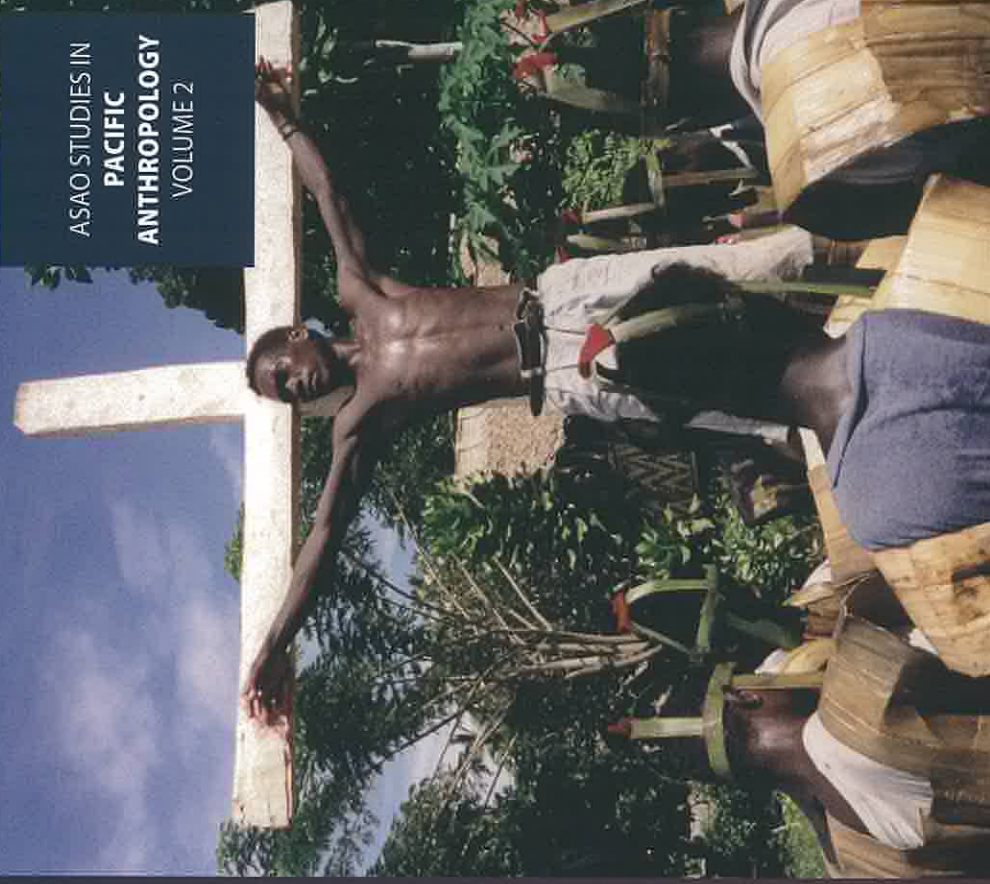


ASAO STUDIES IN
PACIFIC
ANTHROPOLOGY
VOLUME 2



CHRISTIAN POLITICS IN OCEANIA

Edited by **MATT TOMLINSON**
and **DEBRA MCDUGALL**

ASAO Studies in Pacific Anthropology

General Editor: Rupert Stasch, Department of Anthropology,
University of California, San Diego

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Christian Politics in Oceania



Edited by
Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall



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MT & DM, November 2011

Christian Politics in Oceania

MATT TOMLINSON and DEBRA MCDOUGALL

“What difference does Christianity make?” Fenella Cannell begins her landmark edited volume *The Anthropology of Christianity* (2006) with this provocative question, and to the book’s credit, the contributors arrive at different—but always ethnographically vivid—answers. For example, Seventh-day Adventists in Madagascar use the Bible as a basis for “normal science,” continually attempting to harmonize mainstream scientific knowledge with scriptural standards. In contrast, Swedish Pentecostals believe that physical reality can be shaped linguistically, and they expect healthy bodies and worldly success to come from repeatedly speaking the right words. For the Biaks of Papua the difference Christianity makes is comparatively slight, as it simply offers a new “place to capture the foreign” (Keller 2006; Coleman 2006; Rutherford 2006: 259).

Despite the volume’s ethnographic insights, Cannell’s answer to her own question is ultimately less than satisfying. She concludes her introduction by stating: “If we can stop presupposing that Christianity changes everything forever, we may be able to begin to see the experiences of Christianity, in all their diversity, complexity, and singularity, for what they are” (2006: 45). There are two problems with this statement: first, it sets up a straw man, the (nonexistent) anthropologist who treats Christianity as an exclusively transformative force; second, it treats the ground of experience as unproblematic—as if seeing things “for what they are” could ever be agreed upon fully (cf. Scott 1991). If Cannell’s conclusion misses the mark, her question nonetheless remains central, and no anthropologist has yet answered it definitively. What difference, after all, *does* Christianity make?

In this volume, we offer an answer based on ethnographic research in Pacific Islands societies. Thirty years ago, the missiologist Charles Forman stated that Oceania was “in all probability, the most solidly Christian part of the world” (1982: 227). By this, he meant that the overwhelming majority of islanders were members of Christian churches, and that they “were more devoted in Christian belief and gave to the churches a larger place in their life than did the people of any other region” (ibid.). The first claim is easy to prove: of the fifteen countries in the world with the highest percentage of Christian

affiliation in the population, six are Pacific nations or territories, more than any other region (the Americas have five; Europe has four). Every independent Oceanic state except for Fiji and Nauru has a Christian population of more than 80 percent, and most are above 90 percent (World Christian Database 2004). Forman's second claim, regarding devotion, raises a more complex set of issues. What does it mean, after all, to be "solidly Christian"? As anthropologists, we take this question's utility to be the way it prompts us to consider what makes a society "solidly" anything, especially when that "anything" is as labile and shape-shifting a force as Christianity. Yet questions about the solidity of Christian identification, the quality of Christian belief, and the centrality of churches in social life are not only analytical questions; they are also, and perhaps more importantly, the sorts of questions that Pacific Christians increasingly ask themselves.

We suggest that Oceanic societies may be characterized as "solidly Christian" because the political implications of Christianity are often taken for granted: Christianity is the ground and starting point for political action. This is not the same thing as saying that religions always have a political aspect—a banal, if true, point. Rather, it is to call attention to the fact that Christianity's pervasiveness in Oceania can make it seem deceptively apolitical. Only in Fiji, where religious difference parallels other social divisions, has Christianity become politically salient in obvious ways. Across the region, Christianity and politics have redefined each other in ways that make the two categories inseparable at any level of analysis. One can only understand what is Christian in Oceania through understanding what is political, and one can only understand what is political by understanding what is Christian. We do not mean to collapse these categories, but to show how each is irreducibly constitutive of the other. In Oceania, the difference that Christianity makes is always and inevitably political.¹

To be clear, we are not arguing that the domain of Christianity and the domain of politics are always merged, for this is demonstrably not the case. Yet even in situations where Christianity and politics are bounded as distinct and ideally non-intersecting domains—as is the case among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea (Robbins, this volume)—we can see that Christianity delimits the potential of political action. Another way of saying that Christianity and politics are analytically inseparable is to suggest that Christianity shapes the contours of "the political" in Oceania and vice versa. Thus, one of the ways that we attempt to unpack the relationship between religion and politics is to pay close attention to how Pacific Islanders conceptualize this relationship and to how these conceptualizations play out in practice.

There is something paradoxical about our claim that Christianity and politics are thoroughly entwined. To the extent that anthropologists and other scholars have tried to discern the difference that Christianity makes, many

have suggested that modern Christianity is distinctive because it insists upon a separation of religion and politics. This point is at the crux of Talal Asad's critique of religion as an anthropological category: he argues that the definition of religion as a distinct domain of ideas and practices has a Protestant genealogy (Asad 1993; see also Ruel 1982; Luria 1996; Pollman 1996). Inspired in part by this line of analysis, anthropologists seeking cross-cultural grounds for the comparative study of Christianity have pointed to the prominent emphasis on meaning in Christian ritual (Engelke and Tomlinson 2006), on the centrality of individual belief (Robbins 2004), and on a desire to separate matters of the spirit from the base materiality of words and objects (Keane 2007; Engelke 2007). Such studies have demonstrated that many Christians (and, we might add, non-Christians who treat religion as a matter of belief) try to keep their beliefs separate from the entanglements of sociopolitical life and the spirit-stultifying structures of bureaucratic institutions. Several contributors to this volume discuss the work of H. Richard Niebuhr as a particularly lucid exposition of this Protestant ideology. Sects, according to Niebuhr (1929), emerge out of frustration with established organizational forms, but after a generation or so they tend to be consolidated into "denominated" churches, opposed to other churches, and associated with the narrow interests of a class, race, ethnicity or nation, thus betraying the faith's radical promise of human unity.

Not all of the forms of Christianity discussed in this volume—let alone all of those practiced by Christians around the world—seek a spiritual life radically delimited from worldly institutions.² To take just one example, the Anglicans of the Melanesian Mission formulated a missiology of accommodation that strove to reconcile the traditions of Melanesia with the truths of the Bible. According to David Hilliard, the Mission's "interventions in secular politics combined a judiciously balanced defence of Melanesian interests with a deference to established authorities." The Oxford- and Cambridge-educated men who led the missions "respected the traditions of Melanesian villagers because they revered their own" (1978: 294). This reverence colors the present: as Michael W. Scott has shown, for example, indigenous Anglican leaders in Makira, Solomon Islands, continue to seek out connections and commonalities between Christianity and custom (2007: 268–82).

In this volume, we observe both "church-like" and "sect-like" Christianities, with the former tending toward engagement and integration and the latter tending toward disarticulation and separation. But as Scott points out in his chapter, discourses and practices often "resist clean denominational categorization"; rather than relying on denominational labels to categorize types of Christianity, scholars must attend to the broad precepts of Christianity and to the particular denominational inflections of these precepts, as well as to idiosyncratic individual attempts to make sense of the world in light of both. While this volume gives evidence of the overt political force of clearly "denominated"

forms of Christianity, contributors also attend to the ways that apparently non-confrontational discourses and practices may be pitched against denominational alternatives. Thus Christian politics “need not be located in sermons, institutional church pronouncements, public debates, campaign platforms, or national agendas. Seemingly localized idiosyncratic discourses can carry theologically rigorous internal denominational politics with far-reaching visions for national, international, and cosmic politics” (Scott, this volume). In the face of diversity across dialogically constituted denominational traditions, then, the difference that Christianity makes cannot be manifest in any particular ideological stance toward politics.

It may be impossible to answer Cannell’s question in a fully satisfactory way. But this does not mean that we can do little more than note the “diversity, complexity, and singularity” of Christian experience. Rather than abandon the comparative endeavor, we pursue comparison in two modest ways. First, we focus on Oceania, and specifically on Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji, four troubled nation-states in the western Pacific whose engagements with Christianity are historically entwined. As we have already suggested, Christianity is the dominant cultural force throughout the region. We would not expect Christianity and politics to be so thoroughly entwined in other places, although we trust that our analysis of these dynamics in the Pacific will offer insights into those dynamics elsewhere. The second impulse in this volume is more subtle. In many of our chapters, we engage in comparative discussions of Christianity (and, in McDougall’s chapter, of Islam) precisely because this is something our interlocutors do themselves, both at metropolitan theological colleges and village kava circles. Most of the people whose lives are discussed in these chapters are engaged in exercises in comparative religion, trying to make sense of the different visions of self and nation that they encounter. They critically evaluate new and old forms of Christianity against each other and make sense of troubling political situations in light of different denominations’ insights. Even the most rural villages—the ones slipping off the map at the self-described “ends of the earth,” the ones that seem thoroughly excluded from economic globalization—are centrally implicated in the swift religious shifts taking place at local and global levels.

The limits and contours of Christian politics

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Christianity was still being introduced to much of Oceania, religion had emerged as a salient (indeed, naturalized) category in Europe. Christianity was introduced to Pacific Islanders as a token of a type—as one “religion” among others—and they were encouraged to reflect on indigenous cultural practices in order to distinguish

the religious from the merely secular. A familiar line in missionary writings from the era is a concern about whether converts had experienced a “truly” religious change of heart or whether they had come under mission influence for merely social, political, or material reasons.

If anthropologists have tended to emphasize the role of missions in establishing colonial hegemony, many Pacific Islanders seem to reverse the means and ends, seeing the establishment of colonial administration as a mere prelude to the Christian transformation of their societies. Thus, when a group of Fiji’s leading chiefs ceded their nation to Queen Victoria in 1874, they declared that they were “desirous of securing the promotion of civilisation and Christianity” (quoted in Dean and Ritova 1988: 36). Although government pacification preceded missionization in much of the western Pacific, many narratives of conversion pull the chain of causation in the other direction, claiming that warfare ended because ancestors heeded the Gospel message of peace (Dureau 2001; Errington and Gewertz 1994; White 1991: 138).

Unlike many of the indigenous institutions that Christianity and colonialism partially supplanted, the introduced institutions of colonial church and colonial state were often markedly distinct. To be clear, mission Christianity was never apolitical: colonial administrators gave permission and protection to colonial missions because they helped make colonial subjects governable. But few missions moved in lockstep with government policies, and British colonial administrations in particular sometimes worried that mission teachings would undermine the supposedly “traditional” political structures that enabled policies of indirect rule. As Jean and John Comaroff write of Nonconformist missionaries among the Tswana in Southern Africa, “the evangelists might have wished for potent chiefs and secure polities, but their own actions subverted the very political capital on which Tswana government rested” (1991: 259; see also Etherington 2005). Even as the Methodist Mission educated many of the islanders working for the British district administration in the Western Solomon Islands, for example, longtime mission head Rev. John Goldie saw himself as preventing the exploitation of islanders at the hands of European traders and protectorate officials who sought to alienate their land (Hilliard 1966: 273–334). In the meantime, the Seventh-day Adventist mission in the same region remained aloof from affairs of state, deploying its promising converts not in government but as missionaries elsewhere in the Protectorate and throughout Papua New Guinea (Steley 1989). Whether engaged or aloof, however, missions in the Western Solomons and throughout Oceania shaped the ways that their adherents engaged first with colonial administrations and later with independent national states.

Although many European, white Australian, and Pakeha New Zealander missionaries in the Pacific worked to distinguish the domains of politics and religion, such distinctions were not necessarily salient to converts. Across the

Pacific, once islanders began to make Christianity “their own,” they blurred imported ideological boundaries between religion and politics that did not map onto indigenous categories. In much of the central and western Pacific, would-be converts were evangelized not by Europeans but by other islanders who had converted decades or generations earlier and who brought a Christianity already shaped by encounters with Oceanic understandings of sacred and secular power.³

In the present, one of the most remarkable features of Oceanic religious politics is the degree to which Christianity defines the terms of national identity. Throughout the region there are attempts to define the state as a Christian polity, with many countries’ constitutions explicitly equating national identity and Christian identity. For example, Samoa—statistically the most Christian nation in the world after the Holy See—begins its constitution with a ringing declaration:

IN THE HOLY NAME OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, THE EVER LOVING[.] WHEREAS sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omnipresent God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Samoa within the limits prescribed by His commandments is a sacred heritage[;]

WHEREAS the Leaders of Samoa have declared that Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition ... we the people of Samoa in our Constitutional Convention, this 28th day of October 1960, do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution.⁴

The constitution of Nauru begins with similar sentiments, phrased more simply: “WHEREAS we the people of Nauru acknowledge God as the almighty and everlasting Lord and the giver of all good things: And Whereas we humbly place ourselves under the protection of His good providence and seek His blessing upon ourselves and upon our lives.” The theme of placing trust in God is prominent, with the constitutions of Kiribati and the Marshall Islands mentioning such trust in their first sentences, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands both declaring themselves to be “under the guiding hand of God” as they establish their states, Tuvalu invoking “the guidance of God,” and Tonga beginning its constitution with a “declaration of freedom” that is a theological statement of mankind’s freedom through God’s will.

In many of these documents, Christianity is made to sing in harmony with reified indigenous tradition. The worthy customs of the ancestors are proudly invoked as supportive of Christianity, and in some cases they even merge with it. Tokelau’s constitution begins by drawing the Christian God and the traditional deities Maui and Tui Tokelau together in a single image of the divine: “We, the people of Tokelau, declare, Tokelau is permanently founded on God.

This foundation is made manifest in the villages and when the people cooperate and live together peacefully and happily. At the dawn of time the historic islands of Atafu, Nukunonu, Fakaofu, and Olohega were created as our home. Since the days of Maui and Tui Tokelau the land, sea, and air have nurtured our people, and God has watched over us.” The constitution of Papua New Guinea makes a point of expressing respect for ancestors and honoring “traditional wisdoms” while also invoking “the Christian principles that are ours now” (see Robbins, this volume). Fiji’s constitution asserts that God “has always watched over these islands” while mentioning the ancestors’ conversion to Christianity “through the power of the name of Jesus Christ,” casting God both as the author of traditional religion and its replacement.

The politics of tradition and *kastom* (“custom”) have been intensely, sometimes vehemently, debated over the past three decades, and we do not want to make that troubled journey again. Rather, we want to observe how tradition—like politics—has developed as a category in constant dialogue with Christianity in the Pacific. Writing of the American Revolution, Benjamin Lee has argued that “we see the emergence of a notion of peoplehood concrete enough to apply to every citizen but abstract enough to legitimate a constitution” (1997: 322). In Oceania, the notion of “we, the people” often retains this abstractness at one level while insisting at another level that whoever we are and whatever we become, we do so as Christians.

Yet this fusion is not the only way that Pacific Islanders describe the relationship between religion and politics. Many conceive of Christianity, tradition, and government as three parts of a larger whole. The articulation of these elements is envisioned through different metaphors—for example, the legs of a tripod in Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands (White, this volume), sides in Polap, Micronesia (Flinn 2010), and pillars in Fiji (Tomlinson 2009). In other contexts, however, Pacific Islanders do not emphasize fusion or congruence between Christianity and tradition or the state, but strive to reject ancestral traditions wholesale. Even members of churches that generally value traditions, like Fijian Methodism or Solomon Islands Anglicanism, may invoke an opposition between the darkness of the past and Christian enlightenment. Some also consider Christianity to be opposed to national states which by and large have failed to provide many benefits to their citizens. Against those who have claimed that Papua New Guinean nationalism is underdeveloped, Joel Robbins (1998) has argued that many PNG citizens have very strong ideas about the nation but that their attachment to the nation is profoundly negative. Rather than seeing congruence between “traditional wisdoms” and “Christian principles” (as presented in the PNG constitution), Urapmin see transnational Christianity as an alternative to the nation as a translocal form of imagined community. Being Christian is understood to be a potential means of transcending the troubled nation, as well as blackness as a racial identity and the

vexations of local custom, all of which are negatively valued by Urapmin (see also Bashkow 2006; Eves 2003; Jorgensen 2005; Scott, this volume).

Seventh-day Adventists and some other fundamentalist Protestants see national states and international institutions like the United Nations as the harbingers of a “new world order” that will ultimately persecute true believers. Far from seeing history as progressively fulfilling God’s prophecy, the theology of such visions breaks human history into “dispensations” defined by the type of relationship prevailing between God and humans that are both attested to and predicted in the Bible. According to premillennial versions of this dispensationalism, the present is a time of intensifying chaos and war preceding the Second Coming of Christ. Such theologies may appear to be apolitical insofar as they seem to despair of changing the course of history; instead, they encourage adherents to align their own lives with God’s will so they will be among the saved rather than the damned at history’s end. Premillennial dispensationalism is not, however, the only prophetic vision of end times embraced by evangelical Christians in Oceania. Theological currents that might be labeled Christian reconstructionism, postmillennialism, dominionism, or Kingdom theology seem to be on the rise in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, for example (see, respectively, Tomlinson, McDougall, and Eriksen, this volume). Christians influenced by these global theological movements do not see nation-states as Satan’s tools; rather, they believe that Christ has commissioned them to minister to “the nations” and to help bring God’s dominion to the earth. In contrast to the nationalist authors of constitutions, their focus is not on how Christianity can support the shared values of a national community; instead, for many evangelicals, nation-states are the means and not the ends of Christian action.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, we should expect variations in the relationship between Christianity, tradition, and the state not only across societies but also in different contexts within the same society. For example, we might contrast the ways that traditional authority in Fiji has been joined with Christianity in a way that has not occurred in Papua New Guinea. But in doing so, we must also pay attention to the differences between the ways in which this relationship is figured: on the one hand in constitutional declarations and other programmatic statements, and on the other in the everyday rumors, grumblings, and hopes of Christian citizens.⁵ Christianity and politics are constituted in relation to one another, but the relationship may be framed as fusion, articulation, disconnection, or a complex combination of patterns.

Whether we are considering the politics of European missionization, Christian nationalism, or evangelical attempts to rescue the nation, we cannot begin our analyses with fixed definitions of religion or politics. The first analytical step must be to ask what sorts of distinctions are locally relevant. One way to do this is to consider the limits of Christian action. What kinds of actions

are considered off-limits for Christians, or at least for those individuals most responsible for representing, acting on behalf of, or speaking for the church as a whole? Is there a distinction between what a pastor can do and what a chief can do? In this volume, Robbins’s discussion of the ambivalent role of Christian “big men” and Handman’s discussion of the use of village proxies to disguise denominational power struggles clarify such distinctions. Conversely, White’s account of the most recent chapter in a decades-long endeavor to integrate the Christianized customary power of chiefs with the formal institutions of government suggests that any distinction between church and government is problematic for the people of Santa Isabel. Eriksen describes the activities of a church founder who defines his mission as organizing congregants into “a new politically and economically conscious generation.” Tomlinson’s and McDougall’s descriptions of contemporary evangelical crusades in Fiji and the Solomons reveal a desire to merge the political and the religious by “taking back the nation” in ways that seem to owe much to the Christian politics of North America.

Another way to trace local distinctions of the religious and the political is to pay close attention to processes of circulation. The things that circulate socially—discourse, ideologies, texts—do not “flow” in free space but help define the contours of their own circulation and the conditions of their uptake. Sometimes the patterns and pragmatics of circulation seem straightforward, but careful analysis usually complicates the picture. For example, consider Romans 13:1–2, which reads: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” Robbins’s chapter discusses the verses’ unsettled meanings in the context of Urapmin understandings of the relationship between religion and politics, which he describes as a diarchy: “each domain has its own kinds of legitimate leaders, leadership in one domain confers little or no authority in the other, and no one is allowed to occupy leading positions in both domains at the same time.” He notes that all Urapmin know and discuss this passage of the Bible. But Urapmin have not reached a consensus on whether the message of Romans 13 supports their diarchical system, giving “politics its own place,” or supports an opposing model of politics as “part of the divine scheme of things ... [which could] give them ample ammunition to develop fully fledged arguments about the religious grounding of politics.”

Similarly, Tomlinson describes a situation in which Romans 13:1–2 circulates prominently, indexing ongoing concerns with sorting out the relationship between religious and political domains. In coup-era Fiji, the verses have been invoked frequently to support the neotraditional chiefly system nurtured by conservative, ethnonationalist, indigenous-led governments; the Fijian trans-

lation of Romans 13:1–2 explicitly refers to *turaga*, “chiefs,” bolstering such an interpretation. In the event Tomlinson analyzes, however, an evangelical preacher broadens his interpretation of the passage to discuss the general idea of “leadership,” an idea that for him is exemplified by Fiji’s current military-led government, which is distinctly anti-chiefly. In short, the preacher uses the passage to oppose what most other speakers use it to justify. This does not support the fatuous notion that the Bible can prove anything, Tomlinson argues, but rather it reveals the strategies through which indigenous Fijians disentangle competing systems—chiefly, democratic, military—in the act of defining authority always in relation to divine power.

Other chapters discuss similar dynamics of circulation in the categorization of religion and politics. For example, Scott discusses Makirans’ use of passages from Revelation both to understand their situation at the end of time and the end of the world and to recognize the Antichrist, identified by some as the late prime minister, Solomon Mamaloni. McDougall notes the opposition in Solomon Islands between churches that tend to draw on the books of Daniel and Revelation in articulating an antinationalist message and those that draw on books such as Isaiah and Kings to argue that God’s rule must take effect “through the agency of earthly governments.”

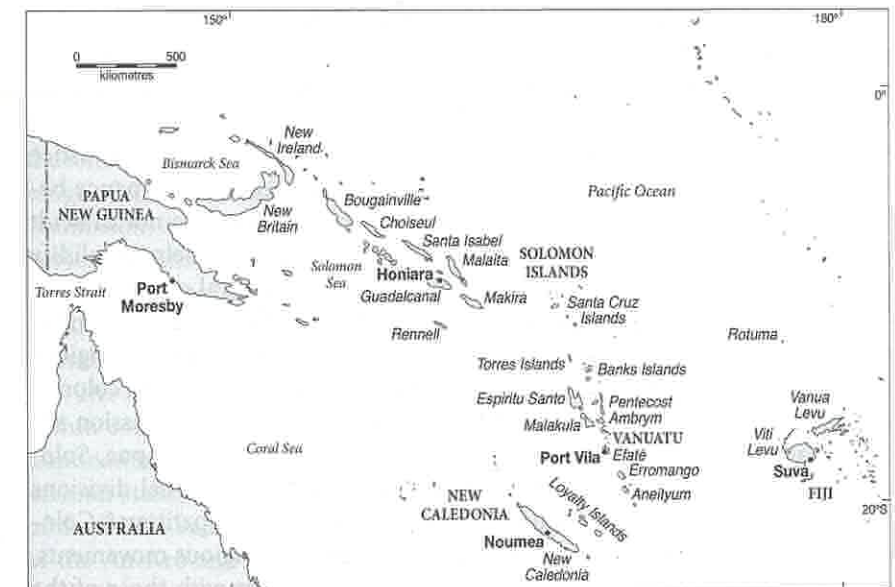
Troubled states of Oceania: toward a comparative anthropology of Christianity

We frame this volume as an exploration of Christian politics in Oceania—not just in Melanesia—for two reasons. First, this publication emerged from a workshop that included contributions from scholars working across the Pacific Islands. Many of the themes discussed in this volume resonate with case studies from Polynesia and Micronesia, but they were discussed most explicitly in the contributions gathered here. Second, like many other scholars, we find “Melanesia” a problematic designation. The term does not designate a coherent linguistic, ethnological, biological, or archaeological zone (Kirch and Green 2001: 63), and it emerged primarily as a category for drawing comparisons and contrasts with Polynesia within evolutionary frameworks (Thomas 1997). Problems with the category Melanesia become most obvious in Fiji, which lies on the boundaries of the region, is populated by indigenous islanders of great phenotypical diversity, and now looks politically toward Melanesia while at the same time fetishizing a classically western Polynesian system of chiefdoms. But the problem of Melanesia should not trouble the borders alone; it should trouble the illusory center, as the term suggests a false homogeneity across diverse regions of the western Pacific and has arguably led to the generalization across the entire “Melanesian” region of models of sociality that were originally

developed with particular reference to Papua New Guinea (Scott 2007: 24–32). We note, too, that the term “Oceania” itself can be similarly destabilized, and an appeal can be made to higher-level unity in the Austronesian world.

Yet there is a compelling reason to put these particular chapters together: the matter of contemporary geopolitical circumstances. Not only do political leaders of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji describe themselves as Melanesians, institutionalizing their relationship through the Melanesian Spearhead Group, but all are considered to be “weak states” in the policy proclamations of aid donors and regional powers. Fiji has suffered four coups since 1987. The Solomons endured a devastating civil conflict between 1998 and 2003, with a coup in 2000 and ongoing intervention from Australian military forces. Papua New Guinea has struggled with open rebellion in Bougainville and has experienced basic law and order problems almost everywhere else. Vanuatu’s unstable governing coalitions have been challenged by lawlessness, conflict over land, and ethnically inflected urban violence. A widespread failure of postcolonial states to meet citizens’ minimal expectations of infrastructure and service delivery continues to afflict the region. An examination of Christian politics is thus especially urgent for understanding the dynamics of these troubled states, and ought to engage policy-makers and church and political leaders as well as anthropologists and scholars of religion.

In light of ongoing efforts to improve the functioning of these states, one of the most relevant messages of this volume is that many citizens do not think



Map I.1. The western Pacific. Map by ANU Cartographic Services.

that national improvement will come by secular means. The people of Santa Isabel hope to make the state (finally) relevant in their lives by bringing it into connection with the island's Christian chiefs. For the urban Solomons and Vanuatu, McDougall and Eriksen describe the local uptake of widely circulating theologies of the nation and document how particular actors strive to constitute themselves as moral agents and effective citizens. Visions of local politics for Guhu-Samane speakers of Papua New Guinea focus on engagements with churches, the most powerful transnational organizations that penetrate the region. According to the national police commissioner of Fiji, the problems of crime are to be tackled not by a better managed or supervised police force, but by one that follows a "Jesus strategy." One of the reasons that religious institutions have been so effective in Oceania is that states have been inept; religious visions are persuasive in part because secular promises of progress have become unconvincing. We hope that these cases alert readers to the different agendas at play and the sometimes surprising aspirations of Oceanic citizens. While projects of political and social improvement that are not motivated by religion are hardly doomed to failure, projects that do not recognize Pacific Islanders' religious aspirations probably are.

Sacred and secular visions of nations and citizenships are not necessarily contradictory; the resonances between such visions may be both productive and highly problematic. Many Pacific citizens today exhort their leaders to be good Christians, arguing that if politicians live an upright life in God's eyes, they will run governments with some degree of transparency. This was the vision of Father Walter Lini, the Anglican priest who became Vanuatu's first prime minister: "Should the Church play politics? My answer is Yes," he wrote unambiguously in 1975. "I believe that the Church must play politics because its role today is not so much concerned with individuals as with governments, which are responsible for changing the system and structures so that justice will come" (Lini 1975: 176-77; emphasis in original). Yet the resonance between secular and sacred visions may also be problematic: it is not difficult to see how many of the Christian projects in these pages will help to solidify exclusive ethnonationalist identities within these multicultural nation states.

Without seeking to exaggerate the distinctiveness of the present or minimize the dynamism of the past, we note that the momentum of religious change increased over the course of the twentieth century. European colonial administrations often sought to control the activities of foreign mission societies, and in multid denominational colonies like New Guinea, Papua, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, they attempted to orchestrate regional divisions among missions in order to minimize denominational competition.⁶ Colonial administrations also sought to regulate indigenous religious movements, particularly those that envisioned political futures at odds with those of the government (see, e.g., Kaplan 1995; Keesing 1978-1979). A major mission

push to coastal areas of the western Pacific occurred in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century; what is today PNG was missionized by church personnel who were predominantly British and to a lesser degree German, and what is today Vanuatu was missionized by predominantly French clergy. The large mission churches still central to these societies were shaped by that historical moment, one marked by tensions between high Anglo-Catholicism and low Nonconformist churches that strained taut before the emergence of truly modern fundamentalism. The shock of World War II, with US soldiers promoting their bustling religious marketplace, electrified much of Oceania, as did a 1970s revival which introduced evangelical enthusiasm to mainline churches and gave rise to some of the first local Pentecostal-style churches. Since independence, governments in the western Pacific have taken less paternalistic attitudes than former colonial masters and have not generally sought to "protect" populations from Christian evangelism. But more importantly, these states lack the capacity to provide critical services and infrastructure to citizens, let alone to regulate the influx and circulation of religious ideas. Some government officials in the region have expressed a desire to limit non-Christian missionary work, but the capacity of the state to enforce controls over proselytization is doubtful.

Overview of the Chapters

Joel Robbins observes in his contribution to this volume that the phrase "Christian politics" is ambiguous, pointing in two directions: first, to political relations between denominations, and second, to "the way Christianity shapes broader political debates about the best way to govern society." Taken together, the following chapters address politics in both of these senses and across a wide range of social and spatial scales: from the nation (Eriksen, Barker, White, and Tomlinson) to the village (Handman and Robbins) to inter- and even intra-personal levels (Scott and McDougall). As Scott notes, "because denominational categories can in some contexts also be ontological categories, Christian politics can be a dynamic within the person as much as across institutional church lines."

The first two chapters examine the micropolitics of denominationalism within communities. Courtney Handman discusses a situation in which denominational politics are implicated in struggles over land and control of a mission station that is the conduit of translocal connections. The Garasa area of the Waria Valley, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea, lies on the border of the Au-Aro and Muniwa regions. An Au-Aro leader, Ulysses, broke from the Lutherans in 1977 to form the New Life Church. Ulysses and his congregation built the Garasa airstrip, which people in the area saw as "the beginning

of a millennial City on the Hill that would transform ... Papua New Guinea as a whole." A decade and a half later, a Muniwa leader named Mark developed plans for a Bible college. Dissatisfied with New Life's theological and ritual tendencies, however, Mark established the Reformed Gospel Church in 1994 and aligned his plans with those of Pacific Island Ministries, a mission running an education project in Garasa. With these competing interests, Handman observes, a land dispute became almost inevitable, as "each [church] saw an opportunity for its project to succeed if only 'their' side could gain control of the land." And yet church leaders involved in the dispute are loath to acknowledge that Christian sectarianism drives that dispute, and they act through village proxies in an attempt to keep the land claims and denominational divide seemingly separate. After analyzing the overt politics of land, Handman turns to examine the less obviously political struggles over appropriate sounds of Christian worship. Objections to particular forms of music—singing, drumming, clapping, playing guitars, and brass instruments—are ostensibly objections based on volume, but in fact they offer pointed condemnations of the appropriateness and effectiveness of other groups' ritual practices. Handman uses the examples of the land dispute and the sounds of worship to complicate Niebuhr's discussion of the difference between churches and sects. "The question," she concludes, "is then to ask how local Christians can be embarrassed by the sociality of their Christian forms even as they celebrate these media as the sources of their connection to God."

In the following chapter, Michael W. Scott analyzes talk of an underground army on the island of Makira in the southeastern Solomons. This secret army is an emblem of Makiran identity, the icon of "a primordial power integral to the island and its truly autochthonous constituents"; it includes people from around the world, but much of its strength and technological sophistication comes from its troops of dwarfish creatures called *kakamora*. Some Makirans see the army in positive terms: it offers the potential to create "heaven on earth," because it is a force that will restore *kastom* and perhaps "fulfill the destiny of Makira to inaugurate the end times and fight for God at Armageddon." In contrast to this hopeful vision, a Seventh-day Adventist couple tells Scott that the army—and Makira itself—is Satan's base and the site where the Antichrist will arrive. Their discourse constitutes a Bakhtinian "internal polemic," as their talk is "directed toward an ordinary referential object"—if one can call a massive underground army ordinary—while "indirectly striking a blow at the other's discourse," namely other denominations' competing interpretations of this army. Scott traces the consonances and dissonances between the various representations of the Makiran underground in order to analyze broader processes through which an island-wide identity is emerging after a period of intense civil conflict.

The next set of chapters addresses the diverse ways in which Christian denominations shape ideas of the nation and inculcate practices of citizenship. Matt Tomlinson discusses the situation in Fiji, where religion and ethnicity seem to line up neatly, with nearly all indigenous Fijians identifying themselves as Christians and most citizens of Indian descent (Indo-Fijians) identifying themselves as Hindus or Muslims. The nation's largest Christian denomination, the Methodists, supported coups in 1987 and 2000, justifying these coups as efforts to secure indigenous rights. In 2006, however, a new coup led by military commander Voreqe Bainimarama radically shifted the contours of Fijian religious politics: in a jarring instant, many previous coup opponents became coup supporters, and the Methodist Church found itself in the new and uncomfortable position of fighting a coup and defending democracy. Rather than create a Fijian Methodist hegemony, the coups seem to have accelerated movement away from the establishment church and fractured the religious landscape. Tomlinson analyzes an evangelical leader's performance at a public rally sponsored by the police. The speaker, Atunaisa Vulaono of the New Methodist Church, was critical of the mainline Methodists and strongly supportive of Bainimarama's military-led government. Ultimately, Tomlinson argues, what distinguishes the New Methodists from the "regular" Methodists—besides their diametrically opposed stances on the legitimacy of Fiji's government—is their different configurations of the spiritual value and utility of newness. For many Fijian Methodists, newness is inherently suspect; for the New Methodists, befitting their name, newness is inherently positive and is one of the strongest reasons to support the military regime.

In the next chapter, Annelin Eriksen turns to a distinctly Pentecostal kind of "nation making" in Vanuatu. Drawing on alternative theories of the state as well as the colonial and postcolonial history of Vanuatu, Eriksen suggests that projects of governance have never been limited to the state. Indeed, while French and British administrations focused primarily on fostering European commerce, the missions inculcated a profound sense among the broader population that they were the subjects of governance. Eriksen thus counters the widely held assumption that the apparent "failure" of Melanesian states is due to the fact that people have not had experience engaging with statelike forms. She also explores the overlap between secular and theological aspirations for good governance and economic development. Contemporary Pentecostal institutions seem to focus less on worship and prayer and more on what many might consider secular success. The Centreville Christian Centre Inc., for example, runs a "school of the prophets" focused on economics and financial management. Counterintuitively, perhaps, efforts to remake the nation and its citizens according to God's plans are buttressed by secular aid programs that seek partnerships with churches as effective civil society institutions.

Following Eriksen's discussion of churches' "state effects" in Vanuatu, Debra McDougall analyzes present-day Solomon Islands, arguing that even though new sects or religious traditions may fragment rural communities, the incessant evangelism that gives rise to them has also generated a shared public culture that allows citizens of different ethnic and even religious backgrounds to interact with one another. In examining how this generalized evangelical culture has emerged, McDougall pays close attention to the Solomons' civil conflict of 1998–2003 and also to transnational movements of religious innovation, from Billy Graham's historic crusade to Australia and New Zealand in 1959 to the inroads currently being made in the Western Solomons by a charismatic Malaysia-based preacher. Traffic in people, discourse, ideas, and icons makes the Solomons a new crossroads in global Christian journeys, resulting in a situation where "the public sphere of the Solomons is pervaded by Christianity of a type that might strike a secular outsider as extreme." To illuminate the ways this evangelical saturation both unites and divides segments of Solomons society, McDougall describes the experiences of two men: Jeremiah, who has journeyed from church to church in a passionate but never fully satisfying quest, and Akmad, who has converted decisively to Islam but who still speaks of Jesus more than Muhammad and refers to the Bible more than the Quran.

The final three chapters deal most directly with articulations of religion and politics as marked domains—that is, as categories that people configure with explicit reference to each other. John Barker reviews the literature on church and state in Papua New Guinea, a nation with almost 95 percent Christian citizenship that nonetheless bustles with two thousand foreign missionaries from several dozen countries. Their numbers, Barker notes, are swelled by PNG's own homegrown "internal missionaries" who evangelize their fellow citizens. It is a complex denominational landscape where different churches have had distinct zones of influence, as in the Solomons and Vanuatu. Barker argues that anthropologists' enormous overrepresentation in the social scientific literature on PNG has skewed disciplinary understandings toward the local and particular and away from regional and national levels. This is especially unfortunate because in PNG, Christianity is that rare thing: something that most citizens agree on. "Despite differences in theological dogmas, liturgical practices, and moral constraints," Barker observes, "the various churches at base share a common language and a religious commitment that, in turn, provide the diverse groups in PNG with a shared reference point, much more so than appeals to 'traditional' culture" (see also Barker 1990).

In the next chapter, Geoffrey White tracks the articulation of church, chiefs, and state on the island of Santa Isabel since Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978. The relationship between these three domains is described locally as a "tripod," with each leg helping to support the other two,

but in practice it seems to function like a wobbly two-legged stool. The institution of chieftainship is tightly linked to the Anglican church in Santa Isabel, but the relationship between chiefs and the state has been a loose one. Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable about the situation is the degree to which both the people of Santa Isabel and government representatives have sought to articulate "customary" local leadership with the formal structures of the state and how elusive this articulation has proven. White's chapter also shows that local, national, and global forces are inextricably entwined, even in apparently remote locales. The latest ritual performance of the triadic relation of church, state, and custom was the 2010 installation of a new paramount chief, a close relative of the first paramount chief, who also just happens to be the assistant bishop of the Diocese of Exeter in England.

In his contribution, Joel Robbins considers the articulation of church and politics for the Urapmin of PNG, focusing on the level of local big man authority. The contrast between Urapmin Pentecostals and Santa Isabel Anglicans is stark: whereas the Anglicans about whom White writes fuse the domains of religion and politics in the very persons of Christian chiefs, Urapmin strive to separate Christianity and the hurly-burly of local politicking. To explain this diarchy—a division that has no analogue in traditional culture—Robbins draws on Niebuhr's distinction between churches, institutions reconciled with the demands of society to run itself, and sects, which remain critically opposed to society in fundamental ways. Urapmin have adopted a sectarian form of Christianity, but they have adopted it *en masse*, creating, as Robbins puts it, a "sect as big as society." Like everyone around them, Urapmin big men are Christians. But much of the work they do—negotiating brideprice, haranguing people—and the personal characteristics they display, such as aggressiveness, are seen as antithetical to Christian virtues and values. Big man politics is thus configured internally as the "outside" against which radically sectarian Christian aspirations are articulated.

Taken together, these chapters make the case that politics in Oceania can only be understood by taking account of Christianity, and vice versa. As we have argued above, the difference that Christianity makes in Oceania is always and inevitably a political one. But rather than create a regional sameness, this has led to a constellation of different outcomes. And even as Christianity has largely maintained its all-pervasiveness, this saturation has in turn become a problem in the opinions of some Oceanic Christians. The resurgent post-World War II evangelical Christianity that has "revived" the faith of established Christians and drawn new converts in the "last places" emphasizes individual belief and the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus. Despite—or perhaps because of—the lack of resonance between this individualism and the more traditional orientation toward relationships or collectivities, many Christians in Oceania are enthusiastically embracing such ideas (Ernst

1994, 2006). Many of these new theologies inspire the development of frames for understanding national and global politics that can otherwise be opaque to ordinary islanders who have relatively limited access to global networks of information. Others suggest that churches and organized religion in general cannot contain “morality,” and that a full-blown revival will affect everyone in the nation—not just members of particular churches—and will transform not only their spiritual lives but also their social, material, and political lives. To track the paths of these rapidly transforming religious ideas and to understand the ways that they cut across local and national political landscapes in “the most solidly Christian part of the world” is the task taken up in the chapters that follow.

Notes

1. Perhaps this is one reason why, despite the seemingly obvious penetration of Christianity into all aspects of life, it is rarely mentioned in discussions of Oceanic nationalism and the role of the state (see Douglas 2007; Foster 1995). This gap in the literature also follows from foundational scholarship on European nationalism, which considers it to be part of “a package with individualism and secularism, as required by the industrial transformation of an agrarian world” (Van der Veer and Lehmann 1999: 5). The supposed secularity of the European nation is, however, overstated. Van der Veer and Lehman point out that secular nationalism in Europe was shaped by “new and highly original religious organizations” that “proliferated in Britain and Netherlands in the nineteenth century,” and that until the early twentieth century, most Europeans were so thoroughly familiar with biblical narratives that they envisioned political leadership as following Christian models (1999: 7, 10). In this era of “war on terror” when religion seems to motivate conflicts around the world, it is not novel to argue that politics and nationalism involve religion. It is worth noting, however, that this involvement is neither a recent perversion of a once-secular modern nationalism nor a postcolonial aberration of a secular European form.
2. This observation is at the center of several recent critiques of authors who strive to identify the core cultural features of Christianity. Cannell herself begins with Hegel in her critique of scholars who have overemphasized transcendence, immateriality, and internal belief while downplaying the importance of fleshly incarnation. Michael W. Scott (2005) has also called for care in generalizing about Christianity, suggesting in particular that individualism is only one part of a broader tension between the individual and community within Christian tradition. Chris Hann (2007) suggests that the emphasis on rupture that is prominent in anthropological studies of Christianity reflects the disproportionate attention given to fundamentalist Protestantism and points out that little attention has been directed to Catholicism and hardly any to Orthodox Christianity.
3. The widespread use of the Tongan term *lotu* for both Christianity and worship in much of Melanesia is a linguistic trace of the work of islander evangelists. Tongans carried out much of the difficult early evangelical work in Fiji; scores of Samoans, Tongans, and Fijians died in the malarial lowlands of Solomon Islands and Papua New

Guinea. Writing of PNG, John Garrett uses a memorable martial metaphor: “Cook Islanders, as elsewhere in the Pacific, tended to be shock troops of the Christian warfare, Samoans the occupiers and stabilizers” (1982: 211). Seventh-day Adventists from the Western Solomons brought this young sect to the highlands of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islanders of the South Sea Evangelical Church were instrumental in fomenting a region-wide revival in the late 1970s.

4. All of the constitutional texts we quote in this chapter come from the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute database (2010). For research assistance with church statistics and national constitutions, we thank Liudmila Kirpitchenko.
5. In 1886, a Methodist missionary serving in German Papua New Guinea, R. Heath Rickard, wrote wistfully that in Fiji, “a chief said ‘I am *lotu*’ [that is, ‘I am converting’ or ‘I am Christian’] and hundreds said the same day: ‘So are we.’ In New Britain, on the contrary, a so-called chief says he is ‘*lotu*’, but even his wife and children say ‘we will not’: therefore we cannot expect here the great things that were witnessed in Fiji” (quoted in Firth 1982: 155–56; emphasis in original).
6. Determined missionaries fought back. For example, Stewart Firth describes how the French Catholic bishop Louis Couppé, of the Sacred Heart Mission in Papua New Guinea, “never resigned himself to official directives which he did not like.” When the German administration divided the Gazelle Peninsula into Methodist and Catholic zones in 1891, he ignored them, kept acquiring land in Methodist territory, and continued “bombarding Berlin with complaints” until the divisions were eliminated less than a decade later (Firth 1982: 142–43).

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The Generation of the Now

Denominational Politics in Fijian Christianity

MATT TOMLINSON

Fiji's Christian landscape is steeply contoured, with eruptions and erosion at the fault lines between churches. The nation's four coups since 1987 have pulsed with the religious motivations and justifications of many participants, and to speak of Fijian politics is necessarily to speak, at least in part, of Christian denominationalism. In this chapter, I analyze a sermon delivered by the senior pastor of the New Methodist Christian Fellowship at an evangelical rally held in Suva in June 2009. The preacher, Atunaisa Vulaono, declared that all styles of worship are acceptable, but his views on the nature of people's relationship with God distinguished his position sharply from those of mainline churches. Moreover, his statements about the conjunction of religion and politics pitted him against the country's largest denomination, the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of Fiji's recent religious-political history. Next, I analyze the distinctive features of Vulaono's sermon, including his explicit support of the military-led government. In the third section I continue this analysis, focusing on the theme of *newness* which Vulaono emphasizes to distinguish his aims from those of other churches and to align his aims with those of the government. As Robbins (2007) has argued, ideologies of rupture and newness are central to many Christian understandings of time and belief, in contrast to anthropological assumptions of deep cultural continuity. I extend Robbins' argument and develop it ethnographically by examining the different articulations of newness at play in Fijian religious politics. Although both the mainline "old" Methodists and the New Methodists emphasize the force and necessity of Christian rupture, they differ sharply in their evaluations of newness as a source of legitimacy.

Fiji's Christian landscape

The first known Christian evangelists in Fiji were a Tahitian named Taharaa and two Mooreans named Hatai and Arue. The London Missionary Society

sent them to the Lau islands of eastern Fiji in 1830, but then, inexplicably, failed to support them (Thornley 1995, 1996; see also Wood 1978: 21–24). The LMS then agreed that it would focus its efforts on Samoa and leave Fiji to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. The WMMS sent David Cargill and William Cross to Fiji in 1835. Like their Polynesian predecessors, Cargill and Cross landed on Lakeba Island in the Lau group. Both men had worked previously in Tonga, so Lau was a logical step not only geographically but also culturally, as it had a vigorous Tongan presence—so vigorous, indeed, that Tongan Christians often combined their early evangelical efforts in Fiji with military campaigns.

In the first two decades of their mission, the Wesleyans made slow gains. They experienced dramatic success beginning with the conversion of the paramount chief Ratu Seru Cakobau in 1854. ("Ratu" is an honorific used for chiefs.) The year after his conversion, Ratu Cakobau's forces, aided by Tongan soldiers, won the decisive victory at the Battle of Kaba that ended a twelve-year war against the chiefdom of Rewa. His conversion gave the war a "transcendental level" of religious significance (Sahlins 2004: 19 n. 6), exemplified in the statement of one Fijian chief who declared that Christianity "is true or Kaba would not have been taken" (Thornley 2002: 80). Two years before Ratu Cakobau's conversion, the Methodist Church had slightly more than 5,000 members in Fiji; by the time the islands became a British colony in 1874, the number was almost 125,000 (Thornley 1979: 295). Events of the mid-1850s decisively put Methodism into a central and dominant position in Fijian religious politics.

The missionaries had brought a new religion, one whose sacred text announces its newness in verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:17 ("Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"). During the mission encounter, Fijian converts did not necessarily identify Christianity's newness as a source of legitimacy, however. Elsewhere, I have argued that missionaries and converts debated both truth and efficacy in religious practice, with missionaries seeing the two categories as fundamentally connected and evangelized Fijians sometimes questioning that connection (Tomlinson 2009a); the claim that legitimacy derives from newness does not seem to have arisen. Indeed, in an anticolonial resistance movement of the late nineteenth century, a Fijian prophet argued compellingly that the Bible was really a Fijian book about Fijian spirits in a Fijian landscape, but that it had been misrepresented by foreign missionaries (Kaplan 1995).¹ Below, I turn to the topic of newness and oldness in present-day Fijian Christianity and consider its paradoxes in detail.

Once established as the dominant denomination in Fiji, the Methodists tried to fend off challenges to their authority. Three main sources of competition were Roman Catholic missionaries, Indian immigrants, and new evan-

gical sects. In 1842, a Fijian Catholic catechist named Mosese Monatavai was placed at Lakeba by the French priest Jean Baptiste Pompallier. Two years later, French priests from the Society of Mary came to stay, accompanied by converts from Wallis (Uvea) and Tonga (Buatava 1996: 174). They were not welcomed initially, but eventually “found that they were welcomed in places that had either been past enemies of Bau [Ratu Cakobau’s chiefdom] or resented the growing Tongan influence in Fiji” (Thornley 1979: 295). Catholic gains infuriated the Wesleyans and led to conflict. On the island of Rotuma, Methodists and Catholics fought each other violently during the 1870s, including a seven-month war between the churches in 1878 that led to the deaths of eighty-four people (Thornley 1979: 299; see also Garrett 1982: 284–85). Then, beginning in 1879, indentured laborers from South Asia were brought to Fiji to work on sugarcane plantations, and Methodist missionaries were alarmed at the possibility that these “heathen” arrivals might cause indigenous Fijians to backslide (Thornley 1973: 2). Despite their anxiety, the Methodists were slow to evangelize Fiji’s migrants. When they did attempt to convert the “Fiji Indians,” their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Finally, the Methodist Church has lost members to evangelical Christian denominations, especially in recent decades, as I explain below. These groups have never had as many members as the Methodists or Catholics, but on a small scale they have made dramatic gains. The Assemblies of God, which arrived in 1926, increased from less than three thousand members in the mid-1960s to more than thirty thousand by 1992; during the same period, Seventh-day Adventist membership in Fiji increased by 400 percent (Ernst 1994: 24, 50).

Fiji became an independent nation in 1970. Seventeen years later, its religious landscape convulsed when Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka executed two coups. In his view and the views of many of his supporters, indigenous Fijian political and economic interests were threatened by the interests of citizens of Indian descent (now generally called “Indo-Fijians” in academic literature). According to indigenous ethnonationalists, the situation became perilous in April 1987 when the multiethnic Labour Party won election and took control of government. Rabuka, a lay Methodist preacher who claimed to be on a mission from God, justified his coups in overtly religious terms: he linked his actions to the Biblical prophecies of Jeremiah and compared himself to the martyr Stephen, his namesake (Dean and Ritova 1988: 162). Regarding Indo-Fijians, Rabuka declared: “I appeal to all the Christian church leaders to concentrate on evangelising and converting the Hindus and Muslims,” and he noted: “It will be a big challenge for us to convert them to Christianity ... we either go that way, or they convert us and we all become heathens” (*ibid.*: 121).

The 1987 coups divided the top leadership of the Methodist Church, with consequences that have lasted to the present. Although the church’s president at the time, Josateki Koroi, denounced Rabuka’s actions, he was ejected from

his own office in a “church coup” by hardliners in February 1989, and ethnonationalists were elected to fill the top leadership positions at the next annual conference. In contrast, Fiji’s Catholic leaders “criticized the coup and reminded the Fijian leaders of the dangers of overprotecting their people” (Lal 1992: 286; see also Premdas 1995: 106–16). These events seemed to suggest a more aggressively fundamentalist and Methodist-dominated future for Fiji. Indeed, fundamentalists within the Church pushed for—and temporarily won—a ban on most commerce and recreation on Sundays; they also amplified their calls for Fiji to be declared a Christian state.²

Fiji’s third coup took place in 2000, publicly led by the civilian George Speight, a Seventh-day Adventist who took Rabuka as his model in some ways. Speight, with some support from a divided military, successfully ousted the government and held parliamentarians hostage for eight weeks, but he was then arrested and convicted of treason. The deposed Indo-Fijian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, said in court that “rebels and armed men called him and detained parliamentarians ‘heathens’ and forced them to convert to Christianity” (Mafi 2002). Newland (2007: 305) notes that the Assemblies of God, Anglicans, United Pentecostal Church International of Fiji, Christian Mission Fellowship, and Seventh-day Adventists (despite Speight’s nominal membership in that church) publicly opposed the coup. The Methodist Church offered token criticism of Speight’s methods, but endorsed the caretaker military government.

The coups of 1987 and 2000 seemed superficially like a moment of triumph for militant Christianity, but they repelled some Methodists. Steven Ratuva (2002: 19) writes that “social and psychological discomfort created by the unsettling political situation in Fiji after the coups of 1987 and 2000 drove many to find spiritual solace in evangelical spiritualism,” that is, outside of Methodism. In the ten years after Rabuka’s coups, membership in the Methodist Church declined from almost three quarters of the indigenous population to two thirds. Between 1996 and 2007, Methodism’s membership declined proportionally further. Although Methodism is still the largest denomination for indigenous Fijians, it has suffered a serious decline over twenty years.³

One of the most notable consequences of the 2000 coup was the formation of a new politically active Christian organization. Leaders of the Assemblies of God felt that “the Fijian people were very much fragmented,” and asked the president of the Methodist Church at the time to convene a new meeting of denominations (Newland 2007: 305). This group became the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF), which came to be “perceived as a think-tank” of Laisenia Qarase, the prime minister who led Fiji from 2000 to 2006 (*ibid.*: 308). An older organization, the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC), seemed to be practically displaced by the ACCF sometime in 2008. Relations between the ACCF and FCC became especially confused when a top Meth-

odist Church leader, Rev. Tuikilakila Waqairatu, chaired both groups at the same time. The important point for this chapter is that the ACCF, born of Speight's coup, became ascendant as a specifically political Christian organization that united the Methodist Church with smaller evangelical and Pentecostal denominations.

Reversed polarities: The coup of 2006 and Methodist-Catholic rivalry

Fiji's fourth coup, led by military commander Voreqe Bainimarama, was an aftershock to the events of 2000. In 2000, Bainimarama had attempted to calm the turmoil in Speight's wake by asking the president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to abdicate his position, after which he declared martial law (Lal 2006: 203). The armed forces were divided in their loyalties, however, and in November of that year members of an elite squad tried to assassinate the commander. They killed three loyalist soldiers, but Bainimarama escaped, and the mutiny was violently suppressed. Five rebel soldiers died, some possibly beaten to death after being arrested (Pacific Islands Report 2000; see also Field, Baba, and Nabobo-Baba 2005: 244).

The events seem to have galvanized Bainimarama's determination to "clean up" Fiji, but, to his consternation, the government in power from 2000 to 2006 maintained the status quo. Prime Minister Qarase began promoting a "Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity" bill which seemed designed to pardon the aggressors of 2000, and his government even urged the president not to prosecute the mutinous soldiers who had tried to kill Bainimarama (Fraenkel 2007: 423–24). For these and other reasons, Bainimarama became an increasingly outspoken critic of Qarase's government, although the commander insisted that he would not execute a coup. He did, though, on 5 December 2006.

Now, for the first time, the Methodist Church became an overt and consistent opponent of coups. The church's assistant general secretary at the time, Tuikilakila Waqairatu, described the new coup as a "manifestation of darkness and evil" (Newland 2009: 190). In February 2007, the Methodists published a statement in the *Fiji Daily Post* newspaper titled "Here We Stand," echoing Martin Luther's famous line of protest. In the statement, the Church defended its previous support for the reconciliation bill as "part of the church's support for the concept of reconciliation and restorative justice as defined in Scripture," and argued that humanity's sinful nature meant that the military's "cleanup" efforts were fundamentally unsound: "The Bible is explicit in that Man was corrupt from the beginning. By our very nature, we are imperfect. The church therefore cannot agree with a clean up campaign to rid Fiji of corruption as a basis to justify the military's intervention in the mandate of a government elected by the people" (Methodist Church in Fiji 2007). Church leaders held monthlong prayer and fasting programs in July 2008 and March

2009 for God's will to prevail, and a statement in the program instructions for March 2009 sounded like a threat:

We know from the Bible that God became angry at the land and people [of Israel] because the Israelites neglected the true God. He withheld water from the land and a drought and famine came. He also sent locusts and wasps to eat the plants, and also increased the drought of the [land]. We should pray that our leaders remember that our blessings or our curses in the days ahead will largely depend on their decisions. (Methodist Church in Fiji 2009)⁴

Discourse about "curses" is widespread in Fijian Methodism, both at local levels in which kin groups attempt to extinguish any lingering evil influences of ancestral spirits and at the national level of political discourse. In the mid-1990s, Church officials told members of a constitutional review commission that Fiji should be declared a Christian state, warning, "We are ... of the view that if this is not recognized now then this nation is under a Divine curse" (Ryle 2005: 70). The suggestion that God might curse the country is therefore not a novel or surprising claim in Fijian Methodism, but it does represent a sharp reversal of the Church's previous relationship with the state, which had been intimate and mutually supportive during the years of Rabuka and Qarase.⁵

In contrast, the Catholic Church under the leadership of Archbishop Petero Mataca depicted the events of 2006 in a gently filtered light. The Catholics had not supported Rabuka's or Speight's coups, but several weeks after Bainimarama's takeover, the archbishop wrote an opinion piece in the *Fiji Times* in which he declared: "I wish the new interim government well in its efforts and I call upon all women and men of goodwill to assist in whatever way they can to rebuild our beloved country" (Mataca 2007). In October 2007, he joined Bainimarama as co-chair of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji, a group created partly to produce a blueprint on how to reform Fiji, the "Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress."⁶ Predictably, the Methodist Church was vociferously critical of the Charter, and conducted a campaign to get tens of thousands of church members to sign a petition in opposition to it.

Shortly after the coup, Bainimarama also received support from a prominent Catholic priest, the poverty activist Kevin Barr, who co-authored an opinion piece in the *Fiji Times* which implied that the coup was not really a coup because "it was not a swift, sudden and unexpected event" and because Bainimarama had been "very reluctant to take over the reins of government," although, in doing so, had created "a time of great opportunity" for Fiji to become a more just society (Baleinakorodawa, Barr, and Qalowasa 2006). Observing the leadership of Mataca and Barr, one scholar wrote caustically that "One can understand the satisfaction of the head of the Catholic Church, who having watched for decades, the Methodist Church at the helm of Fiji's leader-

ship, has now done his bit in the sun, to 'take the country forward'. And his clerics will also be happy that 'their' charter proposal for electoral reform will be implemented, whatever the impact the coup has on the rest of the country" (Narsey 2008; see also Newland 2009: 196–99).

Archbishop Mataca faced criticism from members of his own church, however. Two Catholic paramount chiefs, the Roko Tui Dreketi and the Tui Namosi, opposed the archbishop's political involvement (Newland 2009: 198). The president of the Catholic League, a lay organization, wrote to the pope and the Apostolic Nuncio in New Zealand in protest at Mataca's actions (*Fiji Times* 2007). As a result of these criticisms, the archbishop apologized, but did not give up his post as co-chair of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (Elbourne and Singh 2007).

The Methodist Church, in publicly opposing the government, found several allies among the evangelical denominations of the ACCF. For example, Suliasi Kurulo, leader of the Christian Mission Fellowship, denounced the coup as "unbiblical, ungodly, unconstitutional, unlawful, and unethical"; he had also criticized Speight's coup (Newland 2009: 191; Newland 2007: 304–5). But one Protestant denomination explicitly aligned itself with the military-led government: the New Methodist Christian Fellowship, usually referred to as the "New Methodists." Until recently, the church was led by two brothers, Waisea and Atunaisa ("Atu") Vulaono. Unlike religious reformers such as Luther and Wesley, who did not actively seek separation from their home churches, the Vulaono brothers had little apparent interest in reforming mainline Methodism: they wanted to start something entirely new. Indeed, they want to start something whose legitimacy is grounded in its newness. For a brief period, they were successful.

Crusading for God and government

In December 2008, Fiji's police force launched a months-long evangelical Christian "crusade." The crusade was a series of public rallies led by the Vulaonos' older brother, Esala Teleni, a former rugby star and naval officer who had been appointed national police commissioner by Bainimarama as part of a campaign to install military officers in top civil service positions. Teleni was a passionate evangelical Christian who sought to impose his views and practices on nonbelievers, including members of his force. The police crusade, Teleni said in 2008, was necessary because "we are aiming for a 50 per cent reduction [in crime] by Christmas," but humans could not accomplish this alone: "We firmly believe that this aim is achievable through divine intervention" (Vuruna 2008; see also Trnka 2011). He claimed that his effort had drawn wide support: "When we first sent out invitations to all Christian denominations around the country, we were pleased that none responded negatively" (*ibid.*).



Figure 3.1. Fiji Police Crusade parade, 21 December 2008.

One notable event within the crusade was a five-day rally held in the capital city, Suva, from 17 to 21 June 2009 called "Ruggers for Jesus." This rally of "ruggers," meaning rugby players, featured stars such as Vilimoni Delasau and Rupeni Caucau testifying about their faith, followed each evening by a sermon from an evangelical minister. It also included "action songs by police units ... [and] speeches by police officers. ... The volume was high and the wor-



Figure 3.2. Fiji Police Crusade parade, 21 December 2008.

ship style Pentecostal" (Titus 2009). Atunaisa Vulaono of the New Methodists preached on the final two nights of the rally; I attended the crusade on Saturday, June 20, and recorded his sermon. It was a muddy and drizzly night, with rain dripping off the corrugated iron roofs of makeshift pavilions in Sukuna Park, a small park in Suva's city center.



Figure 3.3. Atunaisa Vulaono of the New Methodist Church, Fiji. Photo courtesy Fiji Times Ltd.

In his sermon, to which I now turn, Vulaono states that denominational differences should not matter. At the same time, he emphasizes differences between his version of Christianity and the practices of mainline denominations like Methodism. "I can worship silently, I can worship playing the guitar," he preaches at one point. "I can worship climbing on the roof. Doesn't really matter. Your mind must be open to the style of worship that you encounter, amen." On their surface, these statements seem straightforwardly ecumenical, as if Vulaono is embracing all forms of Christian ritual, but as I will show below, he does criticize the practices of other churches. Moreover, the idea of



Figure 3.4. Policemen dancing onstage at "Ruggers for Jesus." Photo by Paul Titus.

"What is impossible with man, is possible with God." (Luke 1:37)

**RUGGERS
FOR
JESUS**

VENUE: *Sukuna Park, Suva*
 DATE: *June 17th - 21st 2009*
 TIME: *11:00am - 2:00pm*
6:00pm - 9:00pm

PROGRAMME

Come and witness Former/Current Rugby Heroes testifying that Jesus is Lord.

Sponsored by Fiji Police Force.

Figure 3.5. "Ruggers for Jesus" program.

ecumenism is considered problematic by members of conservative denominations like Fijian Methodism, so to invoke it is to position oneself against them to some extent. The statement “I can worship climbing on the roof,” for example, can sound absurd and disrespectful to those who, like Methodists, emphasize displays of extreme respect and submissiveness to God.⁸

Regarding connections between church and state, Vulaono echoes American-style “dominion theology,” which promotes “the idea that Christians, and Christians alone, are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns” (Diamond 1995: 246). He explicitly declares his support for Bainimarama’s government and justifies his position in religious terms:

Original [Mixed Fijian and English]

And I believe, and I believe as a pastor, as I believe as a man of God, it is my duty to take cue from the desire of the leader of the nation. E noqu itavi vakaitalatala na ka e vinakata na ka e vinakata tiko na iliuliu ni matanitu me yacova ko Viti e noqu itavi vakaitalatala meu cakacakataki yau e na vision e vinakata tiko na iliuliu ni matanitu. If not, I’m a rebellion person. Huh? Kevaka iko saqata na ituvatuva ni matanitu iko a rebellion person, go and find another nation. Kaya na Ivolatabu o era sa turaga tu, ko era sa veiliutaki tu, sa mai vua na Kalou. ... Kena ibalebale, ke o iko beca, ko beca tiko na Kalou. Veitalia ko lotu, veitalia ko talatala, veitalia o qase levu, veitalia o qase lailai. Romans thirteen, the Bible says Honor those who are in leadership because those in leadership are selected by God. He promotes, He demotes!

In supporting the government, Vulaono characterizes it as a guiding light: “it is my duty to take my cue from the desire of the leader of the nation.” In

Translation

And I believe, and I believe as a pastor, as I believe as a man of God, it is my duty to take my cue from the desire of the leader of the nation. It is my responsibility as a minister, what the leader of the government wants, what he wants for Fiji, it’s my responsibility as a minister to make it happen for the vision the leader of the government wants. If not, I’m a rebellious person. Eh? If you are against the government’s plans, you are a rebellious person, go and find another nation. The Bible says those who are chiefs, they who lead are from God [that is, ordained as leaders by God]. ... This means, if you reject, you’re rejecting God. Never mind that you go to church, never mind that you’re a minister. Never mind that you’re the president of the church, never mind that you’re a minor official. Romans thirteen, the Bible says Honor those who are in leadership because those in leadership are selected by God. He promotes, He demotes!

justifying this position, he refers to the Bible passage Romans 13:1–2, verses which are frequently referred to in Fijian Christian discourse (see also Robbins, this volume). They read, in part: “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” The verses are often applied to traditional chiefs—indeed, note that Vulaono begins his discussion of the passage by stating, “The Bible says those who are chiefs” (*Kaya na Ivolatabu o era sa turaga tu*)—but he then moves to discuss “leadership” generally. Indeed, Vulaono actually uses the verses to support the authority of the military-led government, and not the traditional chiefly system. His logic is slippery but clear: leaders are given their authority by God; God has now put Voreqe Bainimarama in charge of Fiji; because church ministers do the work of God, they must support Bainimarama’s government. Although Vulaono does not say so explicitly, one of the targets of his criticism is evidently the Methodist Church, supporters of the chiefly system and leading critics of Bainimarama.

Elaborating his vision of the church’s role in service to government, Vulaono criticizes churches that “discuss government matters. They, they’re not, they aren’t politicians, and they want to talk about things they haven’t studied.”⁹ At this point, he explains that his own task is simply to pray, but he also characterizes himself as a prophet—someone with a special message from God that the nation needs to hear. And it is a distinctly political message:

It is our duty as a church to pray and fast and let God be God. Lelevu era nanuma tiko ni, “o Talatala Atu, o koya sa taura tiko na nodra mona na sotia, sa taura tale tiko ga nodra mona na ovisa.” Sega ... O yau, noqu itavi ga, masu tiko, masu tiko, masu tiko. Noqu itavi ga na masu. ... Vanua sara ga oqo o Sukuna Park au a kaya kina, two thousand five, ena dua na one week crusade e ke, “A time will come that the Lord will use the discipline force to take the gospel to the nation.” “Talatala, why?” Because we are disciplined anyway. The gospel is about discipline, emeni. Vanua sara ga qo, vanua sara ga qo au vunau tiko kina. I remember two thousand five, ena yaco na gauna na Kalou ena vakayagataki ira na ovisa

It is our duty as a church to pray and fast and let God be God. Lots of people think, “Rev. Atu, he is brainwashing the soldiers, he’s also brainwashing the police.” No ... Me, my responsibility, is to pray, pray, pray. Prayer is my responsibility. ... In this very place, Sukuna Park, I said in 2005, in a one-week crusade here, “A time will come that the Lord will use the disciplined forces to take the gospel to the nation.” “Reverend, why?” Because we are disciplined anyway. The gospel is about discipline, amen. This very place, this very place I was preaching. I remember two thousand five, [saying] the time will come when God will use the police and the soldiers to carry the good news. I didn’t study this in a school. I didn’t

kei ira na sotia me kauta na itukutuku vinaka. Au sega ni vulica ena dua na koronivuli. Au sega ni lako ena dua na bible school, au sega ni lai vulica mai. Revelation, revelation is the vision e download mai lomalagi to you. It's the download of information from God to you. If God can speak to Moses, If God can speak to Isaac, if God can speak to Jacob, if God can speak to Mary, why can't God speak to Atu? Tarogi ka dabe e yasamu, "Why can't God speak to you?"

Bainimarama's coup, as depicted by Vulaono, was arranged by God so that Fiji could receive the good news of Christianity. In one way, this claim seems to echo Rabuka's call more than twenty years earlier for the conversion of Fiji's Hindus and Muslims. After all, most indigenous Fijians' ancestors converted to Christianity more than a century and a half earlier, so the idea of introducing them to the gospel sounds anachronistic. Yet Vulaono does not seem to be explicitly concerned with the nation's non-Christian citizens: he does not rail against heathenism, nor does he poke fun at so-called wooden gods (as Methodists sometimes do in reference to Hinduism). Rather, his target seems to be Christians who do not share his evangelical impulse.

Vulaono rounds out his claim to being a prophet by denigrating education as insufficient for spiritual knowledge: "I didn't study this in a school. I didn't go to a bible school." This is a theme he expresses elsewhere in his sermon, too, declaring at one point, "Gone are [the days when] people hid behind [the reputation of] their bible schools, gone are [the days of] people with their degrees and their knowledge. People are needed who can work wonders, work miracles."¹⁰ Members of many Fijian Christian denominations attend Bible schools, not only Methodists, but Vulaono waves them all away: worship is not a matter of study. Despite its dismissive tone, his core claim is not necessarily controversial. A strain of anti-intellectualism runs through Fijian Methodist discourse, too. But Vulaono goes further, urging his audience to seek inspiration directly from God: "Ask the person sitting beside you, 'Why can't God speak to you?'"

Like many evangelicals, he emphasizes a personal relationship with divinity, one with dimensions beyond ritual's formalism. In his view, prayer is the key practice by which Christians can align themselves properly with God's plans and cultivate their relationship with Him. As he puts it with notable

go to a bible school, I didn't go to study it there. Revelation, revelation is the vision that heaven downloads to you. It's the download of information from God to you. If God can speak to Moses, If God can speak to Isaac, if God can speak to Jacob, if God can speak to Mary, why can't God speak to Atu? Ask the person sitting beside you, "Why can't God speak to you?"

insistence, "If you want to be a person for the new generation, for the new nation, you need to pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray. And pray and pray and pray and pray and pray!"¹¹ In contrast to his earlier assertion that one can worship in any style, Vulaono now offers a specific model to his audience. He begins by chastising his listeners for not praying enough: "Some church people today, it's really difficult for you to pray. Yeah. Bible study, you run [to it], yeah. Time for worship, you run [to it]. Crusade, you run [to it]. Time to pray, [you] just relax."¹² Then he explains the nature of prayer and how it should be practiced properly:

If you want to be a powerful person, then you must be a prayer warrior. Vakasausau mada ena tikina ya. Aleluya. Rogoca: E lai caka, e lai caka na cakacaka mana baleta na masu e ... caka tiko. O rau qo na masu na connection, na masu na relationship, na masu sa i koya e dua na, e dua na isema e tiko, oya na masu. Prayer is the communication between men and God. E sega ni: "Kemuni saka na Kalou mai lomalagi. O ni sa tawatubu, tawamudu." Sega ni dua na ivalavala, it's a relationship. "Turaga vina' valevu, au sa tiko qo e Sukuna Park, sa vakarau tiko na lotu turaga. ... Vina' valevu." E sega ni tuvatuva. E sega ni dua na ikabakaba mo kaba vaqo, kaba vaqo, kaba vaqo. It's a relationship. "Dad, please give me ten dollars. Dad, I'm [inaudible]. Dad, I'm going here." It's a relationship. E sega ni dua na ka me vakaisulutaki, vakaoveralltaki, vakalikutaki, vakaisulurataki. Emeni.

If you want to be a powerful person, then you must be a prayer warrior. Put your hands together for that. Hallelujah. Listen: Miracles happen, happen because of prayer. It's these two things: prayer is a connection, prayer is a relationship, prayer is a, there is a connection, that's prayer. Prayer is the communication between men and God. It's not: "You, sir, God in heaven. You are entire, eternal."¹³ It's not a practice, it's a relationship. "Lord, thanks a lot, I'm here in Sukuna Park, Lord the service is ready to begin. ... Thanks a lot." It's not a structure. It's not a ladder to be climbed like this, climbed like this, climbed like this. It's a relationship. "Dad, please give me ten dollars. Dad, I'm [inaudible]. Dad, I'm going here." It's a relationship. It's not something to get dressed for, to put on overalls for, to put on a skirt for, to put on an underskirt for. Amen.

In this part of his sermon, Vulaono is not only critical of other denominations, he is sarcastic. When he says that one should not pray like this—"You, sir, God in heaven. You are entire, eternal"—he is imitating Methodist prayer's formality and honorific address toward God, and his voice takes on a tone of dopiness. He draws out the syllable *lou* in *Kalou* (God), sounding like a dimwitted dog in a television cartoon. In contrast to this kind of unthinking and formulaic

prayer, Vulaono urges audience members to treat God like a benevolent dad, chatting about where one is going and asking Him for ten dollars. In uttering these lines, Vulaono's tone slides into a casual, conversational groove.

The excerpts I have presented so far are meant to illustrate the evangelical themes that distinguish the New Methodists from mainline Christian congregations in Fiji, and to show that Vulaono's evangelical program is molded to serve the military-led government. As mentioned above, he argues that "If you are against the government's plans, you are a rebellious person," adding the hostile suggestion, "go and find another nation." His sermon resonates with the theme of the police crusade, building a better Fiji through disciplined Christian action with a strongly evangelical cast. But the key distinction of his performance—the thing that most sharply differentiates the New Methodists from the "old" Methodists and that reinforces Vulaono's support of the government—is his repeated implication that newer things are inherently more legitimate than older ones.

To worship the new

Recently, Joel Robbins has argued persuasively that anthropologists have had difficulty developing a coherent anthropology of Christianity because Protestant emphasis on newness—on radical rupture—violates anthropological expectations of deep cultural continuity (Robbins 2007; see also Keane 2007: 128). Here, I draw on Robbins' argument in order to understand the politicized situation of Fijian Protestantism and the denominational border between the Methodists and the New Methodists.

In the present, many Fijians describe the pre-Christian era in terms of darkness and the Christian era in terms of light—a common metaphor across cultures—but they also emphasize adherence to "tradition" as inherently valuable. Tradition "makes the present flow smoothly out of the past; from this perspective 'the coming of the light' did not violate indigenous cultural practice but revealed the inherent Christianity of the Fijian people" (Toren 1988: 697). Moreover, some claim that Fijian ancestors were ancient Israelites (Ratuva 2002: 21; note also the Israeli flag in figure 3.1, above).

The equation of oldness and legitimacy is prominent and resonant in Fijian Methodism. In Methodist discourse, saying that something "is not new" means that it is acceptable, reliable, legitimate. For example, in May 1999, the superintendent Methodist minister at Tavuki village, Kadavu Island, ceremonially installed a man in an important church position even though the man was descended from one of Fiji's most notorious early opponents of Christianity. Several years earlier, the man's subclan (*mataqali*) had formally apologized to the Methodist Church for their ancestor's aggression, hoping that they would

thereby escape the lingering effects of his actions. After describing these events, the minister, Rev. Isikeli Serewai, declared: "this position is confirmed through God's releasing [or rescuing] powers on the family. It isn't something new, it isn't a mistake."¹⁴ By this, he meant that although the nominee was an unlikely choice for the position, his subclan had done the right thing by apologizing in the traditional way, and that his appointment was therefore legitimate.

Another example of Methodist emphasis on the legitimacy of oldness comes from a sermon delivered on Pentecost Sunday, 1999, by the Tavuki village catechist, Tomasi Laveasiga. In a stretch of his sermon during which he discussed the nature of the Holy Spirit, Laveasiga stated that it was a not a new thing, and he extended this claim, declaring that the Bible itself was nothing new: "The Holy Spirit is not something new in the Bible. ... The whole Bible is not something new. The Holy Spirit is God's spirit. ... God's spirit is the Holy Spirit. In the Bible's stories, the Holy Spirit is not something new."¹⁵ I suspect that he repeated this point to reassure his audience that he was staying firmly within the biblical boundaries of orthodox Methodism, while also trying to claim the territory of Pentecostals in case there were any audience members interested in knowing more about the vigorous new sects that emphasize the Holy Spirit so thoroughly in doctrine and practice.

A third and final example shows more clearly how Methodism's consistent characterization of oldness as a source of legitimacy means that newer denominations are tainted by the simple fact of being new. This text comes from a sermon that Rev. Serewai preached at Nasegai village, Kadavu, in September 1998. He mentioned "the arrival of churches going on now in our land," adding, "we receive the teachings of some churches, and many teachings get twisted."¹⁶ He explained:

Au sa vakadreta matua sara vei kemudou na qase: dou tudei, dou kakua sara ni yavalati. ... Eda sa donumaka e dua na gauna tekivu cadra sara kina vakatotolo e Viti. Kaukauwa na nodra lotu na noda itabagone. Levu na veivuvale era sa moici vakasauri ka vakatotolo sara e na kaukauwa ni nodra toso na gone, ka era sa raica na gone, ka era sa taleitaka na gone. Era curumaka e na loma ni nodra vuvale. Sa laki tamoi kina na usutu kei na uto kei na suitu ni dua na vuvale. Paula vakadeitaka toka e na bogi edaidai:

I very strongly urge you elders: be firm, do not waver. ... We are in a time [that is] beginning to come up very quickly in Fiji. Our youth's religion is strong. Many families get twisted [turned around] suddenly and very quickly in the strength of the youths' movement, and the youth see it, and the youth like it. They bring it into their families. This turns the backbone and the heart and the spine of a family. Paul confirms tonight: you elders, you are spiritual, you are mature. Stand properly. Stand firm. Because when you set

oi kemudou na qase, kemudou sa vakayalo, kemudou sa matua. Dou tu vakadodonu. Dou tudei. Baleta ni dou sa davo donu ka tudei e na donu tiko kina na ilakolako ni Lotu Wesele e Viti kei Rotuma [vei na] gone era na muri mai.

In this example, the minister takes the logic of “It isn’t something new, it isn’t a mistake” and applies it, inversely, to the new evangelical and Pentecostal denominations: they are new, therefore they are mistaken. Youth are excited by the new churches’ novelty and enjoy their disruptive power. Against these new denominations’ power to metaphorically twist and turn families about, Rev. Serewai urges elders to stand firm (see also Tomlinson 2009b: 92–93).¹⁷

In contrast to such emphasis on venerable stability, Atu Vulaono of the New Methodists treats newness as a defining feature of God’s plan. His sermon at Ruggers for Jesus begins with an exuberant declaration:

New people for new generation for new time. Na tamata vou ena gauna vou ena vanua vou. Hallelujah. Sa gadreva o vuravura nikua eso na tamata vou, so na vakasama vou, so na qaravi Kalou vou, and we are the generation of the now and God is counting on someone tonight—that you will make a difference to the nation, that you will impact the people on the street, that you will impact the shoeshine boys, that you will impact the soldiers, you will impact the police, you will impact the people in so—society, because you are the new person. Kaya vei koya e toka e yasamu “tamata vou.” Sega ni tamata makawa, tamata vou. Duatani na nomu rai, duatani na nomu nanuma, duatani na nomu vakasama, duatani! Emeni.

Lako qai lai vakawilika na Cakacaka, na kena wase tolu, tikina e dua me yacova na tikina e tinikarua. New

things straight and firm, the journey of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma [to the] children of the future will thereby be straight.

New people for a new generation for a new time. New people in a new time in a new land. Hallelujah. Today the world needs some new people, some new thoughts, some new kinds of worship, and we are the generation of the now and God is counting on someone tonight—that you will make a difference to the nation, that you will impact the people on the street, that you will impact the shoeshine boys, that you will impact the soldiers, you will impact the police, you will impact the people in so—society, because you are the new person. Say to the person beside you, “new person.” Not an old person, a new person. Your views are different, your ideas are different, your thoughts are different, different! Amen.

Go and study Acts chapter three, verses one to twelve. New generation, Jesus was nailed to the cross,

generation sa mai m—m—vakoti ko Jisu ki na kauveilatai, sa qai duri cake e so na tamata vou ni lotu. Fiji need a new church. Fiji need new mind. The things that are not done before ... We need to have a new mind to do new things. Emeni.

and now some new people of the church are rising. Fiji needs a new church. Fiji needs new minds. The things that are not done before ... We need to have a new mind to do new things. Amen.

In sharp contrast to Methodist preachers, Vulaono presents newness as thoroughly desirable: he demands new people, new thoughts, new worship, in a new Fiji. Among these new people he mentions “shoeshine boys” (young men in Suva who ply their trade on the sidewalks and who are often invoked as an emblem of the underclass) along with police and soldiers. The Bible passage he refers to, Acts 3:1–12, tells the story of an encounter between a lame man and Jesus’ disciples Peter and John. The man begs every day at a temple gate and expects the disciples to make a contribution, but instead Peter commands him to stand and walk in Jesus’ name. The man does, leaping about and amazing his onlookers. After citing the verses, Vulaono summarizes the story for his audience, concluding: “Old mindset, old thinking, old style. Then Peter and John broke through. New generation, new people, hallelujah.”¹⁸

For Vulaono, newness is both a spiritual and a political project. The two are inseparable. As noted above, he invoked the verses Romans 13:1–2 to argue that God had placed Bainimarama and his soldiers in charge of Fiji. Just before this part of his sermon, he brought Christianity and politics together by aligning his message with that of a speech given by Bainimarama:

Au sega ni kila na draki ni bula e tu e na vanua oqo o Sukuna Park ena bogi nikua. Kevaka ko iko e dua ko biligi tiko, o cati tiko, o iko mavoa tiko, kavoro tiko na nomu bula, you are in a right place at a right time because we have some people here, they are the generation of the now. Na Kalou e se’ni via raica na nomu leqa. Na Kalou e se’ni via raica nona, na, na incomplete tu vei iko. Na Kalou e raica tiko ga na yalomu. Vakasausau mada vua na Kalou. Emeni. Emeni. New generation. New people. New nation! Au vakavinavinaka na prime minister ni noda vanua, na vica na siga sa oti,

I don’t know what the atmosphere is like here in Sukuna Park tonight. If you are not loved, not wanted, you’re hurting, your life is a mess, you are in the right place at the right time because we have some people here, they are the generation of the now. God doesn’t want to see your problems. God doesn’t want to see the, the, the incompleteness you have. God just sees your soul. Put your hands together for God. Amen. Amen. New generation. New people. New nation! I thank the prime minister of our land, a few days ago, or last week,

se na macawa sa oti, e kaya tiko ko koya ena nona malanivosa, according to the Radio Fiji news, we need a new Fiji, and a new Fiji is new people, and a new people is a new mindset, and a new mindset when Christ is the center of our life. Kaya o koya da sa gadreva e dua na Viti vou, eda sa gadreva e dua na tamata vou, eda sa gadreva eso na ituvatuva vou. Everything will come new when Jesus Christ becomes the center of somebody's life.

he said in his speech, according to the Radio Fiji news, we need a new Fiji, and a new Fiji is new people, and a new people is a new mindset, and a new mindset is when Christ is the center of our life. He said we need a new Fiji, we need a new people, we need some new plans. Everything will become new when Jesus Christ becomes the center of somebody's life.

Vulaono presents Bainimarama both as an authority whose words must be obeyed and as a speaker whose words validate Vulaono's own message. Their discourse merges in the resonant theme of newness. As the preacher presents it, newness is found not only in the words of the Bible but also in the words of the prime minister, whose rule Vulaono considers to be divinely sanctioned and whose programs must be undertaken as a religious obligation.

The work of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji, co-chaired by Bainimarama and the Catholic archbishop Mataca, was also defined by its orientation to newness. At the council's first meeting, Mataca declared "It is interesting to note how often the word 'new' is used in the Bible: a new song, a new covenant, a new creation, a new heart, a new spirit, a new age, new life, new wine, a new heaven and a new earth. We are told that God wants 'to make all things new'" (Mataca 2008).¹⁹ The quasi-sacred document that the NCBBF produced, the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, fired four bullet points on page one of its final draft:

We, the People of Fiji:

- Awake, and we Arise
- To a New Dawn
- To a New Day, and a New Way
- In Our Lives, as One Nation, as One People (National Council for Building a Better Fiji 2008: 1)

As if to underscore their claim to be offering something genuinely new, in June 2009 the government began publishing its own cheerful fortnightly newspaper titled *New Dawn*. In all of this pro-military government discourse, then, to be on the side of the government is to be on the side of novelty. God, humanity, Fiji: all need the prophet-quick promise of the new, freed from the dragging weight of the old.

Such discourse about the need for newness might sound typically American (Wilson 2009), as well as clichéd to readers who are weary of the equation

"newer = better." As I have shown briefly, however, Fijian Methodist discourse often treats newness as inherently suspect rather than inherently good. Against a resonant backdrop of claims that something "isn't new, it isn't a mistake," texts like Vulaono's sermon and the Peoples Charter stand out for emphasizing, as Robbins (2007: 10–11) puts it, "the salvational necessity ... of the creation of ruptures between the past, the present, and the future."

As I noted above, although many Fijian Methodists valorize oldness over newness as a source of legitimacy, they also characterize recent history in terms of a fundamental break between the pre-Christian time of "darkness" and the Christian era of "light," a common metaphor in Oceania and elsewhere. I have argued elsewhere (Tomlinson 2009b) that Fijian Methodists anxiously admire aspects of the "dark" past, especially the ancestors' social unity and physical power. To extend Robbins's argument that Christian theories of culture and history depend on rupture rather than continuity, then, I would add that Fijian Methodist discourse draws on both processes. In Methodist understandings, Christianity changed Fiji by wiping out heathenism, cannibalism, and warfare, but the past had a power which is sorely missed in the present, and newness, in many cases, now means fragmentation, smallness, and weakness. This latter message is the one that Vulaono and Bainimarama oppose as they cultivate a devotion to newness in and of itself.

The stark difference between Methodist affinity for the old and Vulaono's rapture for the new threatens to obscure significant similarities. As suggested above, Vulaono's anti-intellectualism resonates to some extent with mainstream Fijian Methodist anti-intellectualism. In addition, his emphasis on prayer is shared by Methodists, although, as noted above, he mocks their formulas and advocates a chatty, informal style of speaking to God. Finally, Vulaono equates social unity with efficacy in a way that Methodists would recognize and endorse. Just before claiming that he could worship while climbing on the roof, he preached: "The success of the police crusade and the ruggers crusade is because some people decided to unite with the police for this Good Word cause. [Inaudible] unity. The first thing there should be for the new people of the new time, the new Fiji: unity. No barriers. Amen."²⁰ Similarly, in the sermon quoted above in which the Methodist catechist Tomasi Laveasiga took pains to say that the Holy Spirit was not new, he also focused on unity as an ultimate goal for indigenous Fijians (see Tomlinson 2009b: 177–82).

Conclusion

As quickly as they rose, so the New Methodists fell: the denomination lost favor with Bainimarama not long after the Ruggers rally. Jon Fraenkel (2010: 420) explains that "The 'Christian Crusade' within the police force, and Vulaono's New Methodist road show ... abated after protests from prominent

Catholic regime supporters led Bainimarama to quash the new cult." A former editor-in-chief of the *Fiji Times* commented that the New Methodists had been "sat on" by Bainimarama, "because if they were allowed to continue to ridicule the other denominations, there was going to be trouble" (McGeough 2009). The crusades' drain on the police budget may have been a factor, too.²¹

This chapter, then, describes a fleeting moment. The questions it raises, however, will continue to dominate Fijian religious politics. Two of the core questions, simply put, are: what makes something new, and how does newness matter in denominational politics? In the case of the New Methodists, as seen in Vulaono's sermon, extreme emphasis on newness as a source of religious and political legitimacy was coupled with overt and enthusiastic support for the military-led government. The denomination's name is paradoxical in the Fijian context where Methodism is emblematically not new. In other words, while the New Methodists were obviously new, they were not obviously Methodist, at least in Fijian terms. Although the Fijian Methodist Church stands, in Vulaono's perspective, as a model of everything that needs to be challenged and changed, he did not seem to be interested in reforming them. Rather, he was interested in overcoming them, and for a brief period he had the political advantage over them. New Methodism aimed to negate Methodism in the name of a purified newness, one in service to Fiji's latest coup.

Notes

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1. The historian Andrew Thornley observes that Methodist missionaries and chiefs held fundamentally different ideas about how Christianity's new order should reshape Fiji. The evangelists sought "a relationship similar to that between prophets and the Jewish kings of the Old Testament," which meant displacing traditional priests (*bete*) from their roles and setting themselves up as religious authorities who advised not only chiefs but commoners, too; in contrast, for "most chiefs, the people were theirs alone, not God's, and decisions affecting a commoner's well-being could not be independently arbitrated by the church" (Thornley 2002: 225). In sketching this opposition, Thornley draws on H. Richard Niebuhr's typology of relationships between Christ and culture, suggesting that missionaries wanted a "Christ above culture" system, in which Christ is understood as "the fulfillment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of true society," even as "there is in him something that neither arises out of culture nor contributes directly to it. He is discontinuous as well as continuous with social life and its culture" (Niebuhr 1951: 42). Chiefs, in contrast, sought a "Christ of culture" model, in which Christ "confirms what is best in the past" (1951: 41).

2. In his zeal to convert Indo-Fijians to Christianity, Rabuka allowed more missionaries into Fiji, which led one Latter Day Saint (Mormon) church member to puzzle, "After the coup, our quota increased to forty, fifty, one hundred. That's funny, it is really a contradiction in a sense that a military government gave us more freedom to bring in more missionaries to spread the Gospel" (quoted in Ernst 1994: 274; see also Newland 2007: 304).
3. Ernst (1994: 206) reports that 74.2 percent of indigenous Fijians were Methodists according to the 1986 census; Ratuva (2002: 19) presents 1996 census figures showing that the percentage had dropped to 66.6 percent. The figures used for 2007 come from the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics online reports from that year's census; see www.statsfiji.gov.fj. Between 1996 and 2007, the total number of indigenous Fijian Methodists increased by 5,765, but this gain was not proportionally equivalent to the national population increase. In this regard, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that Methodism is stagnating rather than declining.
4. In the Fijian original, this was: "Eda sa kila mai na Vola Tabu ni dau cudruva na vanua na Kalou ena vuku ni nodra sega ni dau vakanamata vua na Kalou dina ko ira na Isireli. Edau bureitaka kina na wai mai na dela ni qele ka yaco na dausiga kei na lauqa. E dau tala mai na vodre kei lago kata mera kania na sovu ni kau drokadroka ka vakatubura talega na dausiga ena dela ni vanua. Meda masu mera nanuma tiko na noda i liuliu ni nodra lewa ena vakatau vakalevu kina noda kalougata se noda kalouca ena veisiga veitaravi sa tu e matada." I have not corrected minor typographical errors in the text.
5. Bainimarama's religious affiliation is somewhat ambiguous. He occasionally self-identifies as Methodist but denounces the church's leaders; he attended a Catholic high school in Suva, and his wife is a Catholic.
6. The document's title omits the apostrophe in "People's."
7. Vulaono's sermon is a riot of codeswitching between English and Fijian. The line translated here was originally delivered as: "Au rawa ni lotu vagagalu, au rawa ni lotu vaq-iriqiri. Au rawa ni ... lotu kaba e dela ni kava. Doesn't really matter. Your mind must be open to the style of worship that you encounter, emeni." My goal in this chapter is not to analyze his codeswitching, but in extended quotations I present the original and its translation side by side so that interested analysts can follow his stutter-step performance. For comparative purposes, I note that Fijian Methodists tend to preach in either Standard Fijian or a regional dialect, codeswitching into English only occasionally and usually for a fairly obvious reason (displaying special knowledge, enhancing authority, iconically representing the process of translation, etc.). Vulaono, in contrast, hops back and forth between Fijian and English without discernible pattern or purpose, although his overall performance style—loud, aggressive, exhortatory—recalls American televangelists' style generally. In translating his sermon, I have changed his Fijian English into standard American English. In contrast to sermons I have analyzed in other publications, here I proceed topically and thematically, not following the sequence of the performance itself.
8. For Fijian Methodist discomfort with ecumenism, see Casimira (2008).
9. In the original, "era bese tu na ka ni matanitu. Era, era sega, era sega ni politikiki, era qai via veitalanoataka na ka era sega ni vulica."
10. In the original, "Sa oti ko ira na, o, vuni tu ga ena koro ni vuli ni lotu, sa oti o ira na, kauta tu mai nodra degree kei na ka era kila. Sa gadrevi eso na tamata era cakava na ka veivakurabuitaki, cakacaka mana."
11. These lines were spoken in English.

12. In the original, "So na tamata lotu tiko nikua sa dredre sara ga mo masu. Io. Bible study ko cici, io. Gauna ni lotu ko cici. Crusade ko cici. Gauna ni masu, relax toka ga."
13. I am translating "tawatubu, tawamudu" as "entire, eternal" to maintain the poetic repetition of the Fijian original. *Tawatubu* literally means "not growing," and connotes that God is complete, not going through stages of growth like humankind. *Tawamudu* means "without end" and "eternal" is therefore a straightforward translation.
14. The minister spoke Standard Fijian. His original words were "sa mai vakadeitaki na itutu oqo ena vuku ni kaukauwa ni veisereki ni Kalou e na vuvale oya. E sega ni ka vou, e sega ni ka vacalaka."
15. The catechist spoke a Kadavu-specific dialect of Fijian. His original words were "I mino walega ni qai je ere vou i na Ivola Tabu na Yalo Tabu.... I mini je ere vou na itukutuku ni Vola Tabu raraba. Na Yalo Tabu na yalo ni Kalou.... Na yalo ni Kalou na Yalo Tabu. I mini je ere vou i na itukutuku ni Vola Tabu na Yalo Tabu."
16. His original words were "na vakacabe lotu se lako tikoga e na noda vanua," "na ivavuvuli ni lotu e so eda sa ciqoma, ka levu na ivavuvuli e sa mai moici."
17. A complicated expression of this ideology comes from a book of songs lauding Rabuka's coup of 1987, in which the editor writes: "The overthrow of governments is not a new thing, but an old game in the world. But it's a new thing for us, because this is the first one to happen in our part of the world." (This is my translation of the Fijian original: "Na vuaviritaki ni matanitu e sega ni ka vou, ia, sa dua na qito makawa vakavuravura. Ia, e ka vou vei keda, ka ni sai koya oqo na kena i matai me yaco e na noda i wase ni vuravura oqo"; Bulicokocoko 1988: vi.)
18. In the original, "Old mindset, old thinking, old style. Sa qai basika mai ko Pita vata kei Joni. New generation, new people, hallelujah."
19. The bible verse which he quotes is Revelation 21:5.
20. In the original, "The successful of the police crusade and the ruggers crusade because some people decide to unite with the police for this Good Word cause. [Inaudible] unity. Matai ni ka me tiko e na tamata vou ni gauna vou, ni Viti vou: unity. No barriers. Emeni."
21. In November 2010, Atu Vulaono's brother Waisea announced that he was leaving the denomination because it "now focuses on material things," and "The Holy Spirit revealed to me that we are no longer serving God but the church" (Rina 2010).

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