

Christianity in Western Melanesian Ethnography

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The photographs that conclude Gregory Bateson's *Naven* neatly frame a key problem in Melanesian ethnography.¹ Most of the plates portray exotic subjects: initiations, mortuary rites, portrait skulls, and so forth. Plate xxiv, however, is an instructive study in contrasts. The upper photo shows a man in native garb, whose face is painted white with pig tusks hanging from his nose, holding a long limestick on which dangle pendants indicating the number of men he has killed. The caption describes him as one of Bateson's chief informants and describes the nuances of his personality at some length. The lower photograph shows a man dressed in a white *laplap*. The caption is as austere as his dress: "Tshimbat, a native of Kankanamun, a product of culture contact." In the context of the ethnography, the message is clear: the *Iatmul* have a culture worthy of study while the "product of culture contact" does not. It is not only that the "product" has become more like Us and less like Them—he is a special kind of pretend Us. Tshimbat's culture, if he can be said to have one, is as much a mindless product of acculturation as the mass-manufactured white calico he is wearing. His culture is spurious, not capable of supporting ethnography.

It is quite possible that Tshimbat was a Christian. Certainly, many visitors to Melanesia have written about Christian converts in dismissive terms. Before World War II, however, anthropologists could still easily find the "real" natives, those who seemed more or less untainted by mission influence. This strategy has become increasingly difficult as the vast majority of Melanesians have associated themselves with the many Christian sects and denominations in the region. Yet few ethnographers have altered their assumptions about Melanesian Christians—these "products of culture contact." They have, instead, developed new strategies to write them out of

ethnographies, to reduce them to silence or inconsequence. As a result, ethnographers are presenting a picture that is more and more removed from reality.

Lest there be any doubt about the extent of Christian influence in Melanesian countries, consider the following: In a century and a half—considerably less in most places—the vast majority of the population has come to profess Christianity. The Pacific Council of Churches, for example, reported in 1980 that 85 percent of Papua New Guineans declared themselves Christian, while only 7.5 percent adhered to "indigenous religions" (1980, 3, 4). There are thousands of village churches, theological schools, religious radio services, and church businesses spread across the region. Christianity today exerts a powerful influence at all levels of Melanesian life. In rural villages, the churches have introduced a wide range of ideas and forms, from vernacular translations of Bible stories and Western-style education and health services to Pentecostal revivalism. At the regional level, Christian converts have moved through church networks to enter the working and middle classes in the postcolonial nations, while many villagers have appropriated Christian themes into millenarian movements and independent churches. Christianity also commands attention nationally. The first prime minister of Vanuatu, Fr. Walter Lini, is an Anglican priest. And the constitution of Papua New Guinea ranks "Christian principles" with "noble traditions" as values to be cherished and preserved. Finally, we also find Melanesians participating in international Christian organizations such as the Pacific Council of Churches and the Vatican. Christianity thus pervades Melanesia. Apart from Polynesia, one can find few places where Christianity has spread so quickly or permeated so thoroughly (see Forman 1982).

Anthropologists have a unique vantage point on the ways Melanesians have interpreted, modified, and incorporated Christian forms and ideas in local communities.² Yet only a handful seem interested.³ In the first part of this chapter, I argue that anthropological ignorance of Melanesian Christianity is methodical, deriving on the one hand from a narrow conception of cultural authenticity and, on the other, from a simplistic conception of Christianity as a missionary imposition. I then critique the assumptions behind missionization models, and suggest a broader framework that places Christianity within the context of Melanesian popular religion. My aim throughout is to take Melanesian Christianity seriously as an ethnographic subject. I hope to show that meeting this goal requires not only removing obstacles to seeing Christianity but also rethinking assumptions about Melanesian religion in general. This chapter, then, shares several of the larger aims of this volume, especially the desire to situate ethnography in a shared world of historical experience rather than the romanticized and divided universe of Them and Us.

MELANESIAN RELIGION AND AUTHENTICITY

Ethnography in Melanesia began as a salvage operation undertaken by educated colonialists to record what they could of indigenous customs before they vanished under the juggernaut of "Christianity, commerce, and civilization." Most of the first ethnographers were missionaries (e.g., Codrington 1972; Brown 1910; Holmes 1924; Saville 1926; see Langmore 1989). Metropolitan anthropologists like E. B. Tylor and James G. Frazer depended upon these "men in the field" for most of their ethnographic facts. Beginning with the Cambridge expedition to the Torres Strait in 1898, survey anthropologists, notably A. C. Haddon and C. G. Seligman, developed even closer working relations with missionaries and administrators, relying upon their services as translators, hosts, informants, and writers (see Barker 1979; Haddon 1901; Seligman 1910). These kinds of partnerships broke down after Bronislaw Malinowski established intensive personal fieldwork as the basis of professional anthropological careers. The search for the traditional intensified, however, as anthropologists roamed remote high valleys for pristine cultures or delved ever deeper into the symbolic systems of missionized coastal peoples (see Lawrence 1988). This fixation on the traditional has nowhere been so pronounced as in the study of religion. It is ironic that while Christianity's success stimulated and provided the conditions for early ethnographic studies of Melanesian religion, Christianity, by virtue of its Western origins, has rarely itself been considered a reputable ethnographic subject.

Although students of Melanesian religion frequently acknowledge that Christianity has made inroads, their writings, taken in the aggregate, paradoxically leave the opposite impression. The best case studies describe topics such as initiation cycles, sorcery practices, and mythology, usually in societies where Christianity has as yet made limited inroads (e.g., Schieffelin 1976; Tuzin 1980; Williams 1940; cf. R. Smith 1980). Comparative studies also treat Christianity very briefly (if at all) as a foreign influence altering or replacing Melanesian religion (e.g., Brunton 1980; Chowning 1987; Lawrence 1973). It is rare, then, to see Christianity recognized as a legitimate aspect of Melanesian religious life despite its long presence in many areas.

The huge anthropological literature on millenarian movements would seem to provide an exception. Christian borrowings and syncretic formulations often form core elements in these movements. Yet the interest in the movements is itself revealing. Anthropologists tend to focus on the most exotic forms, notably cargo cults. Moreover, they concentrate on syncretist movements while neglecting revivals within Christian communities, although the latter have been very common (see Barr and Trompf 1983; Loeliger and Trompf 1985). In other words, anthropologists find most in-

triguing those religious movements most analogous to traditional cultures—those that can be regarded as exotic native productions (see Fabian 1981).

The convention of analyzing religious elements solely in terms of local cultures further obscures the presence of Christianity. This working assumption, elaborated in many forms since the days of Malinowski's functionalism, extends the primary aims of salvage anthropology: one not only reports indigenous exotica, one goes beyond them to discover supposedly primordial cultural systems. Whether drawing upon functionalist, symbolic, phenomenological, or cultural reproductive modes of analysis, models that posit autochthonous cultural systems are prone to oversystematization and over-interpretation of ethnographic data (Brunton 1980; Keesing 1989a). They create an essentialist fiction by denying history to Melanesian communities. The resulting insular images of Melanesian societies may seem plausible for communities in remote high valleys, but become contentious when applied to coastal societies with long-established and intricate ties to encompassing government, church, and economic systems.

Consider two recent ethnographies written by expert and highly respected anthropologists. *The Fame of Gawa*, by Nancy D. Munn, presents a symbolic analysis of value formation on a small Massim island. Munn investigates several topics of religious interest such as mortuary observances, witchcraft, and notions of time and space. Although a map shows the presence of a church, and Munn mentions Gawan preachers and sermons (1986, 247), she simply asserts that the Gawans treat Christian and other "new authorities" in the same way as traditional specialists, "on the fundamentally acephalous (separate and equal) terms of the indigenous order" (1986, 44).⁴ We never learn whether the Gawans consider themselves Christians. Perhaps it does not matter. This seems to be Roy Wagner's assumption in *Asiwinarong*, a study of the Usen Barok people of New Ireland. In the opening chapter on Bakan Village, Wagner indicates that the villagers are deeply involved in the larger Papua New Guinea society: many have attained elite positions in business and government, and those left in the villages place much importance on economic development, schooling, and their membership in the United Church (1986, 20–23). These aspects of the Usen Barok's world vanish in the chapters that follow, where Wagner resolutely pursues *kastom* through a study of (presumably) traditional ideas and ritual actions. Both studies, then, fail to grapple with the presence of Christianity apparently because the authors (if not the villagers) consider the "new" religion to hold little intrinsic interest.⁵

Anthropologists pride themselves on their ability to grasp indigenous points of view. There is something ironic, therefore, about the widespread resistance to the fact that many Melanesians incorporate Christian ideas, rituals, and organizations into their religious lives. Clearly there is more at

work here than assumptions about what is and is not really Melanesian. We need to look closer at how anthropologists think about the relation between Christianity and indigenous religions.

*Models of Missionization*⁶

While students of Melanesian religion have had little to say about Christians or Christianity, they have been more forthcoming about missionaries and missionization. There is a staggering literature on the missions in Melanesia, most of it written by missionaries, missiologists, and historians. But anthropologists have also made important contributions since the 1930s. In recent years, a number of ethnographic studies of missions and the missionary impact on indigenous societies have appeared.⁷ These studies reveal much about the foundations of Christianity in various parts of the region. Yet their focus on the missionary as the agent of religious change, when combined with the essentialist perception of Melanesian cultures, presents a major obstacle to the recognition that Christianity has become part of Melanesian religion for a number of reasons. First, the study of missionaries is anachronistic in many parts of Melanesia where most foreign clergy have long departed (a point to which I return later). Second, those who focus upon the missionary tend to think of religious change in dualistic terms: missionaries versus natives, Christianity versus Melanesian religion, Western versus traditional culture, and so forth. This dualism, in turn, provides explicit arguments for denying a Melanesian-supported Christianity by portraying Christianity as irreconcilable with authentic indigenous religious beliefs.⁸

If one thinks of religious change as a contest between two incompatible religions and cultures then there can be but three possible outcomes to missionization: displacement of Melanesian religion by Christianity, temporary accommodation between the two sides, or rejection of Christianity by indigenous peoples. Each of these scenarios has gained favor at different times. The first was advanced by ethnographers in the 1920s, who loudly protested what they saw as the wanton destruction of native culture by missionaries. Such "dangerous and heedless tampering," Malinowski (1961, 467, 465) warned, inexorably led to the "rapid dying out of native races." F. E. Williams (1923, 1928) suspected that missionary mischief also lay behind the mass frenzies (as he saw them) of the Vailala Madness and Taro Cult in Papua. The second opinion formed in the 1940s and 1950s when it became clear that missionized people had not lost all of their traditional religion. Ian Hogbin (1939, 1951) and Kenneth Read (1952) described a kind of creeping Christianization and syncretism among the people of the Solomon Islands and New Guinea Highlands, respectively, in which new converts adopted Christian forms and ideas while maintaining a range of former beliefs and ritual practices. These authors assumed that eventually Christianity would become the

dominant religious strain in this mix. The third perception formed during the explosion of new ethnographic research in the 1960s and 1970s, as several anthropologists working in the coastal regions discovered that many indigenous institutions were thriving despite the long period of colonial rule and missionary activity. Peter Lawrence and Mervyn Meggitt concluded that the religions of missionized coastal peoples "have proved far more durable than is generally supposed. The changes introduced impinged mainly on the superstructure of native life, the external form of the socio-cultural order" (1965, 21).⁹

Different as these scenarios appear, they are permutations of the same model of missionization. I will review the assumptions underlying this dualistic conception of religious change more closely in the second part of the paper. My concern here is to show how each scenario allows ethnographers to dismiss Christianity as not authentically Melanesian, while buttressing the essentialized notion of indigenous religion. Christianity appears as a threat, a recent innovation, or a rejected possibility. It is not allowed to emerge as an ethnographic subject in its own right. After looming ominously on the pages of an ethnography in the form of missionary activities and pressures, Christianity then disappears. Now you see it, now you don't.

Ethnographic writings on the Trobriand Islands, that "sacred place" in anthropology (Weiner 1976, xv), present a striking illustration of how assertions about missionization may bolster an essentialist perspective on traditional society. The Trobriands were among the first places in eastern Papua to receive missionaries. European and Fijian Methodists arrived in 1894, followed by Roman Catholic priests in 1937. According to historian David Wetherell, membership in the Methodist church "was small for a long time but eventually burgeoned" (cited in Forman 1982, 57). Anthropologists have not worked in the Trobriands as long as the missions, but the islands are almost unique in terms of the historical depth of the ethnographic record, stretching back to Bronislaw Malinowski's famous research in 1915–1918. Susan Montague and Annette Weiner, who worked in the islands in the 1970s, mention the Christian presence. It is interesting to compare what they say with Malinowski's comments and to consider the implications of these different assessments of Christianity on anthropological perceptions of Trobriands society.

Bronislaw Malinowski arrived on Kiriwina in the Trobriands more than twenty years after the Methodist missionaries. While providing few details about the Christian presence, Malinowski's tone in his published work is clearly hostile. Missionaries appear *deus ex machina* to account for missing or transformed customs. In *The Sexual Lives of Savages*, for example, he blames mission influence for the disappearance or corruption of several customs (1929, 61, 217–218, 230, 475) and for the encouragement of a "novel im-

morality”: couples resting together in public view (1929, 403). Malinowski makes his reasoning clear: Christianity is utterly incompatible with Trobriand culture.

We must realise that the cardinal dogma of God the Father and God the Son, the sacrifice of the only Son and the filial love of man to his Maker would completely miss fire in a matrilineal society, where the relation between father and son is decreed by tribal law to be that of two strangers, where all personal unity between them is denied, and where all family obligations are associated with mother-line. (1929, 159)¹⁰

In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1961, 464–467), Malinowski unleashes a tirade against government and mission meddling and predicts the imminent collapse of Trobriand society. He thus sees his task in classic salvage terms: to make a record of a disappearing way of life.

Annette Weiner (1980, 1982), who returned to Kiriwina in the early 1970s, found that Malinowski had been unduly pessimistic. Trobriand society has successfully resisted colonial pressures (including missionization) for more than a century. Malinowski’s first error was to regard the islanders as passive victims awaiting the colonial steamroller. Weiner claims instead the Kiriwinans eagerly embraced the new opportunities presented by church, state, and capitalism. Still, as Margaret Jolly shows in her detailed critique in this collection, Weiner consistently presents changes in the Trobriands as extrinsic and superficial; the core values and reproductive processes of the society remain intact. By exchanging yams and women’s wealth, the Trobrianders “ultimately subvert any plans that touch at these core elements” (1982, 72); and so cooperative commercial ventures fail, school enrollments drop, and out-migration and remittances flag, while Trobriand culture endures. Working from the kind of unidimensional conception of European-Native contact that Carrier describes in the Introduction, Weiner not only uses indigenous institutions to explain cultural persistence, she presents them as evidence that Trobrianders really are traditionalists. Perhaps for this reason she finds it unnecessary to say whether there are churches in Trobriand villages or even if any islanders regard themselves as Christian or pagan. The acceptance of the new order by Trobrianders, then, turns out to be a mirage. They are, at their core, the same people described by Malinowski some fifty years earlier (see Carrier’s and Jolly’s discussions of this in their contributions to this collection).

Although Kiriwina apparently escaped the ravages of missionization, by the 1970s Kaduwaga village on Kaileuna island off the west coast of Kiriwina looked like Malinowski’s nightmare come true. According to Susan Montague, the villagers had abandoned colorful yam houses, canoes, traditional ceremonies, and ritual deference to their chief in favor of numerous “Westernisms”: manufactured clothes, cooperative stores, and ardent Christian

worship. Rather than seeing this as the inevitable result of colonialism, however, Montague expresses surprise:

It was one thing to find that Trobrianders, exposed to Western ways, have largely ignored them. But it was quite another to discover that a large, prominent Trobriand village, physically located well away from the Westerners who reside in the Trobriands, should move against the current of conservatism, and go out of its way to embrace Western life ways. (1978, 93)

Montague argues that the collapse of the traditional society has been more apparent than real. She takes the position I have described as creeping Christianization, implying that real change has not progressed much further than external forms. Unlike Malinowski, Montague believes that several key premises of Christianity and Trobriand cosmology are easy to reconcile (and the rest, presumably, can be ignored). These Trobrianders reinterpret Christianity to make it consistent with what they already know. They see Christianity as a source of power, as a means of access to the European wealth to be utilized in cultural reproduction. The Kaduwagans’ purpose in converting, in other words, has been to appropriate the power of Europeans by adopting their mannerisms. Their conversion amounts to “a series of changes designed to perpetuate traditional life in the village” (1978, 100).

Unlike Malinowski or Weiner, Montague reveals some details about Christian practices and identity in one part of the Trobriands. Yet this is the exception that proves the rule. Montague does not provide the historical background on colonial and missionary activities in Kaduwaga that would allow one to evaluate her claims of cultural continuity. Nor does she investigate the connections between the various “Westernisms” and encompassing political, religious, and economic systems (it would be interesting to know, for example, if pastors receive training from the United Church or are even Kaduwagans). In an unintentionally revealing aside, Montague mentions that she refused to attend church services, despite the urgings of some Kaduwagans, because of her personal agnosticism (although this does not prevent her from commenting on the contents and significance of the services [1978, 98]).¹¹ The effect of such neglect, of course, is to deflect attention from Western introductions and innovations to the conceptual and social processes that form the authentic Trobriands culture. The key part of the article is thus taken up with an analysis of traditional cosmology and of how Christianity and other “Westernisms” have been appropriated and made Trobriandisms.

Malinowski, Weiner, and Montague assess the impact of the missions on Trobriand society differently, but they share the premise that Christianity and traditional culture do not mix. Because Christianity is a Western imposition that works to displace Trobriand culture, indigenous elements *ipso facto* represent rejection or subversion of Christianity. The premise thus provides a rationale for elegant synchronic interpretations of the traditional culture,

and fends off—in ethnography if not in the actual Trobriands—the Christian influences Malinowski dreaded. Caught in crossfire between missionaries and indigenous culture, Trobriand Christianity never appears in its own right. Indeed, these anthropologists have little to say even about the missionaries.

The Problem of Religious Authenticity

Dan Jorgensen writes the following in a recent review: “If the study of Oceanic religions is to retain contemporary relevance it must take as its task an understanding of religious life harking back to Leenhardt’s central problem: the retention of authenticity in the face of christianization [*sic*] of the Pacific” (Jorgensen 1987, 53).

I have shown in this section that many anthropologists identify authenticity with traditional religion. Christianity, by implication, is inauthentic. It may be ignored or considered a threat, but it does not receive the attention, esteem, and sensitive analysis reserved for “authentic” religion. Read this way, Jorgensen’s call for relevance is in accord with mainstream opinion going back at least to the time of Malinowski.

There is another possible reading, however. This is to consider authenticity as a subjective problem at the heart of Melanesians’ efforts to construct a satisfying religious response to their changing experience. The search for authenticity leads some Melanesians to reject Christian symbols and values. But many others conduct their search by combining Christianity with indigenous values and beliefs. This is nothing new in the history of Christianity. As Kenelm Burridge (1978) notes, Christianity poses the issue of authenticity rather sharply. It is a global religion potentially embracing all people, yet the Bible provides no firm guidelines as to the cultural makeup of a truly Christian social order. From this second perspective, then, Jorgensen’s statement can be read as a challenge to take Christianity seriously as an integral part of modern Oceanic religion: to see Christianity as a constituent part of indigenous people’s total religious dialogue with the forces affecting their world. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to explore the possibility opened by this second reading by enlarging the scope of Melanesian religion to include Christianity.

RETHINKING MELANESIAN RELIGION

If we grant that Melanesian Christianity should be considered seriously in ethnographic terms, the question remains of how to conceptualize it. James Carrier has suggested in the Introduction that many anthropologists take a selective unidimensional view of the articulation between traditional society and the West, a view that assumes that village societies are incapable of creative interaction with Western ideas and institutions. This is certainly

true for the study of religious change in Melanesia. Pointing out the inadequacy of unilinear models, however, is not enough. One must also take into account the fact that Melanesians have had very different experiences of Christianity. By the 1980s, for example, many peoples on the coast had been active Christians for a century while many interior people were still in the process of receiving an introduction to the religion. This is, of course, to say nothing of the historical influences of sectarian divisions, missionary action, and local reinterpretations. The challenge is to move from unilinear and unidimensional models of missionization to more complex conceptions of religious innovation that simultaneously address a variety of factors and contexts: the history and organization of non-European and missionary religious ideas and actions in an area, popular religious practice and ideology, and the social circumstances in which combinations of religious elements are generated (cf. Laitin 1986). This wider approach rejects the narrowness of unilinear models of missionization. It also disputes the conventional opposition between Melanesian religion and Christianity, an opposition that finds its basis in essentialist distinctions between Them and Us rather than in empirical observation.

I have three aims in this section. First, I wish to show through a variety of examples that Christianity today forms a vibrant part of many Melanesians’ religious experience. My second aim is to offer a systematic critique of missionization models. Finally, I wish to propose ways of conceptualizing religious innovation that include Christian and indigenous elements. I provide illustrations of Melanesian Christianity throughout the section, but the second and third goals require a more methodical approach. Missionization models rest upon an essentialist distinction between Us and Them, but analysts differ in where they situate this opposition. Some see it in terms of agency: the missionary versus the indigene. Others perceive religious systems in opposition: Christianity versus traditional religion. And still others suggest a cultural and political framework: Western colonial capitalism versus traditional subsistence societies. Sometimes these are presented as alternative theories of missionization, but they are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, from the perspective of religious innovation, each framework provides a complementary angle on a single complex process of change. In constructing my critique, then, I find it helpful to consider missionization models and alternative understandings of religious innovation in three stages: in terms of agency, popular religion, and finally political economy.

Agents of Religious Change

At the most basic level, missionization models highlight the encounter between missionaries and Melanesians. Missionaries, who leave extensive records, usually appear as the initiators of action—as “change agents.” Eugene Ogan (1972), for example, compares the impact of different sects

upon Nasioi economic performance on Bougainville, and A. H. Sarei (1974) argues that Catholic doctrines eroded the traditional marriage practices of the Solo on Buka. Such studies of missionary agency focus on the success or failure of a mission to bring about change.

Too often analysis stops there. Scholars who perceive Melanesian Christianity in terms of missionary initiatives tend to reduce complex and often ambiguous situations of change to a simple contest between missionaries and natives. This narrow perspective distorts understanding both of missionary activities and of the religious forms that emerge from them.

To begin with a very common distortion: Focusing on missionary pronouncements often leads scholars to exaggerate the consistency of a mission's policy and practice. Studies of Anglicans in Papua provide a good example of this confusion. Drawing from pronouncements by mission leaders, David Wetherell concludes that "The aim of the Anglican pioneers was the creation of village Christianity within the framework of Melanesian society. They wanted the convert to live beside his neighbors, differing from them in nothing but his religion" (1977, 131). Anglican leaders were indeed liberal in their attitudes—although not especially knowledgeable about Papuan culture. Yet Richard Davey (1970, 90) notes that liberal pronouncements on paper "did not stop [missionaries] imposing social habits on their catechumens in the guise of Christian moral teaching." The Anglicans were not particularly consistent in practice. The five missionaries who worked in the Collingwood Bay area on the northeast coast between 1898 and 1920, for instance, veered sharply between acceptance of indigenous customs and out-and-out condemnation (Barker 1987). But even those missionaries who sought radical change in converts found it difficult to enforce new rules. They simply did not have the resources to supervise widespread villages that they could only visit periodically from the head stations. Statements of aims by Anglican leaders, then, give only a crude indication of the direction of mission efforts. Missionaries' musings on their purpose may constitute a "theory of social change" (Beidelman 1982, 16), but it is hard to see what interest such a "theory" holds to students of religious innovation if it has not been consistently applied.

An analytic focus on the missionary has a second weakness: it tends to obscure the contributions of non-European evangelists and teachers. The vast majority of missionaries to Melanesia have been Polynesian and Melanesian converts recruited along the path of mission expansion. Leaving few if any writings of their own, and often downplayed or ignored in mission writings, they are only beginning to receive the attention they deserve (Crocombe and Crocombe 1982; Latukefu 1978; Wetherell 1980).

Teacher-evangelists have often been responsible for diffusing cultural traits between groups and for promoting the wholesale abandonment of elaborate traditional ceremonies and customs, often against the wishes of white missionaries. Ann Chowning points out:

Since local people usually have no reason to doubt the authority of the native missionaries, nor opportunity to check their dicta, they often believe that it is a necessary part of Christianity to abandon practices (such as wearing face paint, mortuary observances, avoidance between certain relatives) which strike missionaries from other areas as "pagan" or just distasteful. (Chowning 1969, 34)

Teacher-evangelists have frequently promoted unorthodox interpretations of Christian dogma, particularly in more remote areas where they escape the direct supervision of white missionaries. Peter Lawrence thought cargo-cult doctrines in Madang were preached by "the less reliable congregational elders and native members of [Lutheran] Mission staff" (1956, 86). "Convinced that the cargo would come only when everybody had embraced Christianity, they spared no efforts to hasten the event" (Lawrence 1964, 82–83). Chowning tells of a Tolai catechist who gained fame as a native healer: "He is sometimes reported to have been over-zealous, but the possibility of his reinterpreting doctrine, and the effects of his attitudes towards the people he is working with, have rarely been considered" (1969, 33). Re-interpretations made by teachers are thus difficult to unravel from those of converts.

Missionaries and teachers do not exhaust the list of those shaping Melanesian Christianity, however. Diane Langmore (1982) draws our attention to the important but neglected contributions of European women in the missions. In addition, government agents, traders, and other foreigners forged their own complex links with both the missions and indigenous people and thus influenced religious attitudes (cf. Burrige 1960).

This is to say nothing of the crucial part played by villagers, especially converts, in adapting Christian ideas and institutions into Melanesian settings. As we shall see in the next section, some anthropologists have examined cultural reformulations of Christianity. Few, however, have looked at the actions or interpretations of individuals. Studies of leaders, from the highly successful Paliu on Manus Island to obscure local prophets and healers, demonstrate a general willingness to reconceptualize and incorporate Christianity into local belief systems (e.g., Loeliger and Trompf 1985; Schwartz 1962; Trompf 1977; Tuzin 1989). It would be most interesting to know how indigenous clergy and lay people understand and attempt to live out Christian beliefs.

In the final analysis, the focus on the missionary encounter must be questioned because it is archaic. With the key exception of the Roman Catholic Church, almost all of the older missions have largely localized their staffs and have become nationally based churches. While the churches maintain many of the policies, rituals, and theological orientations of their missionary predecessors, they are no longer simply missionary extensions of Western-based churches.

It is worth considering for a moment why the figure of the missionary

exerts such a strong pull on the imagination of scholars, attracting praise and condemnation alike. I suspect that the popular literary image of the heroic white missionary struggling to bring light into the pagan darkness accounts for much of this attention (and derision). The attitude, however, is not limited to outsiders. Many Melanesians also speak of religious change in terms of missionary initiatives. Maisin villagers on the northeast coast of Papua New Guinea, for example, told me that they had given up or greatly modified several traditional practices because the missionaries "told us to stop." They typically drew a striking contrast between the "ignorance" of their ancestors and the enlightenment of those who "obeyed the mission" (see Schwimmer 1973, 77ff.). This was puzzling to me, for a European missionary had not lived among them since 1920 and the local priests were Papua New Guineans who rarely intruded into local affairs. It was only after months of detailed research in the archives and extensive interviews with village elders and former missionaries and teachers that I realized that the people themselves had made most cultural modifications. The changes had less to do with mission initiatives than with the pressures deriving from the Maisins' increasing participation in the national economic system of Papua New Guinea (Barker 1985b). The Maisins' rhetoric, then, masked the very active role they had taken in shaping their conversion to Christianity. It also concealed (from themselves as well as outsiders) the degree to which religious innovations were influenced by the process of colonial incorporation (Barker n.d.).¹²

I do not mean to imply that missionaries have never forced change or that interactions between missionaries and converts have been unimportant. My point is simply that the missionary encounter forms too narrow a focus for understanding either the development or diversity of Christianity in Melanesia. What is required is a wider framework that includes the contributions of indigenous peoples, European missionaries, Melanesian teacher-evangelists and clergy, politicians, traders, and others to the totality of a people's religious ideas and actions. Such a framework should embrace different sorts of religious expression—traditional, syncretic and Christian—without reducing them to a contest between traditionalists and converts. The framework also needs to be wide enough to contain the different types and levels of social organization within which the actors participate, experience, and develop their religious ideas, rituals, and discourses. Christianity, in other words, should be examined as an ingredient within a people's popular religion—the totality of their religious experience.

*Melanesian Popular Religion*¹³

While the missions have had different receptions in different places, almost everywhere today we find people making use of both Melanesian and Christian forms and ideas. R. W. Robin (1982, 340) argues that this situation challenges anthropological interpretation:

The major source of contention appears to lie in two questions. First, to what extent does Melanesian society continue to adhere to traditional values and world-view? And second, to what extent does Melanesian society adopt the tenets and beliefs of Christianity (as taught by the mission) and make them their own?

Robin says, citing Lawrence (1956, 88), that most scholars "express the opinion that Christianity 'has been built into the framework of native society,' implying the pre-eminence of indigenous beliefs and values over Christian ones" (1982, 340). However, the Pacific Council of Churches has confidently declared that "Christianity is the predominant religion" (1980, 3).

The issue Robin raises is deceptively simple. It is not an easy matter to determine whether a person really is or is not a Christian, even among people who have had only a recent acquaintance with the religion. Writing of the relatively unacculturated Tauade of Papua, C. A. Hallpike (1977, 18) cogently remarks that "to estimate the sincerity and motivation of [a convert's] faith, motivations which may be obscure even to the believer himself, is a task for which the ethnographer has no competence." Indeed, even theologians have yet to come up with a mutually acceptable definition of Christian identity. It is little wonder, then, that fieldworkers studying peoples with similar cultures and religious histories may come to very different conclusions as to the relative strength of Christianity and tradition (cf., for example, McSwain 1977 and Michael French Smith 1984).

This kind of debate is a red herring. It draws our attention away from the key point that popular religion in Melanesia often consists of both Melanesian and Christian religious forms and ideas (cf. Ranger 1978, 487). Further, the debate rests upon a questionable premise: the notion that religions form coherent and mutually exclusive cultural systems. David Laitin has recently criticized this assumption in Clifford Geertz's (1973) influential definition of religion as a cultural system:

By implying that there is a coherent religious interpretation of what is "really real," Geertz's definition misses the social reality that any religion encompasses a number of traditions that are in some degree in conflict. His definition ignores the historical dimension of religious dissemination, and the fact that religions pick up different baggage in different eras and areas. (Laitin 1986, 24)

It is important to note that Laitin's criticism holds not only for Christianity but for indigenous religions as well. There is abundant ethnographic evidence, for example, of Melanesian groups exchanging rituals and magic. Because they were highly permeable, Melanesian religions during the early contact period were likely far less coherent than some anthropologists suppose (Brunton 1980). Certainly the popular religion of today, which may encompass in some places secret male cults, nationalist ideals, and the Bible, is extremely mixed and fluid.

To say that Melanesian popular religion includes indigenous and Christian elements, however, is not to suggest that it is syncretic, at least in the usual sense of that term. "Syncretic religion" implies not only a middle position on an evolutionary ladder—the "creeping Christianization" of missionization models—but also implies a coherent system emerging out of the synthesis of Western and indigenous elements. Now it is clear that Melanesians do invent such creative combinations, but they also support many other ideas and forms which retain the distinct identities of their origins—garden magic and church hymns, for example. Melanesian popular religion, then, is heterogeneous, made up of distinct practices, ideologies, and organizations.

If we include Christian organizations within the compass of Melanesian popular religion instead of excluding them as foreign entities, a picture of dynamic religious pluralism emerges. In some places, the religious field has a sectarian appearance. In northern Malaita, as in many parts of the New Guinea Highlands, for example, numerous Christian sects compete with each other and with non-Christian traditionalists and syncretic religious movements (Burt 1982, 1983; Keesing 1967; Ross 1978). In contrast, many of the coastal people in Papua New Guinea belong to single denominations. But, as Miriam Kahn's (1983) study of Wamiran religion in Milne Bay shows, people with a single Christian identity also experience a type of religious pluralism. All Wamirans identify themselves as Christians, many regularly attend church, still more donate money and labor for the maintenance of the church buildings, and several have become evangelists and priests in the Anglican Church. Yet Wamirans express received ideas about spirits and sorcery and participate in garden rituals that clearly contradict church teachings. Suspended, as it were, between these two religious identities, Wamiran ideas about God and their own recent history merge traditional and Christian perspectives.

It is clear that some foci of religious identity among the Malaitans and Wamirans are more consciously organized than others. It is also obvious that leaders and members of different sects may compete against each other and denounce religious practices that go against the particular dogmas of their group. All the same, when we attend to the experiences of people instead of denominational rivalries, we find that it is impossible to separate Christianity from the totality of popular religion. Despite the foreign support that missions have received, churches succeed or fail on the basis of local participation. The sectarian rivalries on Malaita exist not simply between, say, Anglicans and traditionalists, they emerge *between Malaitans* who, while sharing common languages, cultures, and recent histories, have developed rivalries along the lines of religious affiliations.¹⁴ In Wamira, such divisions have not developed and the same people participate in church and traditional rites. For the most part, Melanesians do not find either situation strange or contradictory. Why should they? We do not expect rigid consis-

tency from Western Christians. It would be hard to imagine Malaitans (as a whole) or Wamirans (individually) abandoning Christianity for traditional religion or vice versa, for to do so would be to renounce a part of themselves (see Ranger 1978, 489).

My argument raises an important question. If churches, cults, and traditional rites are not autonomous religious systems that displace or resist one another, how do they maintain distinct identities in so many places? Outside support for missions and churches provide only a small part of the answer. One must also analyze the emergence and decline of religious organizations and ideologies within a religious field in terms of a people's cultural and historical points of concern: those crucial matters over which they argue and for which they seek solutions (see Laitin 1986, 29). Consider the following three scenarios. In the first, a group of people switches its allegiance from one kind of religious expression to another as they seek an answer to a pressing problem. Cargo cults and religious movements are one kind of situation in which a prophet formulates a unitary answer to a widespread and pressing point of concern: the moral relation between Melanesians and Europeans (see Burrige 1969). In the Madang movements described by Peter Lawrence (1964), leaders experimented with conventional Christianity before reviving aspects of the pagan religion and then, later still, developing syncretic millenarian movements. Northern Malaita illustrates a second sectarian scenario, in which religious groups simultaneously compete by proposing different solutions to the same point of concern. According to Burt, Kwara'ae sects share a common antagonism toward colonial rule which they oppose by "describing their present religion as the basis of the true and original *kastom* of the Kwara'ae people" (1983, 334). Each sect, however, promotes a different mix of Christian and indigenous elements and thus a different conception of *kastom*. And, of course, some pagan groups oppose any mixing of Christianity with received traditions. Finally, the situation of the Wamirans described by Kahn (1983) represents what may be the most common scenario of all. Here the points of concern addressed in the various religious activities of the people are so far apart that people are mostly unconcerned about the logical contradictions between, say, attending church and warding off sorcery attacks. They are "Sunday Christians, Monday Sorcerers." The cults, church organizations, or religious movements that emerge in all three scenarios, therefore, should be seen as variant expressions of a popular religion that includes them all.

The notion of religious pluralism enriches our understanding of the dynamics of religious innovation in Melanesia. It may lead to misleading models, however, especially if we identify particular organizations, rituals, or ideologies within popular religion simply as Christianity or as traditional religion. While traditional (or indigenous), syncretist and Christian elements are often concentrated in certain religious forms, they occur across

the religious field. Moreover, if people are engaging in several types of religious activities, we would expect their experience from one context to affect their understandings of another. Despite the Western, indigenous, or syncretic appearance of a religious action or expression, one can often detect this sort of crossover. Thus Erik Schwimmer (1973) suggests that Orokaiva conceive of their relation with God in terms of traditional reciprocal cycles. Darrell Whiteman (1983) suggests that the concept of *mana* forms a crucial component of priestly authority in the Solomon Islands. And Carl Thune (1990) shows that seemingly conventional prayers and Biblical readings carry radically different connotations when they are reinterpreted in terms of the matrilineal cultural world of Lobodan villagers on Normanby Island.

Where there are real or perceived similarities between Christian, traditional, and syncretist activities and ideas, it may be very difficult to untangle one religion from the other. Take, for example, the fundamentalist Christians Ben Burt describes in northern Malaita who reject "heathen" indigenous rituals, betel chewing, smoking, and traditional costume.

Such prohibitions may be legitimated by Biblical references and form a set of rules which define righteous living under Christianity, as pagan *tambu* did under the traditional ritual system. Even the strictly observed whole "day of rest" has parallels with the periods of enforced idleness which preceded major sacrificial feasts. . . . Hence, despite the conflicts between mission and *kastom* ideologies, between Christian and pagan ways of life, theological parallels between the two religions have enabled Christian Kwara'ae to sustain some of the underlying premises of the pagan religion. (1983, 337-338)

In speaking of various Christian, traditional, and syncretic organizations and ideologies in a religious field, then, we must be careful not to reintroduce essentialist notions. These identities represent constellations of religious elements which are subject to variant interpretations and influences from across the spectrum of popular religion.

The main point I wish to make is simple: all the forms of religious activity a people engage in need to be understood in terms of the specific historical and social conditions in which they emerge. Even the most Western of Christian forms may symbolize a pressing point of concern for local peoples. The Maisin of Oro Province in Papua New Guinea, for example, devote considerable money, food, and labor to their church, and completely accept the authority of the clergy to determine the liturgy, in large part because they associate the church with the education of their children and, beyond that, with economic prosperity (Barker 1985a). This concern is as important to Maisin villagers as the fertility of their gardens or the success of their cooperative store, practical areas in which indigenous and syncretist ideas respectively play more prominent roles. By the same token, even the most "traditionalist" religious forms may in part constitute a creative response to

external forces and certain forms of domination, as Jolly's analysis of Trobriand women's mortuary exchanges in this book suggests. Thus when people follow "traditional" religious sects and forms this does not mean they are incapable of responding to new situations any more than a people's embrace of Christian forms necessarily entails capitulation to Western values. While we probably cannot avoid categories like Christianity and traditional religion, we must resist the tendency to think of them as coherent and separate systems (Keesing 1989b, 209). Ironically, the first step toward creating a more inclusive view of Melanesian religion is to return to an old ethnographic principle and take what our informants tell us seriously, even when they are Christians.

The Political Economy of Melanesian Religion

Melanesianists often see the missionary encounter as part of a much larger drama: the confrontation between Western and indigenous cultures. In Weberian terms, Melanesian religions are "traditional" or "ethnic"—highly localized and parochial—while Christianity is a "world religion," universalistic in its theological scope and expansive ambition. Ian Hogbin suggests that Christianity's impact is fundamentally ideological.

Although pagan beliefs linger beneath the surface for so long, one great change follows immediately on conversion. The religion of any primitive people inevitably reflects the social structure of the community in which it develops. . . . Christianity reflects another type of social system in which genealogical relationship is not so significant. Every Church asserts its universality, and those who belong to it offer the same kind of prayers to the one Deity. A mission native may continue to believe for many years that his chief obligations are to the members of his own society, but a basis is now provided for broadening the concept of brotherhood until it embraces not only the inhabitants of neighbouring settlements but also strangers. (Hogbin 1958, 182)

Several Melanesianists have also suggested that the missions played a political role by simultaneously undermining local autonomy and introducing villagers to key organizations, forms, and ideas of Western society: writing, mathematics, councils, legal codes, and money—to name but a few (M. F. Smith 1982, 1984). Also: "Whatever their motives, and their other concerns, the missions performed very similar functions to those carried out by the administration in lightly controlled areas—they inculcated respect for Western order, receptivity to the white man's domination and his values, worship of the work ethic, and attention to hygiene" (Amarshi, Good, and Mortimer 1979, 170). From the point of view of cultural confrontation, then, missionary activities acted as a softening-up process for colonialism and Westernization.

The expansion of Christianity in the Third World is inextricably mixed

with the political and economic ventures of the Western powers. It is perhaps true, as Beckett suggests, that "Christianity in the South Seas must, in the final analysis, be understood in terms of colonialism" (1978, 209). However, it is misleading to think of colonization as a unilinear process inevitably leading toward a Westernized culture. While the colonial process has produced Westernized and relatively homogeneous social and political structures at the national level, Melanesia retains its famous cultural diversity in local communities. The continuing existence of local cultural variations does not necessarily imply that colonialist incorporation has failed. In Melanesia, as in the rest of the capitalist periphery, different political and economic systems and cultural patterns coexist within the capitalist hegemony (see Wolf 1982). Indeed, some students argue that aspects of indigenous systems have flowered under colonial domination (Gregory 1982). To understand the relation between religious innovation and wider social and political change in Melanesia, therefore, we need to consider how Melanesian religion is generated and articulated within a multileveled political economy.

Robert Hefner's (1987) research on Islamic conversion in southern Java provides valuable insights into the relation between religious discourse and political economy. Hefner notes that scale is a crucial factor in the generation of distinct religious discourses. Embedded in small-scale communities in which knowledge is woven into the fabric of everyday life, local religious expressions are relatively flexible and unarticulated, informed by tacit moral and cosmological assumptions. In contrast, regional religious expressions must contain more explicit general assumptions, for they "provide the discourse for the elaboration of a secondary moral and ideological identity beyond that given in the immediacy of local groupings." Regional and international religious organizations thus form "a kind of secondary community built above and between those given by local social circumstances" (Hefner 1987, 74–75).

We should therefore expect to find a general correspondence between the scale of social organization Melanesians are engaged in and the character of religious discourse. Most Melanesians engage in at least three levels of social and economic organization. Subsistence-peasant economies, based upon kinship and exchange networks, form the most immediate context for rural people. By selling crops at the market, securing jobs in government and commercial sectors, and sending remittances to the villages, Melanesians also participate in the wider networks of regional-urban economies. Finally, Melanesian nations form part of the network of the world economic order. The religious discourses that emerge from these encompassing levels can be distinguished as "local," "popular," and "global," respectively.¹⁵

The religious discourses differ not only in their tone and scale, they differ in what they discern as points of interest, as things worth caring about. International religious organizations, for example, direct attention to global

issues: evangelization and revitalization of Christianity, the problems of poverty, pollution, and exploitation in the international system, and the expansion of literacy. National religions direct attention to regional problems such as the qualities (or lack thereof) of leadership in efforts to develop the economies of rural and urban areas, to create a unifying political and religious language, or to settle conflicts between districts. Local religious discourses focus on parochial moral issues: the meaning of death and suffering in a community or the securing of good crops. Each religious discourse addresses distinct problems that concern most people at one time or another, although rarely at once. Melanesian religion emerges, transforms, and is itself transformed in the intersection of these concerns.

Christian ideas and groups tend to dominate the broader levels of religious discourse and social organization while indigenous forms find their fullest expression in local communities. Christian theologies explicitly provide symbols that potentially unite large groups (an omnipresent and omnipotent deity), whereas indigenous religious discourses tend to build upon implicit knowledge shared by small groups of people who know each other well. In addition, churches have the benefit of rationalized organizations that have long associations with political regimes through schools, medical facilities, and other social services. All the same, we cannot assume that indigenous, syncretist, and Christian sects occupy fixed positions within the hierarchy of religious discourses. Indigenous idioms are capable of being made more universal and taken up in organized worship. The contrary is also true: Christianity may be appropriated by converts to address very parochial concerns. In other words, the essence of Christian or traditional ideas is of less importance than the potential of religious symbols to address and unify different levels of community. Melanesian religion combines indigenous and Christian elements at all levels of discourse.

Beginning at the level of local communities, we find that villagers often employ Christianity in support of preexisting norms. Ian Hogbin gives two interesting examples. The Busama of the Huon Peninsula traditionally condemned adultery and premarital intercourse. After converting, Busama elders forbade everything remotely immoral, from wearing flowers in the hair to dancing, but now in the name of Christianity. Hogbin compares them with the Trobriand islanders:

These latter natives, unlike the Busama, were before marriage almost completely free—and in spite of fifty years of missionary endeavour they still are. During a visit to the Trobriands I asked the Court Interpreter why the islanders were so heedless of Mission morality. "There is nothing in the Commandments to say that unmarried people should avoid intercourse," was his reply. "We accept the Bible and follow it." I thereupon quoted . . . two passages . . . "That's only Paul!" he exclaimed. "God's orders and Paul's opinions are two different things." (1951, 253–254)

Many coastal Papuans, like the Mailu islanders and the Maisin, have adopted church-based organizations as political forums replacing kin groups and feasts, although the issues and moral values expressed in these newer contexts draw heavily on indigenous themes, especially reciprocity and egalitarianism (Abbi 1975; Barker 1985a, 1990). The A'ara people on Santa Isabel in the Solomons, for instance, construct images of Christian leadership that balance social harmony with social dominance, key themes in the local moral ideology (White 1980).

Turning next to the level of popular culture and religion in Melanesian nations, we find that the missions have played formative roles. They established networks of churches, educational institutions, and commercial ventures. Over time, these provided an important basis for the emergence of a class of people who moved between tribal groups and who eventually formed part of an educated and economically privileged elite (Oram 1971). As Michael French Smith (1982, 1984) shows in an important series of papers on Kragur village in the east Sepik, participation in mission practices—especially in the schools and on plantations—also formed one of the principle ways rural people begin to internalize hegemonic orientations to time, money, and work (although not without much ambiguity and reinterpretation). Yet, indigenous cultural elements and initiatives have also been important at this level, especially within millenarian movements, cooperative societies, and other micronationalist forms. One should also note the recent efforts of national governments and indigenous elites to blend a range of traditional customs with Christianity and thus invent an overarching cultural identity and political ideology for their multicultural states (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982).

As Pacific nations have gained independence, the churches too have been eager to associate themselves with Melanesian culture. Drums, indigenous dances, traditional costumes, and other traditional paraphernalia are now commonplace in the church services of many denominations (Dawia 1980). Theologians and their students are also exploring indigenous religious discourses in an attempt to create a Melanesian Christianity grounded in traditional understandings (Christ in Melanesia 1977, Deverell and Deverell 1986). There is more than a little irony in these developments. While traditional religious activities and ideas continue to be abandoned by villagers who find them increasingly irrelevant, many of them are being given a new lease on life in national churches as symbols of “the Melanesian Way”!

At the widest levels of global religion, we find various religious elements that link Melanesia with the rest of the world system. These include international church organizations, trends in Christian education, Pentecostal revivalism, and so forth. Christian influences dominate at this level, but to a growing degree non-Christian religious elements are also entering the global network. Books and films of the occult, for example, are becoming in-

creasingly popular in urban Melanesia. In recent years, tribal religious elements have also entered the repertoire of international religion: New Guinean religious ideas, for example, receive attention in films, books, tourist brochures, and sermons. Elements from the global culture penetrate rural villages in a myriad of forms: as Evangelical radio broadcasts, American gospel cassettes, pamphlets, and comic books, to name a few (see Fabian 1981).

The three-tiered model of Melanesian religious discourse I have described helps to explain how anthropologists arrive at such varied assessments of missionary impact. Depending on the level of social organization one is dealing with, religious activities and ideologies look very different indeed. Those traveling throughout the region might conclude that Melanesians are a highly Christianized people who regularly go to church, bow to the Cross, and enjoy (in English or Pidgin) the latest American gospel hits. A researcher tracing the rise of micronationalist associations and movements might note how leaders creatively combine Christian and cargoist ideas to build regional religions in tune with the current aspirations of people from a wide number of sociolinguistic communities. Finally, the anthropologist studying a village society may discover that indigenous assumptions about bush spirits, ghosts, and power underlie local understandings of Christianity and conclude that the traditional religion has continued under a Christian veneer. In reality, of course, most Melanesians are involved in all of the three levels of discourse. As they move between them, they reshape each discourse according to the concepts and pressures they experience in the others. The limited perspective of the researcher, therefore, may obscure some of the forces that push and pull at the totality of a people's religious ideas and actions.

CONCLUSION

In the fifty years since Gregory Bateson's *Naven* was published, Christianity, already widespread in his day, has expanded into the most remote corners of Melanesia. The religion has developed, mutated, appropriated local cultural elements, and been itself appropriated in a myriad of forms. Yet most anthropologists still regard Christianity as foreign intrusion and continue to pursue the fading vestiges of uncontaminated traditional religions. Like Tshimbat, Bateson's “product of culture contact,” Christianity cannot always be entirely ignored, especially in the coastal regions. But few anthropologists incorporate the Christian presence into studies of village societies. Christianity is the perennial outside force—threatening, corrupting, or merely dusting the surface of the authentic focus of anthropological concerns. In and of itself, it is of no interest. It can never become “cultural.”

I have argued in this chapter that these sorts of assumptions have little basis in reality. They form part of a denial that has more to do with preserv-

ing a traditionalist notion of anthropology than with understanding traditional societies. There is no reason why ethnographic perspectives cannot be applied to nontraditional aspects of people's lives. Indeed, I am convinced that anthropologists have much to offer in understanding Melanesian Christianity and popular religion in general. But first they need to recognize that most Melanesians have embraced Christianity and ponder the significance of this shift in identity. While mission Christianity challenged indigenous religious ideas and practices it did not destroy them. Nor have Melanesian Christians been forced to abandon a diversity of religious and cultural identities for a single Western religious form, as unidimensional models of missionization seemed to predict. In the years since initial mission contact, Christianity and a myriad of indigenous religious forms have become resources for formulating innovative religious ideas, for taking on political causes and even for conserving the status quo.

While I have been critical of anthropologists' lack of attention to Melanesian Christians, my main purpose in this chapter has been positive. Rather than signaling the end of the ethnographic endeavor, Melanesian Christianity challenges us to create historically situated accounts of religious innovation. As we have seen, this will entail looking at the dynamics through which different people accept, create, and combine Christian and indigenous forms; the ways they interact with encompassing systems connecting them to the rest of the world; and the ways they maintain their cultural distinctiveness. In critiquing missionization models I have not tried to advance a model of my own, choosing instead to place Melanesian Christianity within a loose framework within which we can better appreciate its diffuseness, diversity, and pliancy in a variety of settings. In emphasizing the dynamic qualities of Melanesian Christianity within the larger popular religion, I have implied that Melanesians must be regarded as the primary architects of their religions, even though they may import elements wholesale and often must construct their religions under conditions of domination by outsiders. All of these points can be developed much further, most profitably through specific case studies (several of which I have cited already). Such case studies would also examine processes I have only touched on here, particularly the ways Melanesians make sense of Christian forms and ideas and incorporate them into indigenous conceptual schemes and cosmologies (e.g., Barker 1990 and n.d.; Jolly 1989; Keesing 1989b).

These and other questions increasingly will engage anthropologists and other students as we learn to address Melanesian religious life in the round, not simply those aspects that, in the abstract, strike us as authentic. We shall need to observe Melanesians as members of local communities, regional associations and nations within the world system. We shall need to see how concepts and pressures through these linkages are mediated by popular reli-

gion and made comprehensive by different groups of Melanesians. And we shall need to explore the pluralistic ways Melanesians are creating innovative religious ideas and forms from indigenous, Christian, and other sources.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank James Carrier, Robin Ridington, Anne Marie Tietjen, and Donald Tuzin for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

2. Missionaries, missiologists, historians, and Melanesian intellectuals have their own interests in this subject. This literature is huge and I do not consider it here. My impression, however, is that these scholars also tend to neglect indigenous adaptations of Christianity, largely because of their dependence upon missionary documents.

3. I am thinking here particularly of B. L. Abbi, Kenelm Burridge, Margaret Jolly, Michael French Smith, Geoffrey White, and Darrell Whiteman.

4. Munn implies that she was unable to provide an account of Gawa colonial history because of "sparse written documentation" (1986, 277), yet she provides clues that the government and church presence on Gawa is not all that new. She notes that the Methodist Mission purchased land for a church in 1920 and stationed a Fijian teacher there, although a permanent school was not established until 1974 (1986, 281). Other odd bits of information—forgetting the traditional cyclical calendar, the regulation of community projects under the councillor, and the presence of Gawan preachers—point to an extended interaction with Western institutions. It may be that Gawans encased these innovations within the received order, but Munn's assertion closes off any serious investigation of this important process.

5. I am not arguing for the opposite extreme in which all important aspects of indigenous societies are attributed to outside agencies—colonialization or the world system. There are obvious differences between peoples in the world, and these differences can be profitably explored through cultural analyses. Problems arise, however, when the Other is seen as both different and *separate*. I agree with William Roseberry, who views "the Other as different but *connected*, a product of a particular history that is itself intertwined with a larger set of economic, political, social, and cultural processes to such an extent that analytical separation of 'our' history and 'their' history is impossible" (1989, 13, original emphasis). Munn actually gives some indication of the potential richness of this latter kind of study with her sophisticated analysis of a speech concerning the founding of the island school. Rich in allusions to Gawan traditions, the speech ties these to Gawan historical experience and aspirations in the outside world (Munn 1986, 240–255).

6. My main interest here is with anthropological models. Melanesians, of course, form their own understandings of conversion and its implications. While drawing on indigenous narrative forms, these are often suffused with evangelistic tropes: from darkness to light, from cannibalism to peace (e.g., Kahn 1983; Young 1977), thus supporting the essentialist opposition of "pagan" and "Christian." Indigenous perceptions of the missionary period are fascinating but have as yet received little attention.

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7. See, for example, Boutilier, Hughes, and Tiffany (1978), Huber (1988), Jolly and Macintyre (1989), Kahn (1983), Schieffelin (1981), Whiteman (1983), and Young (1977).
8. During some periods and in some places, Melanesians have divided into antagonistic traditionalist and Christian factions, a point to which I return below in a discussion of Malaitan sectarianism. To anticipate, I argue that such a situation is not best understood in terms of a universal contest between Christianity and indigenous religions. Rather the different factions should be seen as belonging to a single popular religion, albeit a sharply divided one (see Keesing 1989b). In other words, the opposition between Christianity and traditional religions is not a given, it has to be taken up by local people to be sustained. And local people, of course, may have a variety of reasons—many of which have little to do with the contents of the religious traditions—for fostering the divisions.
9. The first and last of these permutations correspond broadly to the “activist” and “persistence” approaches to the impact of colonization that Carrier describes in his chapter herein.
10. Carl Thune’s (1990) analysis of a Methodist church service on nearby Normanby Island shows that the translation of Christian patriarchal concepts into a matrilineal culture does require considerable modification of meaning but is by no means impossible.
11. At risk of stating the obvious, one wonders if an ethnographer would so casually justify absenting themselves from “traditional” mortuary or fertility rituals because they did not believe in spirits!
12. James Carrier (1987) calls this form of historical consciousness a “constitutional” historiography. Maisin, like Wamirans to the east (Kahn 1983), characterize history in terms of momentous events, such as the arrival of missionaries, that shift the entire social order. The apparent agreement with the missionary impact model, then, is quite accidental and superficial. Unfortunately, statements by villagers that missionaries destroyed certain customs are often accepted at face value. Although such statements refer to historic events, not “traditional” institutions, they represent the kind of indigenous substantivization explored by Thomas in his contribution to this collection.
13. Terence Ranger’s (1978) impressive critique of writings on African religion provides the inspiration for much of my analysis in this section.
14. Roger M. Keesing makes this point very effectively in an analysis of the ways traditionalist Kwaio women incorporate notions of competing Christian communities into their image of their own religion. “Christian and traditionalist communities,” Keesing argues, “now belong to a single, albeit deeply divided, ideological system (as well as a single, albeit deeply divided, social system).” Therefore, “the struggle between Christian and ‘heathen’ cannot be viewed as one theology doing battle with another, but must be understood as a deeper and more subtle and complex struggle for political domination, and with it the power to define what Kwaio culture is to be” (1989b, 209).
15. My model draws on Fabian’s (1981) rethinking of African religious movements.
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