

Converting Pasts and Presents: Reflections on Histories
of Missionary Enterprises in the Pacific
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The title of this presentation plays in part on John Williams's 1837 publication, *A History of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*. I seek to do several things: (1) to revisit critically, if only briefly, the written histories of missionary enterprises and religious change in the Pacific Islands region; (2) to place these histories against the persistence of missionary efforts in current contexts; (3) to link the historical proselytisation of Christianity in both metaphorical and material forms with the more secular but related, equally transformative and on-going agendas of development; and (4) to suggest the ways in which histories of conversion are also about converting the past. I begin on the island of Pohnpei.

The Reverend Albert A. Sturges, an American Congregationalist missionary from Granville, Ohio who lived and worked on the island for over 30 years, wrote in 1869 that Christianity would have prevailed on Pohnpei 'even without us'.¹ The Reverend Sturges was perhaps more correct in his assessment than he knew, though for reasons he could not recognise or credit. Sturges and other missionaries sent to the island by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions believed that conversion to Christianity required a simultaneous acceptance of the American civilisation through which it was being conveyed.² In the eyes of these missionaries, the success of Christianity necessitated, then, a major restructuring of Pohnpeian society. To achieve this, the missionaries allied themselves with certain chiefs, took sides in wars they understood to be between the forces of light and darkness, promoted Christian commerce, designed Christian towns around mission stations, and advocated a system of government that included elected sheriffs, appointed judges, a popularly chosen legislature, and a written code of laws. They opened schools and mission stations, taught domestic skills to prospective female converts, translated, printed and distributed copies of the Bible, drafted a vocabulary of the Pohnpeian language, and translated English-language hymns into Pohnpeian. In so doing, they struggled against an array of hostile and contradictory forces in the world around them, and in particular, against an island people and way of life they did not love, like or much understand, but sought mightily to change. In their larger themes and general patterns, the stories of these missionaries on Pohnpei parallel closely the efforts of other evangelicals elsewhere in the Pacific Islands region.³

1 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereinafter ABCFM), reel 4, document 297 – Sturges to (unknown), journal letter of 2 Dec. 1868, entry for 6 Jan. 1869.

2 This summary of Protestant missionary efforts on Pohnpei is drawn from my book, *Upon a Stone Altar: A history of the island of Pohnpei to 1890* (Honolulu 1988); see especially chapters 4, 'God versus Gods', and 5, 'Strategies of Salvation'.

In their struggles, these missionaries consoled themselves with the 'arithmetic of salvation', as Greg Dening has termed it. By the mid-1870s, half of the island's population was counted as at least nominally Christian.⁴ Yet, the missionaries ultimately found much to negate or undermine their own calculations. There was the backsliding, spiritual apathy, crass opportunism, and gross materialism that the missionaries thought coloured Pohnpeian attitudes toward the Christian endeavour. Assessing their efforts as largely for naught, they took out their frustration and despair on one another. In the 1883 report on his recently concluded trip through the Micronesian mission field as captain of the *Morning Star*, Isaiah Bray stated that it would be sheer folly to spend more money on the badly divided, dissension-racked company of missionaries.⁵ Looking about Pohnpei, Bray claimed it difficult to identify the fruits of more than three decades of missionary labour. There were fruits, nonetheless.

We might ask ourselves what induced the people of Pohnpei to make a place for Christianity on their island and in their lives. The missionaries themselves are not much remembered; the graves of their children are overgrown or forgotten. The Congregationalist church on the island commemorates annually the arrival of the message, but not the messengers. The explanations most often given for Pohnpeians' openness to Christianity have a utilitarian or rationalist character to them. This litany of determining factors includes the political machinations of chiefs, the literate skills taught in mission schools, the opportunities that Christianity's egalitarian message offered to the lesser chiefs, women and the commoner class, the use of mission stations as a conduit for the material wealth of the Western world, and Christianity as consolation for disease and the harsher elements of colonialism and general contact with the outside world.⁶ These factors find echo in many of the histories of missionaries and missionisation in the Pacific; they provide at best partial explanations for religious change on Pohnpei and elsewhere.

³ See, for example, Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical missionaries in the South Seas* (Melbourne 1978); Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874-1914* (Honolulu 1989); Donald Denoon, et al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge 1997), especially the chapter by Jocelyn Linnekin, 'New Political Orders', 185-217; Francis X. Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A history of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in precolonial days, 1521-1885* (Honolulu, 1983), especially chapters 3, 'Mission to Palos', 6, 'The Powers of Darkness and Light', and 8, 'Christianity and Copra in the Marshalls; Hezel's *The Catholic Church in Micronesia: Historical essays on the Catholic Church in the Caroline-Marshall Islands* (Chicago 1991); K.R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A new South Sea Islands history from first settlement to colonial rule* (Honolulu 1984), especially chapters 6, 'To Recover the Remnant', and 14, 'Mission Frontiers'; and James A. Boutilier, Daniel T. Hughes and Sharon W. Tiffany (eds), *Mission, Church*

and Sect in Oceania (Lanham, Md 1978).

4 ABCFM 1874, *Annual Report* (for 1873), 77.

5 ABCFM, reel 8, document 97 – ‘Report of the 11th voyage of the Missionary Packet *Morning Star*, no. 3 to the

Micronesian Islands, 1881-1882’.

6 I do not mean to minimize or dismiss the physical or cosmological consequences of epidemic disease on Pohnpei. A

smallpox epidemic in early 1854 reduced the island’s population from roughly 10,000 to fewer than 5,000, and within a

six-month period. One Pohnpeian chief asked Albert Sturges if it were Jehovah who was inflicting such death upon the

island. Another chief, more certain than the first, asked Rev. Luther H. Gulick not if, but why the Christian god was

killing the people of Pohnpei. See Hanlon, *Upon a Stone Altar*, 110. Nonetheless, Pohnpeians did not convert but rather

Converting Pasts and Presents 145

I do not know, and think beyond recovery, the ways in which Pohnpeians came to understand Christianity’s symbols as meaningful, as signs for larger lessons and truths that resonated or accorded with their experiences in a changing, sometimes violent world turned upside down or inside out by those who came from Pacific outlands and whose deity was Jehovah.⁷ I do not know enough about the pools of anxiety, doubt and restlessness within Pohnpeian society stirred by the arrival of Christianity. And I am unsure of the exact ways in which new truths, symbols and rituals replaced old ones. I am more certain that the history of religious change on the island does not begin with the arrival of Christian missionaries of any denomination.⁸ Various groups of voyagers brought to the island their gods, their beliefs and practices, and established these in the various areas of the island which they settled or seized. Any history of religious change on Pohnpei would include a consideration of more indigenous or local systems of belief, cosmologies if you will, that joined material and spiritual worlds, and encompassed a totality of experiences and relationships far beyond the compartment that most social science researchers call ‘religion’.⁹ There is a diversity here that subverts any attempt to speak about a unified, consistent, island-wide system of religious belief in existence prior to the coming of European and American missionaries. In light of this varied geography of beliefs and practices, the history of Christianity may be more appropriately rendered as the histories of Christianity for the island. Or, perhaps, we should be speaking of the histories of Christianities as Pohnpeians had to engage and assess denominational differences between American Congregationalism and the Roman Catholicism brought by Spanish Jesuits in 1886. In any event, the issue becomes not eliminating but, in Vicente Diaz’s words, repositioning the missionary within local historical and cultural contexts, and within an approach that considers the reception as well as delivery of the message.¹⁰ In light warred amongst each other in the period immediately following the smallpox epidemic. The first ‘conversions’, three in number, did not occur until Nov. 1860.

⁷ On the process of religious change, see the essay, ‘On Religious Change’, in Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches*,

Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880 (Honolulu 1980), 199-204. For Pohnpei,

there are accounts of Pohnpeians abandoning their gods or ceasing to perform the ceremonies of atonement or supplication associated with them. See for example Paul Hambruch, *Ergebnisse der Südsee Expedition, 1908-1910*, 2, B, 7, Georg Thilenius (ed.), *Ponape* (Hamburg 1936), II, 113, and III, 94-5. These histories do not link this abandonment of god and ritual to foreign disease or to the activities of foreign missionaries; this is not to say they could not be, however. 8 Roman Catholicism, not American Congregationalism, was the first denominational variant of Christianity to reach Pohnpei. It arrived aboard the ship *Notre Dame du Paix*, and with the French priests Alexis Bachelot and Désiré Maigret on 13 Dec. 1837. Bachelot and Maigret were members of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, more commonly known as the Picpus fathers. Bachelot actually died eight days before the ship reached Madolenihmw Harbor on Pohnpei. The first order of business for Maigret was to locate an appropriate burial place for Bachelot. Dissatisfied with, among other things, the lack of quantifiable progress, Maigret abandoned the fledgling mission in July of 1838.

9 See 'The Other Side of Yesterday' in Hanlon, *Upon a Stone Altar*, 3-25; also, 103-5.

10 Vicente M. Diaz, 'Repositioning the Missionary: The beatification of Blessed Diego Luis de Sanvitores and Chamorro cultural and political history on Guam', PhD dissertation, University of California Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz 1992), 14-19. Diaz concerns himself largely with the contemporary cultural politics between coloniser and Chamorro over the canonisation of Fr Sanvitores. His argument also has salience, I believe, for investigations of deeper past and around the issue of religious change.

146 PACIFIC LIVES, PACIFIC PLACES

of all this, I think it not at all profound or radical to suggest that the histories of missionaries are not histories of Christianity in the Pacific, and that the causes or explanations for Christianity's grounding in Pacific soil lie beyond missionaries and are more locally focused.¹¹

My concern is not just with the historiography of Pohnpei. How might histories of religious change be done or be done differently in the larger Pacific Islands region? The wording used to describe indigenous responses to new belief systems is certainly at issue in the histories of missionaries and of religious change in the region. 'Conversion', in its most literal and often-employed meaning, implies a process too final, too complete and too onesided; a response more about uncritical submission or mindless consumption than engagement or deliberation. 'Absorption', 'adjustment', 'incorporation', and 'revitalisation' are words also employed to understand indigenous encounters with Christianity but they lack, I think, an ability to represent an engagement whose stakes were large and ultimately cosmological.¹² 'Appropriation' suggests dynamism and negotiation, but is too often rendered as fact rather than process. Peter Brown would remind us of religious change as a process that is about power and persuasion, and that includes paradox, contradiction, tension, testing, and continuity.¹³ I do not doubt that Christianity has become indigenised. My concern is for the process of that indigenisation, and the representations of it.¹⁴

'Translation' and 'consciousness' are two concepts that might be advantageously deployed in the doing of histories of religious change in the Pacific. They have been deployed with

insightful effect elsewhere. The process of indigenisation certainly raises the issue of translation or the 'art of the impossible' as Andrew Walls has termed it.¹⁵ Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism* considers the efforts of Spanish Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines to translate Catholic doctrines and concepts into Tagalog, and the partial failings of those efforts as Tagalog speakers made a very different sense of the words they heard. Rafael writes that,

11 There has been some very interesting work on early Islander interpretations of Christianity and its missionaries. See, for example, Ron Adams, *In the Land of Strangers: A century of European contact with Tanna, 1774-1874* (Canberra 1984). Bronwen Douglas is another practitioner of history in the Pacific who possesses a sensitivity to the complexities and local dynamics that informed the process of religious change. She suggests that what is called 'conversion' may have constituted one of several empowering strategies intended to cope with novel but threatening forces. Douglas also argues that religious change may have resulted from the desire to evade or undermine the efficacy of more malevolent local deities and their human agents. See her 'Autonomous and controlled spirits: traditional ritual and early interpretations of Christianity on Tanna, Aneitym and the Isle of Pines in comparative perspective', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 98 (1989), 7-48; also 'Power, discourse and the appropriation of God: Christianity and subversion in a Melanesian context', *History and Anthropology*, 9 (1995), 57-92. 12 Andrew F. Walls reviews these variously ascribed forms of response in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the transmission of faith* (Maryknoll, NY 1996), 131-9. 13 Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine* (London 1972), 12-14. 14 In concentrating on what I understand to be the deficiencies and oversights in histories of religious change, I in no way mean to slight several excellent contemporary ethnographies of Melanesian women's negotiations with Christian practices and institutions at both the national and local levels. There is, for example, Margaret Jolly's 'Women-Nation-State in Vanuatu: Women as Signs and Subjects in Discourses of "Kastom", Modernity and Christianity', Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds), *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge 1998), 1-25; and Lissant Bolton, 'Dancing in mats: extending "kastom" to women in Vanuatu', PhD thesis, University of Manchester (Manchester 1993). 15 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 26. Converting Pasts and Presents 147 Spaniards' efforts to translate Christian doctrine into the native vernacular transformed the vernacular and in time the consciousness of its speakers. Similarly, the Tagologs' efforts to read and appropriate Christian-colonial discourse in their own language tended to change the meaning of that discourse and hence the very shape and feel of the colonial legacy as a whole.¹⁶ Rafael's work alerts us to the possibility of multiple and alternate translations, and to the issue of consciousness. The history of religious change in the Pacific or anywhere for that matter also entails changes in consciousness. John and Jean Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution* deals with the encounter between British missionaries and the Tswana people of South Africa.¹⁷ This work contextualises the missionary effort there against the rise of modernity in Great Britain and Europe, the revivalist counter-movement, the colonising impulse, European notions of the 'savage' and the 'heathen', and the complex and dynamic world of the Tswana themselves. Missionary efforts to change the signs and practices of the Tswana resulted in new forms of consciousness for both the coloniser and colonised. In their efforts to incorporate the Tswana into a worldwide Christian commonwealth, the missionaries

sought first to re-make the Tswana by refashioning or otherwise trying to fundamentally alter the more visible and external areas of Tswana life; namely, modes of production, architecture, clothing, aesthetics, personhood, and social calendars.

The Comaroffs find the Tswana not at all passive in their encounters with LMS and Methodist missionaries. The Tswana proved sceptical of the methods of conversion used by the missionaries, reading their own significance into these methods and taking from the material, technological and ideational resources of the missionaries what they found useful or interesting. At the same time, the Tswana resisted the intrusion of the missionaries into everyday life by struggling to retain control over space and place, words and water, arguing for example over the efficacy of rain-making and the ontology of ritual. This selective engagement with the discourse of Christianity brought transformation all the same. To argue for the credibility and worth of Tswana ways against European science, technology, rationalism, and empiricism was to allow these alien beliefs and the world from which they came into the life of the Tswana. In the end, the European colonisation of Africa proved less a direct coercive conquest than an ultimately persuasive attempt to colonise consciousness, to remake people by redefining the taken-for-granted surfaces of their everyday worlds.

The possibilities of doing a history of religious change for Pacific Islands may be in part a function of disturbance, the quality of existing local histories, and the richness of the ethnographic and historical written record. If the historical record prohibits us from understanding local encounters with Christianity, perhaps there is value in considering those areas of the Pacific where Christianity has been resisted Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule*, 2nd printing (Durham, N.C 1996), 11. Rafael also offers a more nuanced definition of conversion as translation in his preface to the 1988 edition of his book (p. xvii), a definition considerably different from the meaning of the word 'conversion' in most Pacific Islands historiography.

Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago 1991), 309-14. or those instances in which Christianity has blended or combined with local beliefs and practices to address the contradictions, inconsistencies and inequities that colonialism causes in Christianity's message.¹⁸ This is not an argument for reconstructing the past through the ethnographic present, but a suggestion for perspective, constructive imagination and creative reflection in assessing religious change of more distant pasts.

In a 1982 study of the Kwaio, Roger Keesing writes that their religion makes awesomely powerful ancient spirits both personal and accessible through dreams and the use of familial intermediaries.¹⁹ Keesing argues that this association between family and ancestors constitutes a central and affirming emotional source for the Kwaio people; it provides them with a religion of the concrete and the immediate, a way of living and acting, which is not to deny or denigrate its deeper metaphysical features. Kwaio religion then exists not on some abstract plane of formal structure, but in the minds and acts of individuals, and in the social and political life of communities. Kwaio belief in their ancestral ways and their consequent resistance to Christianity enable a strong sense of

identity and autonomy. The Kwaio, according to Keesing, see the costs of colonialism for other peoples in the Solomons who have lost their cultures, and in losing them, have lost their ties to the land and to the ancestors.²⁰ Alienated from their customs and their ancestors, they have become like outsiders in their own homeland. Resistance to Christianity and Westernisation is perpetuated and articulated through an ideology of *kastom*. Following the rules of the ancestors is thus a mode of political struggle, as well as a way of life that is not at all Christian.

Embedded within the sensational renderings of cargo cults and millenarian movements may exist evidence of cultural difference and resilience expressed through what Gary Trompf calls the particularity of local or regional histories.²¹ Cargo cults may be understood as resulting in part from the failure of missionaries to tell the whole story about how to acquire the goods or from a more general disillusionment with Christianity for simply not producing or delivering the goods. Perhaps, as Lamont Lindstrom suggests, descriptions of cargo cults are as much about the West's own fears, anxieties and desires as they are about imperfect, incomplete or frustrated encounters with Western capitalism and

18 In addition to the examples cited in this section of my text, I have in mind such syncretist or revitalization movements as the Siovili in Samoa, the Mamaia in Tahiti, and in Aotearoa or New Zealand, the King Movement, the Pai Marire and the Ringatu. See for example Judith Binney's biography of the founder of the Ringatu, *Redemption Songs: A life of the nineteenth-century Maori leader Te Kooti Arikarangi Te Turuki* (Honolulu 1997). Along this same thematic line, there is also Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin and Craig Wallace *Mihaia: The prophet Rua Kenana and his community at Maungapohatu* (Auckland 1990). 19 Roger M. Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The living and the dead in a Solomon Island society* (New York 1982), 242-3. See also G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge 1991). For contrast, see Ben Burt, *Tradition and Christianity: The colonial transformation of a Solomon Islands society* (Chur, Switzerland 1994); and A. R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A study in growth and obstruction* (London 1967).

20 Ibid., 240.

21 G. W. Trompf (ed.), *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements* (New York 1990), 16. Christianity.²²

Following Lindstrom's point about the nature of Western discourse on cargo cults, it is tempting to argue that Lamont Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: Strange stories of desire from Melanesia and beyond* (Honolulu 1993), 205.

issues of conversion or religious change might be more the concern of scholars from beyond the region who look for affirmation of their own beliefs or who feed their agnosticism on the violence' that is so much a part of the history of Christianity in the Pacific.

Religious change or conversion within the Pacific is a topic which has not attracted, at least on the surface, a great deal of critical analysis from indigenous historians. Equating Tangaloa with Jehovah,²³ citing the prophecy of the goddess Nafanua,²⁴ or underscoring the social and religious flexibility of the *fa'a Samoa*²⁵ do not go very far in explaining the spread of Christianity in Samoa, for example. Pohnpeians' epistemological engagement with Christianity is not a topic that Luelen Bernart of Pohnpei expounds upon at any great length. Bernart states simply that: 'In the year 1852, the rule of God came to Ponape'.²⁶ What follows

in his published text is not a history of conversion to Christianity, but a short account of machinations and struggles for power around the Congregationalist mission, and later between the Protestant and Catholic churches on the island.

There are, however, indigenous written histories whose re-reading could enhance an appreciation of the dimensions and processes of religious change in the Pacific. The written histories of Hawaiians Samuel Kamakau, David Malo, John Papa Ii, and the Rarotongans Ta'unga and Maretu have been dismissed as uncritical tracts that too readily evidence the missionary-training of the authors.²⁷ A careful, critical rereading of Kamakau, Malo, and Papa I'i, however, might promote more nuanced and sophisticated histories of Hawai'i and of Christianity in Hawai'i. On the surface of things, the English-language translation of *The Works of Ta'unga* reads very much like a missionary condemnation of primitive 'cultures' with their heathen practices of cannibalism, warfare, idolatry, and polygamy.²⁸ There exist, however, ambiguities and contradictions in Ta'unga's text that reflect a more personal and complicated relationship with the various peoples among whom he worked over the course of his 63-year missionary career. Ta'unga's struggles to incorporate his Rarotongan background, his missionary training, and his experiences in Melanesia and Samoa into an encompassing world view indicate something of the negotiations, tensions and discontinuities involved in local and personal engagements with Christianity.

23 Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia 1996), 8-14.

24 Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A short history of Western Samoa* (Suva 1987), 52. See also Meleisea's 'The

Postmodern Legacy of a Premodern Warrior Goddess in Modern Samoa', Alex Calder, Jonathan Lamb and

Bridget Orr (eds), *Voyages and Beaches: Pacific encounters, 1769-1840* (Honolulu 1999), 55-60.

25 Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional authority in the modern history of Western*

Samoa (Suva 1987), 17.

26 Luelen Bernart, *The Book of Luelen*. trans. and ed. John L. Fischer, Saul H. Riesenberg, and Marjorie G.

Whiting (Honolulu 1977), 115.

This call for a more critically nuanced reading of these Islander writers and historians is not intended to evade or deny the very serious issues surrounding the translating, editing and contextualisation of their works, then and now and in the future.

28 Ron and Marjorie Crocombe (eds), *The Works of Ta'unga: Records of a Polynesian traveller in the South*

Seas, 1833-1896 (Suva 1984). I am indebted to Keith Camacho for his insights and observations on this under-appreciated and often wrongly utilised text. Equally worthy of a more careful and sensitive rereading is Maretu's *Cannibals and Converts: Radical change in the Cook Islands*, trans., annotated and ed. by Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, repr. edn (Suva 1987).

150 PACIFIC LIVES, PACIFIC PLACES

The rereading of indigenous written histories constitutes but one item on an agenda for revisiting histories of religious change in the Pacific. In distinguishing between histories of

missionaries and Christianities, we should not forget the role of Islander missionaries in promoting religious change. Their histories remain largely untold, their roles as agents of change unexamined or not well considered.²⁹ Histories of missionary efforts in the Pacific have been largely by and about men. We have some histories of Euro-American missionary women;³⁰ we have precious few studies of the historical responses of Islander women to Christianity. ³¹ The role of Ka'ahumanu in the history of religious change in Hawai'i, and the prominence of Islander women in the earliest churches and in the ranks of missionaries, point to histories that are far from being only about men.

It is certainly hard to deny the legacies or effects of missionaries in the Pacific. We write from or against their histories and ethnographies.³² We find their metaphors of light and darkness pervading representations of Pacific pasts by outlander and even Islander scholars.³³ And there is the fact too that missionaries continue to come to and proselytise within the Pacific Islands region. While Christianity may be declining in the industrialised West, it remains an expanding and changing religion within the Pacific Islands region. New religious groups such as the Assembly of God, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Baha'i are growing rapidly in the region and at the expense of mainline churches.³⁴ In addition to these five, relatively recent religious groups, there are more than 30 other proselytising entities, most of them either evangelical and fundamentalist para-church organisations or breakaway religious groups. Many of these new and active groups are informed, often sponsored, by a Christian fundamentalist renaissance emanating from the United States; their commitment to individual progress, material betterment and enhanced social status link them to the extension of a more global capitalist order in the Pacific.³⁵ It is the relationship of Christianity to this more secular missionary agenda to which I now

²⁹ Four notable exceptions to the general dearth of histories on Islander missionaries are *The*

Works of Ta'unga; Maretu's *Cannibals and Converts*; Sione L_t_kefu, Ruta Sinclair, et. al., *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia* (Suva 1982); and, more recently, Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley (eds), *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific*. (Suva 1996).

³⁰ See, for example, Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American missionary wives in nineteenth-century Hawaii* (Honolulu 1989).

³¹ On the responses of Islander women to Christianity, see the collection of essays by Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre (005), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact*(Cambridge 1989); also Margaret Jolly, "To save the girls for brighter and better lives": Presbyterian missions and women in the south of Vanuatu', *Journal of Pacific History*, 26:1 (1991), 27-48. ³² On the possibilities that arise from this tension, see Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial discourse Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge 1997), especially his chapter 4, 'Missionary Endeavours'. In distinguishing between histories of missionaries and histories of religious change, I am not arguing that missionaries are an exhausted topic; Edmond's fine chapter suggests how much there remains to do or do over.

³³ See Vilsoni Hereniko, 'Representations of Cultural Identities', in K. R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste and Brij V.

Lal (eds), *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century* (Honolulu 1994), 407-17.

34 Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change: Rapidly growing religious groups in the Pacific Islands* (Suva 1994), 6.

35 Ibid., 272, 277-8.

Converting Pasts and Presents 151

turn. I refer here to another process of conversion — a process of conversion to capitalism that goes by the name 'development'.

Christianity and capitalism are alike and linked through their globalising agendas and their visions of a new world regime. There is a long, varied history of an unequal, often tense but ultimately complementary partnership. The link between capitalism and Christianity, more particularly Protestantism, has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. Max Weber wrote of the importance of the Protestant work ethic to the rise of capitalism in the 17th century.³⁶ In Weber's analysis, the striving for profits and the rational employment of those profits were related to the Calvinist concept of predestination. Doubts and angst developed over the identity of the chosen. An aesthetic, work-oriented and rational approach to life emerged as the best way to prepare for the hereafter. Work became the measure of piety; an aversion to work reflected an individual's position as outside the perimeters of divine grace. The economic prosperity that followed from a commitment to this culturally specific notion of work came to be seen as a likely sign of God's favour.

Norman O. Brown's take on the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism is somewhat different, though ultimately in agreement with that of Weber. Luther, according to Brown, saw capitalism as under the dominion of the devil. Capitalism is the inevitable bondage to the devil that is the consequence of original sin.³⁷ Given this fact, what is the Christian to do? Luther's essential directive was to be in but not of this world. There is a practical accommodation to living in the world, then; 'whosoever would walk peacefully in this world, must be money's guest, and money a guest with him'.³⁸ By keeping the spirit free while surrendering the flesh to the devil, the Christian becomes lord over Mammon.

The business of capitalism provided both a guiding metaphor and a concrete set of practices for the proselytisation of evangelical Christianity in the Pacific.³⁹ Members of the ABCFM advocated a missionary strategy that forged business with evangelism. Cornelius H. Patton, a member of the ABCFM's Board of Directors, wrote of how effective business practices might be employed to enhance the mission effort. In his *The Business of Missions*, Patton proclaimed: 'We are living in a business age. We believe as never before in business results. It is a working, rather than fighting church to which we belong.'⁴⁰ Andrew Walls describes Patton's attitude as characteristically American;⁴¹ John Williams, however, would certainly have seconded the use of Christian commerce as an instrument of evangelism. Protestant mission groups in the Pacific, earlier and now, have linked spiritual salvation to a way of life that includes values, attitudes and beliefs not only compatible with but linked to a market economy. This linkage between market and mission can be seen rather clearly and in contemporary times through the film *Advertising*

Missionaries.⁴² The 1996 film follows a troupe of actors, 'Walkabout Marketing', employed by the HRD advertising agency of Port Moresby to spread the 'gospel of the new way of life' to the Huli people of the Yaluba Valley in the remote Highlands area of Papua New Guinea. These actors are missionaries, not for Christianity, but for consumerism and for the adoption

of responsible economic practices required of citizens of the state and would-be nation of Papua New Guinea.

36 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York 1938).

37 Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The psychoanalytic meaning of history*, 2nd edn (Middletown, Conn. 1985), 221.

38 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 222.

39 Interestingly, the 10th edn of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA 1993), 154, gives

'mission' as a secondary definition of business.

40 Quoted in Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 231.

41 *Ibid.*

152 PACIFIC LIVES, PACIFIC PLACES

The film's narrator calls the actors 'prophets of the consumer revolution'. Skits, written by the director of the HRD agency, represent the interests of various multinational corporations and industries in the country. These presentations serve as comic, entertaining and apparently persuasive advertisements for soft drinks, toothpaste, insect repellent, peanut butter, and" detergent. The troupe also performs more serious but related stories that advocate responsible family planning through the use of contraceptive devices and that warn against domestic violence, the dangers of alcohol, and over-dependence upon such local food crops as the sweet potato.

The message is not at all subtle; what is being promoted is not simply the purchase of a product but subscription to a massive project of social transformation which touches in deep and fundamental ways almost every aspect of life and living in the Yaluba Valley. The parallels to the efforts of past and present Christian missionaries are equally explicit. The troupe leader, Elijah Bennett, describes the actors as 'just like missionaries' in their advocacy of a new lifestyle and related products, and the skits themselves as 'similar to what missionaries do'. The connections with Christianity are clear too in the actors' individual identifications as Christians and in their use of mission stations as rest spots along their journey to the Yaluba Valley.

There are far more formidable forces behind the promotion of development in the contemporary Pacific. In the area of the Pacific called 'Micronesia', where Christian missionaries of different nationalities and denominations have laboured for nearly three and a half centuries, the United States government has sought of late to transform in dramatic fashion peoples who occupy real estate deemed strategically vital to the welfare and well being of the United States government. Development plans and strategies have been employed to re-make these islands into places that have the look, feel, sound, speed, smell and taste of America.⁴³ The compacts of free association between the United States government, and the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau represent in a sense a culmination of these efforts. These compacts of free association are designed to secure continued American

influence over the islands under rhetorical pledges to respect the sovereignty of the different island groups and to contribute to their economic development.

Post-colonialism' is a term whose use and currency are strained by what looks to many to still be 'American Micronesia'. Meanwhile, the development of the islands remains an ongoing story of incomplete or failed conversion as the Asian 42 *Advertising Missionaries* (New York, First Run/Icarus Films 1996). 43 David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over development in a Pacific territory, 1944-1982* (Honolulu 1998), 10-11. *Converting Pasts and Presents* 153

Development Bank, rather than various agencies of the United States government, now prescribes ways in which the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands can reform their tax structures, maximise their human resource potential, improve their infrastructure, enhance their business climate, reduce their dependency on foreign aid, and expand their exports, all in a necessary and critical effort to become economically selfsufficient. 44

This kind of development, or more appropriately developmentalism, shows itself in other areas of the Pacific. Greg Fry writes of Project 2010, an almost evangelical prescription for development emanating from Australia, that paints a doomsday scenario for Pacific peoples unless they transform themselves into responsible, productive and informed citizens of the modern world. Fry sees this doomsday scenario as linked to security and development studies of the Cold War period that presumed a superior, exclusive, essentially racist knowledge about the ways Pacific Islands were to be made modern.⁴⁵ The metaphors of 'mission' and 'missionary' seem applicable and appropriate to efforts at development in 'American' Micronesia and through Project 2010. Against the norms and values of capitalist cultures that define themselves in terms of productive, economic activity, Micronesians and other islands peoples are labeled as passive, indifferent, lazy, irresponsible and unreliable. The transformation from 'heathen' to 'underdeveloped' has proven a short history, indeed.

Beyond missionaries?⁴⁶ The reasons for Christianity's spread in the Pacific involve much more than the efforts and initiatives of missionaries. In the histories of religious change in the Pacific, the issue becomes one of relocating missionaries. And they are certainly still very much with us. At both a literal and metaphorical level, we can see missionaries at work in the contemporary Pacific. New religious groups, most with an evangelical commitment and a fundamentalist agenda linked to conservative social and religious movements in the United States and advocating a lifestyle compatible with an encroaching global capitalism, operate extensively and successfully in the Pacific Islands region. Linked to these on-going missionary endeavours are continuing efforts at a more secular conversion process that goes by the name of development and that has its own brand of missionaries.

Like the histories of religious change in the region, the histories of development are about much more than the particular efforts of planning specialists, aid experts or government officials from different metropolitan nations. The local responses to development are equally varied, distinctive, and dynamic. Given these cultural and political complexities, we might be better advised to think in terms of histories of developments rather than a history or histories of development. The histories of developments are and will be no neater or simpler than the histories of religious change, though perhaps more doable. It becomes hard to argue, then, that the study of Pacific pasts and presents is beyond missionaries, just as it is difficult to argue that histories of change in the Pacific are defined by, limited to or synonymous with the histories of

those agents of change, secular or religious. It may be that histories of religious change are beyond doing in many areas of the Pacific. Victoria Lukere has commented on the impossibility of describing encounters with the Sacred.⁴⁷ If true, the issue then becomes the recognition of the resulting void rather than the filling of it with histories of missionaries.

44 Asian Development Bank, *The FSM Economy: 1996 Economic Report* (Manila 1997); and Asian Development Bank, *Marshall/Islands 1996 Economic Report* (Manila 1997). See also the ADB's agenda for the broader Pacific, *Strategy for the Pacific: Policies and programs for sustainable growth* (Jan. 1996), <http://www.adb.org/Work/Strategy/Strategy_Pacific>.

45 Greg Fry, 'Framing the islands: knowledge and power in changing Australian images of "the South Pacific"', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 9:2 (1997), 329.

46 This essay was originally written for the panel 'Beyond Missionaries', chaired by Christine Weir and a part of the Pacific History Association's Millennial Conference, held 26-30 June 2000, at the Australian National University in Canberra.

154 PACIFIC LIVES, PACIFIC PLACES

History, it seems to me, is also at stake in the conversion process. No missionary effort or undertaking, be it secular or religious, can be complete or successful without an accompanying conversion of the past. Frederic Jameson has written that the process of development does not allow for history outside of the West.⁴⁸ Development seeks to complete the colonial project by redefining non-Western areas in terms of the experience of colonialism. History as usually practiced in and by the West becomes a part of the colonising process in its sacrifice of other people's pasts to the demanding gods of progress and productivity. It strikes me that histories of missionaries that purport to be - or are read as - histories of religious change also contribute to this kind of conversion or erasure.

47 Vicki Lukere made this public comment at the close of the second morning session of the panel, 'Beyond Missionaries', 28 June 2000, Pacific History Association Millennial Conference, Australian National University, Canberra.

48 Frederic Jameson, 'Third World literature in the CIA of multinational corporations', *Social Text*, 15(86), 68-9.