

HARLOT MURAL at NAVUNIBITU, RA, FIJI  
(At Naiserelegi: Kings Road)

The murals decorating the Mission Church at Navunibitu were commissioned by Msgr. Franz Wasner when he was pastor of the mission, and painted between October, 1962 and the beginning of January, 1963.

The wall over the main altar forms three panels of equal size. The central panel, flanked by two wings set at an angle, suggested the idea of a triptych, a form traditional in religious art. This lent itself admirably to the subject matter dictated by Monsignor Wasner: Indians and Fijians, the major races of Fiji, become united in their devotion to Christ.

Christ Crucified is the central figure, dark of skin and crowned with thorns, with a cruciform halo above his head. His loincloth is made of local bark cloth or masi with a design including stylized fish and bird.

The Sacred Heart, haloed in light, symbolizes the love of Christ for all mankind, the reason for his sacrifice and the source of unity among men. The liturgical significance of the scene is emphasized by the Latin inscription, "All honour and glory", interlaced with local designs.

The setting of the entire mural is definitely Fijian, with breadfruit, yaqona and banana plants patterning the background. In Fijian, the single word 'uto' means both 'breadfruit' and 'heart'. Thus the breadfruit leaves and fruits are a symbolic projection of the love of Christ.

At the foot of the cross there are offerings from both races: on the left, a kava bowl or tanoa shaped like a stylized sea turtle, with its cord and shells stretched toward the Crucified, the one to be honoured; on the right, an Indian ceremonial offering of blue-burning camphor, floating in a brass bowl.

On the left panel, a Fijian in ceremonial dress offers a tabua or whale's tooth to Christ. Behind him, a woman waits with her offering: a mat made with her own hands and held in the traditional gesture of giving. Msgr. Mataca, a Fijian priest, robed in white, preaches the word of Christ, while prayers are offered by little Teresia dressed in the blue of the mission school. St. Peter Chanel, a missionary martyred in the Pacific, holds the instrument of his death, a sculptured war club.

The right panel depicts an Indian woman dressed in a mauve sari, holding towards the cross a garland of flowers. Behind her, an Indian farmer comes forward, guiding his yoked oxen through a field of sugar cane. At the far right an altar boy, dressed in red, holds a lighted taper and assists St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of the Mission Church and of India, who holds high the chalice and host, continuing the sacrifice of Christ through the Mass. Giant ferns in the background, with their curled young leaves, suggest a bishop's crozier.

Wall paintings over the two side altars complete the decorations of the church. On the left is Joseph, the carpenter in his workshop, with the Christ child helping him with his manual tasks. On the right, the Annunciation scene depicts Mary at a typically Fijian occupation: braiding a voivoi mat, when she is startled by the message of the Angel.

The murals are painted in true fresco, that is, on fresh mortar. It is an exacting technique that requires a close collaboration between mason and artist. Franz Glinserer, lay missionary still at the mission station, did the masonry work. Jean Charlot painted the murals, helped by his wife, Zohmah, and his son, Martin.

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VISITORS ARE WELCOME at the Mission to view the murals and interesting architecture of the 70 year old church. A beautiful panoramic view of Viti Levu Bay also awaits the visitor. Shade and water are available for picnics. You are also welcome to use the toilet facilities. Navunibitu is 20 miles (towards Suva) from Rakiraki Hotel, and 50 miles (towards Lautoka) from Tailevu Hotel.

Navunibitu Catholic Mission serves as a primary school for 200 children of mixed races, half of whom are boarders from deep inland or from far out on the coast. It is also the home of two priests who serve the 1,800 Catholics in the Province of Ra. Ra Province includes some of the roughest mission country in Fiji, so the station is really only a place for the priests to 'hang a hat' and rest between hard bush trips to the interior where most of the Catholics reside. The mission supports itself and the school with a bit of sugar cane and cattle, and by the generous help of friends overseas. School fees that parents can afford do not suffice to support the school. Plans are being made to expand the school into a Junior Secondary School in 1974. Donations can be made to help this work by sending cheques to:

Rev. Father in charge  
C.M. Navunibitu  
Private Bag  
Suva, Fiji

Present staff at Navunibitu:

2 priests: Father I. Chanel Cyr, Pastor (U.S.A.)  
          Father Daniel Johns, Assistant (Fijian)  
1 brother: 1 lay missionary (Austria)  
4 sisters: 5 teachers.

**Editor's note: this article is not signed by Jean Charlot but resembles closely texts he wrote for other murals. The text has probably been edited.**