countries. One variable influencing how receptive a country is to the Church is how recently the people have converted to Christianity. A people who have recently shown an openness to make fundamental changes in their cultural and belief systems seem more receptive to further examining their beliefs. For many Christian nations, their religious traditions date back not dozens but hundreds of years. The Tongan nation adopted Christianity just over fifty years before the first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived. The relatively recent Christianization of Tonga seems to have helped prepare the people for the gospel.

Another factor in Tonga's Christianization was the rise of religious pluralism within Christianity. The Wesleyan Methodist denomination was first to succeed in proselyting to the Tongan people. After Methodist missionaries baptized Taufa'ahau (later King George), the vast majority of Tongans converted to his faith. However, right before the first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in Tonga, King George and several of his advisers—chief of whom was a Methodist missionary named Shirley W. Baker—decided to break off from the Methodists. They created their own church, the Wesleyan Free Church of Tonga. Though tremendous pressure was applied to average Tongans to change to the Free Church, many Tongans refused and stayed loyal to the main body of Methodists. In the beginning, this created two separate groups that were opposed to

17. Gaunt, "Tonga," 44.

the Latter-day Saint missionaries (both of which succeeded in creating substantial political obstacles for the missionaries), but the split created Christian pluralism, which allowed the Latter-day Saint missionaries to be seen as a viable, even if less popular, option.[18]

Liahona High School

It would be hard to overestimate the influence Liahona High School has had on the success of the Church in Tonga.[19] From the beginning of the Church's presence there, primary and secondary schools have played an important role in the development of the Church. In the early years, primary schools were "the heart and soul of the missionary system in Tonga."[20] By 1958 this focus changed to secondary schools: "The Pacific Board [of education for the Church] and the First Presidency decided that the Church would prefer the governments of various lands to assume the responsibility for the primary education of their own children. The efforts of the Church would be concentrated at Liahona."[21] Liahona High School became the flagship of what some consider the premier educational system in Tonga. The Church financially supported education in Tonga from the beginning. Though the financial expenditures were not large in the overall scheme of general Church

18. For an example of one major attempt to stop the Latter-day Saint missionaries, see R. Lanier Britsch, "Mormon Intruders in Tonga: The Passport Act of 1922," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 121–48.

19. Liahona High School was called Liahona College until 1961 (Delworth Keith Young, "Liahona High School, Its Prologue and Development to 1965" [master's thesis, Utah State University, 1967], 44).

20. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 476.

21. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 476.

spending, they were considerable for Tonga. One scholar wrote, "These institutions also operated on a budget that far exceeded like expenditures on the part of the Tongan government and the other churches."[22]

The first Church school in Tonga was dedicated in 1926 as the Makeke School (the name translates as "arise and awake"). Makeke School "was the principal method of advancing the Church for many years—as its students would study the gospel as part of the school's curriculum."[23] In 1947, Elder Matthew Cowley, "affectionately called their 'Polynesian Apostle' by the Saints of the South Pacific,"[24] said that their school was the greatest missionary the Tongan Mission had.[25] However, by this time the school had become somewhat dilapidated and was unable to physically support continued growth. As a result, Church leaders purchased land and, for the next six years, built a state-of-the-art campus. On February 11, 1952, Liahona High School opened. In many ways Liahona High School—as with its predecessor, the Makeke School—was the greatest missionary Tonga had because it encouraged those who were not Latter-day Saints to learn more about the Church. In addition, Liahona High School was Tonga's greatest training ground for future missionaries.

Over two hundred students attended Liahona High School during its first formal year of operation in 1952. Of these two hundred, around 35 percent of the students were not Latter-day Saints.[26] Throughout its history, the school was a powerful

22. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 63.
23. Sarah Jane Weaver, "Liahona High: A Foundation for Life," *Church News*, September 13, 1997, 12.
24. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. "Matthew Cowley."
25. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 479.
26. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 467.

magnet for Tongans who wanted to provide their children with a quality education. These Tongan youth were exposed to the gospel through the formal curriculum and interacted with their fellow students and faculty who were Latter-day Saints. "Liahona High School became a prime context in which students, both members and nonmembers, reconstituted themselves as Mormons,"[27] according to Tamar Gordon, who is not a member but wrote her dissertation on the Church in Tonga. Because the school complex also contains ward meetings and the temple, Tamar further claimed, "Liahona High School became not only the most important socializing body of the Church and the primary source of youthful converts, but also the hub of a sacred center."[28]

This educational center also became a missionary training center. The school had previously provided a venue for young Tongans to learn what it meant to be a Latter-day Saint and to be exposed to the Church. Within the first decade of its existence, Liahona High School also began to be used as a formal missionary training institution. As Britsch notes, around 1964 Pat Dalton, the mission president; Rondo Harmon, the school principal; "and the senior class advisor decided to call every graduate who was willing and worthy (which was most of them) to fill a short-term mission." Many of these graduates had such a positive experience that they later served full-time missions. By the end of 1965, 214 native Tongans were serving missions. "During that year, 1019 converts were baptized members of the Church. Many of them had been converted by graduates of Liahona High School."[29] While serving as mission president in 1966, John H. Groberg organized the Liahona Missionary Committee. Its job was to provide train-

27. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 66.

28. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 63.

29. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 479.

ing to future missionaries as well as to supervise missionary preparation classes at the high school.[30] Though not necessarily true of every year, "in 1983, virtually 100% of the Liahona graduating class, male and female, immediately embarked on a mission."[31] Thus, much of the Church growth in Tonga can be attributed to the Church's educational system generally and Liahona High School specifically.

Pure, Powerful Faith

The Tongans are a people blessed with a pure, powerful faith.[32] Lacking some of the pseudosophistication of other Christian people, many Tongans simply believe what many other modern-day Christians often question. As a result, many Tongan people have experienced miracles to an extent and frequency that is biblical in proportion. In some ways this was true even before the Church was introduced in Tonga, but the pattern of miracles has become even more pronounced.[33] As reported by David Cummings, an early missionary and author of a book on missionary work in the Pacific, the Tongans share an "unbounded faith in miracles characteristic of Polynesians. . . . It is doubtful whether, in any comparable period of time with a comparable number of people involved, there have been more miracles of greater diversity than are reported by South Pacific labor missionaries."[34] A labor missionary in Tonga adds, "One could write a large book, giving in detail the many outstanding healings I witnessed through administration while I

30. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 481.

31. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 68.

32. David W. Cummings, *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific: The Building Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Its History, Scope and Significance* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 153.

33. For an example, see Shumway, "Tēvita Muli Kinikini," 311–38.

34. Cummings, *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific*, 160.

was serving as a labor missionary in the Tongan Mission."[35] In fact, several books and articles have been written documenting the tremendous faith of the Tongan people.[36]

This simple faith has allowed the Tongans to consider religious truths other people have written off as impossible. Because the Bible witnesses of God's miraculous power and most Tongans believe in the Bible, they have been able to accept the possibility of a God who again appears to prophets and a God who is still involved in His children's lives. This is not to suggest that all Tongans have this kind of faith, but the willingness of many Tongans to take God at His word allows them to experience His power to a remarkable degree. As the Tongans exercise their simple yet powerful faith, the Lord has continually rewarded them with manifestations of His love and power. This in turn continues to strengthen their faith and commitment to the gospel.

Moderation in Worldly Concerns

The New Testament parable of the sower teaches the spiritually detrimental effect of being overly concerned with the "cares of the world" (see Matthew 13:18–23; Mark 4:14–20). Tongans, like all people, want the comforts of life. But, unlike many of their contemporaries, they have generally not been obsessed with worldly consumption. For much of their history, Tongans lived a subsistence lifestyle where their food,

35. LaVell Manwaring, quoted in Cummings, *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific*, 158.

36. Carter E. Grant, "Tonga," *Improvement Era*, May 1966; John H. Groberg, *In the Eye of the Storm* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993); John H. Groberg, *Anytime, Anywhere* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006); Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, October 1968; Fa'aki Kihelotu 'Alatini Richter, *From Tonga to Zion: The Story of Fa'aki Kihelotu 'Alatini Richter, or Faith and Prayer* (Phoenix: Polynesian Publications, 1991).

housing, and clothing came from their tropical paradise.[37] Until the late 1960s, all the people in Tonga, including the king, were expected to help produce their own food.[38] Though Tongans are known as hardworking people,[39] until recently they traditionally labored to provide only for their family's needs rather than to get ahead.[40] This moderate approach to life seems to have taken away one of the typical obstacles to spiritual growth: obsessive materialism.

Just as Tongans tend to be moderate in their worldly consumption, their attitude regarding worldly status has also defied the competitiveness typical of modern society. Respect for leaders is an important part of the Tongan culture.[41] *Mateaki*, or loyalty (especially to the village or local authority), has long been a major part of Tongan culture.[42] Early converts to Mormonism did not come from the ruling class but from the poorer classes. In fact, many of the rulers were antagonistic toward the Church. The Tongan custom to follow established leaders, some of whom were antagonistic to the Church, created a dilemma for the fledgling Church. Tongans were much more willing to change their religious affiliation if powerful and popular leaders were Church members. In fact, many islanders believed it was "anti-Tongan" to leave the Wesleyan Church for the Church of Jesus Christ.[43]

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37. R. Lanier Britsch, "The Expansion of Mormonism in the South Pacific," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 58–59.
38. John H. Groberg, *Fire of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 116.
39. Cummings, *Mighty Missionary of the Pacific*, 141, 151.
40. Vernon Lynn Tyler, ed., "A Study of Cultural and Religious Characteristics and Influences: Tonga" (Salt Lake City: Church Schools, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1969), 49.
41. Tyler, "A Study of Cultural and Religious Characteristics and Influences," 28.
42. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 34–35.
43. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 481.

This same tendency has now turned into an advantage for the Church. Well-respected leaders, including the Tongan monarchy and many nobles, now respect the Church. This makes it easier for Tongans to view the Church as a viable option. Moreover, the Tongan willingness to follow nobles and other respected leaders before baptism translates into a willingness to follow priesthood leaders after baptism.[44] A feeling of obligation not only to follow one's leader but to work hard at doing so has allowed the Tongans to prosper in the gospel whereas many others have failed due to a lack of humility and commitment to Church leaders.

Opposition Creates Strength

The opposition that created obstacles for the Church early in its history ultimately strengthened the local leadership. After missionaries left Tonga due to lack of success in 1897, missionary work began again when Heber J. McKay and William O. Facer sailed to Tonga from Samoa in 1907. A decade later, Tonga became its own mission in 1916 with "approximately 450 Tongan Saints, eleven branches, two conferences, and [twelve] missionaries."[45] However, by 1919, political and religious leaders of other faiths began a concerted effort to stem the tide of Latter-day Saint successes. In 1921 a law was passed forbidding any further visas from being extended to Latter-day Saint missionaries. Since the Church calls laymen and women to serve as missionaries for only a brief time, this exclusionary law threatened to eliminate missionary work in Tonga within a couple of years.

The restriction on foreign missionaries may have been a great hardship on the Church in the beginning, but it turned into

44. Gordon, "Inventing Mormon Identity in Tonga," 34, 36.

45. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 437.

a major advantage. It necessitated the calling of native Tongans to serve as full-time missionaries. From 1922 to 1924, President M. Vernon Coombs called forty-nine Tongans to serve as full-time missionaries.[46] Most of these were married, and their families joined them on their missions. He also called up to ten "home missionaries" within each district to serve on a part-time basis. When the exclusionary law was repealed in 1924, mission presidents continued to rely largely on locally called Tongan missionaries as the number of visas granted to foreign missionaries was always very limited. In fact, when Elder John H. Groberg became mission president in July 1966, only six foreign missionaries were permitted in Tonga. By the time he left in 1969, the quota had been raised to twelve.

The calling and service of local Tongan missionaries had the twofold benefit of continuing the proselyting effort that was vital for continued Church growth and also strengthening the testimony and commitment of those who were called to serve. These same Tongan missionaries completed their missions and then returned to their branches and districts to add vitally needed strength and leadership. In fact, from the 1920s onward, virtually every leadership position (other than the mission president) was filled by Tongans, many of whom had served their missions in their homeland. These Tongans also became the teachers and the leaders of the Tongan Church schools.

When World War II started, the First Presidency of the Church decided to withdraw all foreign missionaries once again from Tonga. However, by this time almost all leadership positions as well as most of the missionary work in the country was being done by native Tongans. As a result, there was no need to transition from a church run by foreign missionaries to one run by native members. The withdrawal of American

46. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 449.

missionaries proved to be a traumatic and disruptive event for the Church in many places in the world, but it had very little impact on the Church in Tonga.

The training and spiritual growth of native Tongans as missionaries and leaders necessitated through hardship and restrictions ultimately produced a self-sufficiency that set the Church on a firm foundation. As R. Lanier Britsch said:

> The slow, trying years, the years of struggle, persecutions, disappointments, and difficulties finally came to an end. Even the annoyances caused by government restrictions and the petty harassments of other churches seemed to work more to the Church's good than to its detriment. During this era the Tongan Saints matured and advanced in matters relating to leadership, Church organization, and spiritual enlargement; the constructing of chapels and other buildings for Church purposes; the improvement of the system for teaching the gospel to nonmembers; and the growth and improvement of the Church school system in Tonga. The rapid growth of the 1950s and 1960s was to a great degree an outgrowth of the work that had been done by earlier [native] missionaries and members.[47]

Conclusion

Will the Church continue to grow at such an astonishing pace in Tonga as many of the circumstances which enabled its twentieth-century success begin to change? Many Tongan families have now been part of their own Christian religious traditions for over a century now, making conversion away from those traditions less likely. Liahona High School is still a tremendously important Church institution in Tonga, yet other quality educational options now exist. Though many Tongans continue to live simple lives of moderation, the materialism

47. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 469.

of the modern world is making inroads in Tonga. At the same time, the Church is set on a firm foundation with seasoned leadership and traditions which are strong and vibrant. As Tēvita Muli Kinikini's faith was nurtured in this unique Tongan environment, many Tongan Saints continue to grow in faith along with the greater Church. The future looks bright for the people of the friendly islands.