

ASAO Studies in Pacific Anthropology

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

The Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) is an international organization dedicated to studies of Pacific cultures, societies, and histories. This series publishes monographs and thematic collections on topics of global and comparative significance, grounded in anthropological fieldwork in Pacific locations.

Volume 1

*The Anthropology of Empathy: Experiencing the Lives of Others
in Pacific Societies*

Edited by Douglas W. Hollan and C. Jason Throop

Volume 2

Christian Politics in Oceania

Edited by Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall

Volume 3

*Big Men and Big Shots: Reciprocity, Disaster,
and Conflicts about "Custom" in New Britain*

Keir Martin

Volume 4

*Rethinking Homeland and Diaspora: Women, Wealth,
and Tongan Tradition*

Ping-Ann Addo

Christian Politics in Oceania



Edited by
Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall



Berghahn Books
NEW YORK • OXFORD

Published in 2013 by

Berghahn Books

www.berghahnbooks.com

©2013 Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Christian politics in Oceania / edited by Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall.

p. cm. — (ASAO studies in Pacific anthropology ; v. 2)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-85745-746-2 (hardback : alk. paper)

I. Christianity and politics—Oceania. 2. Christian sects—Oceania. I. Tomlinson, Matt, 1970– II. McDougall, Debra L.

BR115.P7C245 2012

261.70995—dc23

2012012575


British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in the United States on acid-free paper.

ISBN: 978-0-85745-746-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-0-85745-745-5 (ebook)

Contents 

Figures	vii
Maps	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction. Christian Politics in Oceania <i>Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall</i>	1
Chapter 1. Mediating Denominational Disputes: Land Claims and the Sound of Christian Critique in the Waria Valley, Papua New Guinea <i>Courtney Handman</i>	22
Chapter 2. “Heaven on Earth” or Satan’s “Base” in the Pacific?: Internal Christian Politics in the Dialogic Construction of the Makiran Underground Army <i>Michael W. Scott</i>	49
Chapter 3. The Generation of the Now: Denominational Politics in Fijian Christianity <i>Matt Tomlinson</i>	78
Chapter 4. Christian Politics in Vanuatu: Lay Priests and New State Forms <i>Annelin Eriksen</i>	103
Chapter 5. Evangelical Public Culture: Making Stranger-Citizens in Solomon Islands <i>Debra McDougall</i>	122
Chapter 6. Anthropology and the Politics of Christianity in Papua New Guinea <i>John Barker</i>	146
Chapter 7. Chiefs, Church, and State in Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands <i>Geoffrey White</i>	171

2. See Anderson (1979) for a classic statement, and Wilson (1970) for a sociological treatment of Pentecostalism as a sect.
3. I cannot develop this point here, but it is at the heart of my 2004 book on Urapmin and is discussed in great detail there.

References

- Anderson, Robert M. 1979. *Vision of the Disinherited: the Making of American Pentecostalism*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Bialecki, Jon. 2009. "Disjuncture, Continental Philosophy's New "Political Paul," and the Question of Progressive Christianity in a Southern Californian Third Wave Church." *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 1: 110–23.
- d'Épinay, Christian Lalive. 1969. *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*. London, Lutterworth Press.
- Douglas, Bronwen. 2007. "Christian Custom and the Church as Structure in 'Weak States' in Melanesia." In *Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance: Paradigms of Power and Persuasion*, ed. H. James, pp. 158–74. London: Routledge.
- Dumont, Louis. 1971. "Religion, Politics and Society in the Individualistic Universe." *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute for 1970*: 33–41.
- Hartwich, W. D., A. Assmann, et al. 2004. Afterword. In *The Political Theology of Paul*, ed. J. Taubes, pp. 115–42. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marshall, Ruth. 2010. "The Sovereignty of Miracles: Pentecostal Political Theology in Nigeria." *Constellations* 17, no. 2: 197–223.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. 1957 [1929]. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. New York, Meridian Books.
- O'Neill, Kevin L. 2010. *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robbins, Joel. 1998. "On Reading 'World News': Apocalyptic Narrative, Negative Nationalism, and Transnational Christianity in a Papua New Guinea Society." *Social Analysis* 42, no. 2: 103–30.
- . 2002. "On the Critical Uses of Difference: The Uninvited Guest and The Invention of Culture." *Social Analysis* 46, no. 1: 4–11.
- . 2003. "Dreaming and the Defeat of Charisma: Disconnecting Dreams from Leadership among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea." In *Dream Travelers: Sleep Experiences and Culture in the Western Pacific*, ed. R. Lohmann, pp. 19–41. New York, Palgrave.
- . 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Willems, Emilio. 1967. *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Wilson, Bryan R. 1970. *Religious Sects*. New York, McGraw-Hill.
- . 1982. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1990. *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Reflections on Political Theology in the Pacific

WEBB KEANE

Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall open this volume by invoking Fenella Cannell's question, "what difference does Christianity make?" Depending on how we take the question, it opens up several possible lines of inquiry. First, to ask what difference Christianity makes can turn on a larger framing question: what difference does "religion" make?—for instance, "as opposed to culture" or "when we think about politics." Or the question may direct us to the distinctiveness of *this* religion, to ask what difference Christianity makes, as opposed to the old gods and spirits, or Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and so forth. Of more immediate pertinence for many people in the Pacific is a fine-grained version of the latter question: what difference does it make that a society is Catholic or Pentecostal, Fijian Methodist or New Methodist? And then there is that simple word "difference." Different as opposed to what? Does the answer demand a historical narrative, one with a before and an after—that is, are we asking what followed from the establishment of Christianity in Pacific societies? If so, does it require us to accept some particular notion of causality? In that case, the question seems to depend on another one: what manner of historical entity is this thing we call "Christianity" such that we can claim that it is a plausible candidate for being the cause of observable consequences? But perhaps the difference in question is a matter of setting the terms of relevance, establishing our independent variables—what difference does it make to frame our observations as being about Christianity rather than political parties or economic development? And with these last questions, about causality and framing, we seem to circle back to the first.

In starting this way, I do not intend to play that familiar anthropological gambit: "I'm going to complicate the picture." After all, one of the valuable things about a tight regional comparison like that presented in this volume is the possibility of finding patterns rather than a cluster of unrelated particularities. The point of unpacking Tomlinson and McDougall's question is to suggest that its different aspects are interlocked in ways that may allow them to shed light on one another as we work through the empirical details. Moreover, the chapters in this volume make clear that *these are versions of the same questions*

people in the Pacific are asking themselves. So the ethnographer can take some assurance that the questions are real ones; they matter for people beyond our own disciplinary turf, and we can seek guidance from the conversations in which they are engaged with one another—and no doubt with the ethnographers as well. Indeed, our interlocutors include preachers, teachers, politicians, and other text-readers whose own endeavors at comparative religion and scriptural hermeneutics confound easy distinctions between expert and lay person, observer and observed. And however much the categories of “religion,” “culture,” and “politics” have their historical roots in the Euro-American world (for the implications of this point, see Asad 1993), today they are not utterly alien to people in Oceania. Just as the enthusiastic embrace of Christianity by Pacific Islanders confounds the more familiar narratives of empire that see the faith as nothing more than a foreign imposition, so too we can no longer assume that the analytic categories of the outside observer necessarily do violence to indigenous ones. In certain respects, although of course we must always remain wary of conceptual false cognates and cultural *trompe l’oeil* effects, the circulation of ideas means that sometimes it turns out we are speaking the same language, or at least share a workable pidgin (see Keane 2003).

In this essay, I want to glance at four issues raised by the authors in this volume. First is the place of theology in sociological and cultural analysis. Second is the nature of religion as a category of political analysis. Third is the distinctiveness of Christianity *per se*. And fourth is the relationship between religion and morality. In particular, I want to ask what the political consequences are when religion comes to be identified with morality, or when morality comes to be seen as demanding a religious foundation. By raising the question of the relations between religion and morality—that is, by not taking that relationship for granted—I want to suggest ways in which our understanding of politics should also involve an understanding of moral claims and the assumptions about persons those claims presuppose.

It is striking that the nascent anthropology of Christianity has had to make an argument for paying attention to theology. After all, the case for taking Melanesian spirits seriously was won several generations ago in all but the most positivistic styles of ethnographic analysis. By taking theology seriously, I mean that there is a degree of autonomy to the ideas and values that theology expresses that we shouldn’t try to reduce to some prior or supposedly more fundamental level of explanation. As every chapter in this volume makes clear, the goals, hopes, worries, concepts, and forms of judgment that we call Christianity play a crucial role in people’s worldly actions that can challenge the preconceptions on which secular political analysis depends. For instance, as Tomlinson and McDougall observe, “for many evangelicals, nation-states are the means and not the ends of Christian action.” Notice that although this claim inverts conventional social scientific understandings of means and ends,

it still preserves some version of instrumental rationality: we’re not necessarily talking about utterly otherworldly mystics. In terms that can be quite literally concrete, Christian aspirations may guide infrastructural development in impoverished regions along priorities and following rationalities that no secular economist or politician would be likely to accept. Thus Courtney Handman describes ambitious plans to erect a Bible college in the kind of isolated place where development experts might be more likely to start with agricultural implements and medical facilities. Aiming at unworldly goals, Christianity can demonstrate an impressive pragmatic capacity to mobilize people to apparently impractical ends.

Again, to take theology seriously means that even when it bears on political life, we should not too quickly reduce it to cynical self-interest or false consciousness. When Fijian police fight crime by embarking on moral crusades, they are drawing on a distinct theological anthropology—a fundamental understanding of what humans are—that shapes the means available to them. Such crusades do not take our postlapsarian contemporaries to be beyond redemption, as a darker theological vision might, but they seek the sources of criminality and the solutions in moral transformation, not in social conditions. The means are vastly different from those available for policing nation-states under classically social welfare or liberal forms of governance. The risks too are inherent to a moralized vision of the public that regards criminality as a failure of the moral person. Within the terms of a secular understanding of agency, it is usually far harder to transform the moral character of persons than it is to transform the economic and juridical circumstances in which they live—easier, and perhaps more realistic, to try to bring about equal opportunity of employment and housing in a legal system than to remove deep feelings of racism in a population. On the other hand, divine agency brings in a new range of pragmatic possibilities that secular governance cannot consider, including the hope and expectation that humans can serve as media to channel that sacred power through preaching and prayer. At the same time, any religion is likely to impose limits on possible forms of agency as well. These limits might involve specific moral injunctions, or they might even exclude entire fields of endeavor, such as party politics, as hopelessly corrupted by worldliness. Notice that this exclusion turns on the precise specification and deployment of the metacultural categories I pointed to above. The distinctions among religion, culture, and politics are not always mere academic questions.

Reflection on divinity has long been a way to think about the nature of power and to explain the sources of political legitimacy. In recent European debates, political theology has emerged as a response to a crisis provoked by the demise of familiar assumptions about the inevitable secularization of public life (de Vries and Sullivan 2006). The Pacific clearly presents a different situation; for one thing, the secularization thesis was never taken for granted

either by elites or by the population at large. Some political theologies can seem quite self-serving. That is one way of taking Vulaono's assertion, reported by Tomlinson, that Fijians must accept those in power because power comes from God. Others are less evidently so, as when, according to Michael Scott, some Makirans have concluded that their former prime minister is the Antichrist, surely a delegitimizing inference. And others are merely implicit in institutional histories. As Annelin Eriksen shows in Vanuatu, since the concerns of colonial rule lay elsewhere, villagers' education in the norms of citizenship lay in the hands of the church. Although this might seem to situate governance within an ecclesiastical frame, present-day Pentecostals consider an important part of their mission to be inculcating the practical requirements of success. Political theology not only means that politics is religious; it can impart a distinctly this-worldly character to religion as well.

Anthropologists must be clear about this simple point, if anyone is: questions of legitimation are not necessarily simple instrumental assertions of ideology directed by the powerful to those over whom they exercise their power. First, because there is no view from nowhere from which the purported user of ideology can see all his or her options as objective tools to be wielded in the service of objective interests. Second, because ultimately ideology constitutes those interests as much as it serves them. A nice example is found in Courtney Handman's chapter. Two leaders, Mark and Ulysses, are unhappy about taking part in village politics. As Handman observes, they are embarrassed by their own political machinations because those machinations seem to diminish the universality to which their Christian faith commits them. Although they ultimately do engage in land politics, one can surmise that their Christianity imposes real constraints on what they're willing to do and what they can get away with, to say nothing of the fact that their motivations cannot be understood without the values with which Christianity has endowed them. How could it be otherwise? Ultimately, the concept of political theology may be of less interest in the context of the secularization thesis than as an attempt to grapple with the limits of instrumental rationality as a way of understanding what motivates politics and what determines the outcomes of political actions.

A second distinctly theological dimension of Christian politics concerns the temporal imaginary. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has argued in the context of sacred time in India, alternative temporalities pose real challenges for any history in which the major actors do not orient themselves to the same sense of linear secular time that organizes the historians' narratives and underwrites their explanations. In Oceania, Seventh-day Adventists see nation-states and the United Nations as harbingers of a new world order. On Makira, Scott says, people are convinced that an underground army awaits the imminent arrival of end times, and they scrutinize the Book of Revelation in order to interpret current events. And according to Robbins (2004), when Urapmin,

who constantly seek signs of the millennium, decide the end is near, they stop working the fields and take to prayer meetings, bringing everyday provisioning to a halt.

Christianity is obviously not the only religion given to millenarian enthusiasms, nor the only one to invite the faithful to put their daily affairs in an eschatological perspective. But these are both strong forces in the Christian world with real political implications. Less dramatic temporal imaginings may have even more powerful political consequences. As Tomlinson remarks, different kinds of Methodism encourage opposed stances toward newness, with distinct implications for the willingness of church people to accept or reject new political orders; here the temporal imaginary has direct implications for political legitimacy. The very origin of the nation-state can be seen in light of the temporal imaginary I have called the moral narrative of modernity (Keane 2007). As Tomlinson and McDougall write, "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.'" Note that in this case the historical vision of Christian modernity seems to have catalyzed a strong and self-conscious exercise of historical agency. So theology does not necessarily produce radically otherworldly visions of time. But that it can shape the temporal imaginary and thus the kinds of actions that people find plausible, compelling, possible, or impossible, must enter into our accounts of politics.

Both missionaries and anthropologists have long been attentive to the localization of Christianity. For the former, localization can be both a threat and a promise. The threat is that Christianity will become absorbed into some pre-Christian set of beliefs or be transformed into a new syncretic religion. The promise is that localization may be an effective means by which Christianity comes to be accepted and internalized by those who are being evangelized. Over the course of mission history, a vast amount of theological debate and ethnographic scholarship has been devoted to working out these alternatives (see chapter three of Keane 2007). Not surprisingly, anthropological accounts of non-Western Christians have tended to dwell on the results of localization, a disciplinary predisposition in favor of cultural difference that is reinforced by the spatially and temporally limited perspective that traditional fieldwork can encourage. But many—perhaps even most—Christian communities would resist claims that they practice a distinctively local form of the religion. Often such an assertion would be seen as tantamount to an accusation of heterodoxy, or at least of an incomplete grasp of their faith. For Christianity is a universal religion whose truth should, at least in principle, hold for all Christians regardless of location or social affiliations. Moreover, an important part of the appeal of Christianity has often been its implicit cosmopolitanism. Joel Robbins holds this to be an important part of Urapmin acceptance of Pentecostalism. They

find Christianity to be an attractive alternative to the distant and largely ineffectual nation-state, a passage to a powerful translocal community. If that community is largely imagined, in the Urapmin case, it takes far more immediate forms elsewhere. The Solomon Islands, for instance, have been swept with transnational movements like the Billy Graham crusade, and they have been touched even by Islam. Geoffrey White shows that the concrete ties that international churches create result in some very real cosmopolitans, evident in the actual kinship relations that connected Santa Isabel's paramount chief to a bishop in England. If universal truth claims provide the church with powerful cosmopolitan imaginings, the churches' transnational institutions can take very specific practical forms.

But if universality is a commanding value, it is also, at the limit, an impossible project. Thus to rest one's legitimacy on a universalizing religion may impose paradoxical demands on local leaders. The resulting lack of a secure resting point may be one driving force behind the endless factionalism and denominationalism of Christian churches. In many cases, this factionalism focuses on forms of mediation and the persistent dream of immediation (often identified with localization and universality respectively). Thus we have the recurrence of purifying reform movements from Calvinism to early Buddhism to recent Islam, often accompanied by bouts of iconoclasm, antiritualism, and attacks on custom in the name of direct contact with the divine. To the extent that religions propose utopias, forms of transcendence, and new social imaginaries, their conceptual and emotional appeal to possibilities that are not apparent in immediate social arrangements makes them the preeminent real-world condition for critique, a fulcrum on which Archimedes can rest his lever and move the social world. Thus the problem of mediation and that of social existence are two sides of the same coin. One reason Muslims historically insisted that the Qur'an exists only in Arabic was to separate it from the factional world in which people were divided by mutually incomprehensible tongues, the very media of social conflict. Religious attacks on the forms of mediation can often become attacks on social bonds. What might seem to be aesthetic politics, such as the attack on loud music that Handman describes, is likely to be simultaneously a struggle over the semiotic ideologies that sustain conflicting theological visions and a challenge to the social bonds that semiotic form mediates and the modes of circulation it facilitates.

Another way of looking at the paradox of universalism is to focus on the category of religion as such. Even seemingly abstruse metalevel reflections on conceptual categories may turn out to be quite pressing. If, for example, religion ought to be kept apart from the corrupt or compromised worldly domain of politics, then it becomes important to be clear on what counts as "religious" and what as "political," since that ought to dictate what acts, movements, and institutions the pious may or may not be involved in. As I suggested above, the

questions and even worries with which anthropologists wrestle may turn out to be thoroughly entangled with those of their local interlocutors. Not only do local actors share these categories with anthropologists, they may also be drawing them from the same literatures, which can result in an epistemological confounding of the framing and the framed that Gregory Bateson (1972) would surely have found delightful.

By the time Christianity arrived in the Pacific, religion was, for Europeans, already a distinct element within a secular system of categories. Christianity was therefore inseparable from a well-established category of religion as a domain of life distinct from government, political economy, family, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, culture or custom. The deployment of these categories can itself be highly consequential. It is commonly self-defined secular regimes that have defined religion as the functional domain of moral values, both as an explanation for the existence and validity of those values and as a mechanism for their reproduction and enforcement.

Here I want to stress the tensions that arise even in avowedly nonsecular regimes such as Fiji between the church, on the one hand, and the political institutions inherited from largely secular models of the state (with representational rule, voting, and competing parties) on the other. First, there is the question of identifying the nation or the ethnicity with a particular religion or, as in the case of Fiji, a denomination. To the extent that politics is seen as necessarily contestatory, it would seem to challenge the universal claims of religion. One reason religion has been separated from state in some secular regimes is precisely to protect it from factional contention. For if a government falls, what does that say about the state of the religion with which it is identified?

Within the category of religion, we may ask what is it about Christianity in particular that helps us understand politics in the Pacific. Here of course the first answer is to point out the wide range of Christianities on offer, from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal. Neither universalism nor purification serves to distinguish Christianity from other universalizing religions with strong purifying movements, such as Islam or Buddhism. Here the domain of institutions and practices becomes pertinent. Unlike Islam, for instance, Christianity in most cases involves priesthoods and congregations. Against the Pauline model of individualistic conversion is the institutional history identified with Peter—both can be seen as affordances that may be taken up and elaborated, or ignored, in particular circumstances.

What is really striking in many of the new churches are the low barriers to entry at the leadership level, even if these are sometimes combined with high barriers to entry at the level of membership. Some congregations come into existence only by virtue of what Michael Warner (2005) has called counterpublics. They comprise those who feel themselves summoned by a preacher

or by divine intervention, defined over and against the dominant public forms of worship and self-identification. This correlates with evangelical practices of public speaking. In contrast to Catholic and Anglican, churches where anyone can preach, witness, or testify make possible the ongoing interpellation of a potentially indefinitely open-ended public that can form around those acts of speaking. When preaching is open to anyone, this will tend to reinforce a highly voluntaristic sense of religion, one that stresses the role of choice. Moreover, to the extent that it is above all Christianity that constitutes the public in many places, then public discourse will tend to draw on implicit frames that will shape how people can successfully speak and how they will be interpreted. As McDougall remarks, the public arena in many Pacific societies is soaked with evangelical expectations. Once such expectations predominate, even the most neutral speech or event can take on a theological reading.

The global circulation of preachers and their texts separates denomination from local community without thereby eliminating local community, instead introducing a crosscutting dimension to political life and agency. In Papua New Guinea, John Barker points out, in the absence of other powerful state institutions and national myths, it is Christianity that garners the most secure collective agreement. Yet at the same time that people are united in their Christian faith, one that makes available new forms of association and organization, their religion also introduces new forms of factionalism. Although religious factionalism may simply follow existing lines of social difference and conflict, such as those marked out by linguistic or kin groups, it may also introduce new ones. Moreover, given the association of Christianity with the public sphere, sectarian differences may become highly salient, especially when energized by the proselytizing urge with its implication that one's fellow Christian neighbors may not be up to the mark. Communities remain, but now feature highly explicit forms of plurality as people manifestly live within village and kin groups that are crosscut by different affiliations, responses to different interpellations.

Moreover, these are communities in motion: Susan Harding (2000) observed some time ago that evangelical conversion, being born again, is often less a matter of new convictions than of new speaking possibilities. This is precisely that moment, in Handman's words, "when Guhu-Samane went from being missionized to being missionizers themselves." Barker points to one outcome: PNG is full of internal missionaries, which works against any simple idea that a hegemonically Christian nation-state is going to be unified by virtue of its hegemonic religion. Proselytization is perhaps inevitably political since groups take on an agentive relation to others predicated on a moral obligation to save them.

Preaching and congregation-forming practices are inseparable from mass media and their publics. A public can itself become a potential set of preachers,

blurring the boundary between leader and congregation. Evangelical leaders are thus also rather loosely tied to their constituency, in contrast to the lifelong ties of the parish priest in the mainstream cases. Yet we have examples of shunning, which is one correlate of the voluntaristic nature of new congregations. The category of religion invites people to see a plane of alternative possibilities that can be compared, different members of the same set. People shunned in one can take up with another, or even with Islam, as in McDougall's chapter. Here is the forward propulsion of conversion: the convert should convert others.

These practices are as much among people as between people and God. They form the interactive styles of self-revelation, persuasion of others, and so forth that McDougall identifies as the public culture of the Solomons, when she says that evangelical ritual form "provides a common ground of interaction for stranger-citizens." Others are there to be witnessed to. Rendered into institutions, these interactive styles become the objectifications of new social imaginaries. These interactive possibilities are at least as important as emblematic or organizational models of identity.

Ordinary social interaction typically involves faces, bodies, and voices. Faces, bodies, and voices are preeminent media for the expression—and, perhaps even more, the evaluation—of moral worth. This brings me to my fourth point. In the division of functional domains typical of secular regimes in the West, religion doesn't go away, but it is often accorded a distinct purpose and form of reason: to serve morality. Consider McDougall's convert to Islam in the Solomons. What motivates him? The push comes from being shunned by his original community for unspecified but presumably immoral behavior. The pull comes from this: Islam offers clear moral guidance in the form of rules, rather than leaving matters up to the confused and fallible individual. There are knowable moral rules.

The moralization of politics has been evident in everything from the divine right of kings in early modern Europe to the Cultural Revolution in China and America's "Civil Religion." In the process of European secularization, the effort to associate moral judgment with the religious domain was meant in part to protect politics from moralization. One version of the argument goes that when one sees one's opponents not just as working toward competing interests but as immoral, then compromise—or even just recognition of one's opponents' legitimacy—are likely to become all the more difficult to achieve. But in the context of Oceania, another view seems to be predominant. It seems to focus on the religious modes of subject formation as contributions to the body politic. Here the basic premise seems to be that Christianity offers an alternative to the self-interest that leads to corruption, incompetence, and social strife, as well as the general instability that is endemic in many of the nation-states of the region. As I noted above, moral crusades against crime, such as those in Fiji, are predicated on the idea that social problems require

above all the transformation of persons, not just of social conditions. So too, the fight against political corruption and ineptitude depends on the cultivation of certain kinds of subjectivities, the production of people committed to and capable of fulfilling the demands of an upright life. This is why, as Tomlinson and McDougall note in their introduction, the first prime minister of Vanuatu, an Anglican priest, insisted that religion should play a role in politics.

To see politics as requiring a certain kind of morality, in the highly Christian context of Oceania, presumes that morality is above all a matter of religious faith. The latter association typically derives from a nested set of assumptions: that theology offers an ultimate foundation for morality, that appeal to that theology is the necessary and sufficient justification and authorization for moral actions, that doctrinal teachings offer moral guidance, and that religious institutions and practices are the chief practical means by which that moral guidance is inculcated and those ethical demands made inhabitable. It is in part for such reasons that Americans often assume religion to be the necessary foundation for morality: on these grounds, I have heard it said that it would be easier for a Muslim to be elected president of the United States than an atheist. The assumption that morality requires a religious basis seems to be an important factor (if, no doubt, only one of several) driving the present global transreligious revival, whose effects in Oceania are clearly evident throughout the chapters in this book. Conversely, to the extent that religion is treated as preeminently a source of morality (rather than, say, of ritual procedures, metaphysical descriptions, communal identity, mystical transport, eschatology, or theodicy) and that morality is seen to bear a law-like character, then it is likely to seem either to compete with the juridical side of politics or to encompass it.

As general claims about human social existence, these assumptions might be resisted by anyone familiar with the classic ethnographies of the Pacific. Consider an alternative view of the foundations of morality and of political life: the Maussian total social fact. The preeminent expressions of this concept, the Trobriand *kula* and the Maori *hau*, have roots in pre-Christian Oceania. The gift, Marcel Mauss writes, involves “an enormous complex of facts. . . . Everything intermingles in them, everything constituting the strictly social life of societies that have preceded our own. . . . In these ‘total’ social phenomena . . . all kinds of institutions are given expression at one and the same time—religious, juridical, and moral, which relate to both politics and the family” (1990: 3). Although Mauss characterized his essay as a study of the origins of contract, it is also a treatise on the moral foundations of social life as mediated by law. Thus he refers to “a permanent form of contractual morality, namely, how the law relating to things even today remains linked to the law relating to persons.”

Viewed as a constitutive dimension of the total social fact, morality saturates everyday life in what Mauss considered an “archaic” community. We

might take him a step further to suggest that morality—some shared, compelling intuitions about right, wrong, and the values that motivate and guide actions—is a dimension of what the anthropological tradition came to call culture. As such, morality takes the form of culturally specific embodied instincts and responses, ones that involve observable patterns that the possessor of these instincts is largely unaware of. In other words, if we accept that the ethical life of a community, absent some purposeful, energetic effort at rationalization, is something like Mauss’s total social fact, then what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls *habitus* is likely to be its primary mode of existence. In Bourdieu’s view, the structure of *habitus* does not require the mediation of any *knowable* principle, such as a general ethical precept or a theological doctrine. Quite the contrary: its orderliness emerges most powerfully to the extent that the structuring structures remain beyond people’s consciousness. This does *not* mean that those structures can be understood without reference to evaluation, judgment, and self-consciousness; it only means that as with the Maussian total social fact, these qualities do not require *conceptual totalization* in order to mediate social existence.

So what might instigate conceptual totalization of moral life? In the context of Oceania, I would suggest that the effort to organize morality under a knowable, objectified organizing principle is a distinctive project of a scripture-based monolithic religion like Christianity. At the least, the positing of a transcendental perspective, the God’s-eye point of view, is likely to provoke such an effort. This is because such a point of view invites a universalization that seems to demand principles sufficiently general to hold across an indefinite number of cases and contexts. (This demand is reinforced by the needs of any evangelizing project that aims to function in any and every possible social context.) To illustrate this point, consider Urapmin conversion. In pre-Christian Urapmin (Robbins 2004), different prohibitions and requirements applied to different clans, different genders, and people at different points in their ritual progression through the life cycle. The advent of Christianity introduced the point of view of a transcendent deity, offering a position on which to stand from which one may survey the whole range of known moral values available in any given cultural world, such that their inconsistencies become visible. It is the pressure exerted by this asymptotically transcendental point of view that provides at least one important conceptual and moral motivation for the kind of purification or reform movements that form the context for much of political life in Oceania today.

Religious reform movements and revivals often aspire to reconstruct ethical life in purified and totalizing terms, creating a life in which one’s domestic, economic, and political life should be harmonized with reference to a unitary set of pious principles. Such movements turn on the capacity to posit those pious principles in explicit terms. Thus Urapmin, like many Christians, think

of the upright life as adherence to what is, at least in principle, a fully knowable and internally consistent set of rules. These rules are objectifiable, more like laws than habitus. The more objectified their form, the more general their scope and abstract their formulation, the more they are likely to stand apart from the habits and demands of everyday labor and sociality. It is hard to render high principles into inhabitable practices. This tension is one source of what Robbins calls the “moral torment” of the Urapmin.

This brings me back to one of my opening questions: what difference does the very idea of religion make in political life? Christianity appeared on the scene in Oceania as an evangelizing movement that promoted a self-conscious stance toward something known as religion, set in some kind of contrast to alternatives such as custom, culture, and government in terms that ranged from accommodation to rejection. The divisions among these spheres of social action—the outcome of disassembling the Maussian total social fact—were characteristic of European modernity both as a set of institutions and as a form of historical self-awareness. The idea that morality depends on a religious foundation and that it requires a knowable, coherent system of rules and principles depends (in its modern forms) on this division among spheres. Religion plays a wide range of political roles across Oceania, but underlying them seems to be some version of these assumptions: that only morality can provide the basis for functioning, secure, and legitimate governance, and that only religion can ground morality. Yet the vision of morality in question—especially in the case of the more energetic and self-conscious reform movements—often has an objectified character to it that sets it apart from the taken-for-granted flow of everyday life. The result of trying to reconcile domains whose tendency to diverge is a characteristic feature of contemporary life is often what Louis Althusser (1971: 150) famously called teeth-gritting harmony. Herein lies a paradox: although the goal of Christian politics is often totalization, a quest for a holistic world in which faith, morality, and political order work in harmony, the very terms through which that goal is sought derive from the characteristically modern and secular divisions among domains that set religion as a sphere apart from others. But the fact of being paradoxical hardly disqualifies a political theology from social success, and indeed, it may serve as a goad to yet more strenuous efforts. As this volume makes clear, there is a striking lack of complacency in the religious politics of Oceania. This paradox may be one reason why.

References

- Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1972 [1955]. “A Theory of Play and Fantasy.” In *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*, pp. 177–193. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977 [1972]. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- de Vries, Hent, and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds. 2006. *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Harding, Susan Friend. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Keane, Webb. 2003. “Self-Interpretation, Agency, and the Objects of Anthropology: Reflections on a Genealogy.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2: 222–248.
- . 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1990 [1925]. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Norton.
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Warner, Michael. 2005. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.