

# State Society and Governance in Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

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## RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURES IN POST-CONFLICT SOLOMON ISLANDS? CASES FROM WESTERN PROVINCE

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### INTRODUCTION

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Political analysts, policy makers, and aid agencies concerned with Melanesia have recently begun to pay attention to the role of Christian churches in governance. As Douglas notes, “churches, with their intensely local roots but broadly global reach,” are increasingly being seen “as alternative structures in the context of ineffective or even absent state institutions” (2007, p. 158). The importance of churches in the absence of a functioning state became obvious following the decade-long civil war on Bougainville (Saovana-Spriggs 2000; Howley 2002) and a period of civil conflict in Solomon Islands lasting from 1998-2003 (see, e.g., Scales et al. 2002; Oxfam Community Aid Abroad 2003, p. 14-15; Wainwright et al. 2003). In a discussion of state-building possibilities for the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), Hegarty et al. argued, “Existing civil society groups, especially women’s groups and secular organisations of the churches, offer a ready-made vehicle for donor support of civil society” (Hegarty et al. 2004, p. 9). Since 2004, the Australian

Agency for International Development (AusAID) has worked with churches through the Church Partnership Program in Papua New Guinea and the Community Sector Program in the Solomons. This new optimism within Australia about the governance potential of churches should be understood in the context of pessimistic assessments of the effectiveness of aid administered by supposedly ‘failing’ Melanesian states (Dinnen 2004; Ayson 2007).

In one sense, attention to churches within the policy literature is overdue. For more than a decade, anthropologists and historians have been producing studies of Christianity in Melanesia, some of which deal directly with relationships between churches, nationalism, and the state (e.g., Barker 1999; Douglas 2002; Dundon 2004; Eves 2003; Kaplan 1995; Latukefu 1988; McDougall 2003; Robbins 1998; White 1991). Churches, moreover, have been providing ‘alternative structures’ for more than a century. Colonial administrations throughout Melanesia were under-funded and under-staffed, and

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Christian missions, not the colonial state, provided health services and education to rural villagers. Beyond such services, neither the colonial nor the independent state has had much reach into rural villages. Only with national independence in PNG and the Solomons were many erstwhile church-run schools, clinics, and hospitals turned over to be administered by the newly independent state (Hauck 2005; Bird 2007). The recent transfer in the Solomons of some schools from Educational Authority of the Western Province to that of the United Church (Bird 2007, p. 11) might be seen as a return to the status quo.

But *should* churches be providing the essential services citizens might expect a responsible state to provide? In his baseline survey of church engagement in service provision and governance in the Solomon Islands, Rev. Cliff Bird sounds a note of caution: "It would be a mistake to load extra responsibilities onto them without looking into ways in which their capacities could be strengthened and expanded" (2007, p. 2). In addition to such pressing practical challenges, significant political questions are raised by neo-liberal strategies that attempt to bypass the state by using 'alternative' (i.e., non-state) structures, whether these are religious organizations, secular non-profit organizations, or for-profit corporations like mining companies. Writing of community-based development projects that attempt to bypass corrupt states in Melanesia, Schoeffel critiques the "communitarian version of the argument for privatisation and the rolling back of the state" and concludes that, for rural development projects, "there is no substitute for state agencies" (1997, p. 2). Despite sustained attention to decentralization since Independence, support for provincial and local government in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea has not been adequate to allow the state to effectively deliver services (Cox & Morrison 2004; Filer 2004). Such neglect of local forms of government may be one reason that churches appear to be among the few trans-local organizations that reach into rural areas. As I will discuss at the end of this paper, rather than attempting to use churches to bypass the state, outsiders might take their lead from Solomon Islanders working for government bodies who strive to work with churches in ways that bolster the

legitimacy and effectiveness of both church and state.

Such cooperation requires not only an appreciation of the centrality of churches in social and political life, but also a detailed understanding of the complex terrain of Melanesian Christianity. Because religion cannot be easily separated from what might seem like secular functions carried out by churches, outsiders interested in working with churches should understand how the structure, organization, and development agendas of the different churches are shaped by church history, circumstances, and doctrines.

With these goals in mind, this essay draws on postdoctoral research carried out in the Western Province of Solomon Islands and in the Solomons capital of Honiara over four months in 2006-07 and in October 2007, as well as extensive prior research carried out over the past decade that has focused on the Western Province island of Ranongga. Following a general overview of Solomon Islands Christianity, I describe the three predominant churches in Western Province: the United Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Christian Fellowship Church. This discussion highlights significant differences in the organizational structures of the churches, in the ways they manage economic resources, and in the degrees to which church members embrace trans-local forms of identity. I then turn to a few of the bewildering array of new denominations and sects that are gaining adherents. Working effectively with churches requires understanding not only the importance of the historically dominant churches, but also why some adherents are seeking new options. Like other historic churches in the Solomons, the United Church has a bureaucratic structure that allows extensive local participation; moreover, of all of the Western Province churches discussed here, its structures and ideologies appear most congruent with the secular liberal attitudes that inform the 'good governance' agendas of Australia and some other donor nations. Why, then, are some adherents of the United Church seeking both salvation and worldly connections through newer and smaller religious groups?

## CHURCHES IN THE SOLOMONS AND WESTERN PROVINCE

The population of the Solomon Islands is almost entirely Christian, but no single church dominates. At some times and in some regions, inter-denominational relationships have been marked by animosity. At the time of national independence, however, leaders of dominant churches formed the ecumenical Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). Bringing together not only those mainline Christian denominations that habitually cooperate in global ecumenical councils but also evangelical denominations usually disinclined toward such cooperation, SICA has been lauded as the most successful national Christian organization in the Pacific region and “the most influential and powerful civil society organization in the Solomon Islands in recent years” (Ernst 2006, p. 201).<sup>1</sup> Such factors suggest that churches in the Solomons are particularly well-positioned to mediate divisions within the body politic. In many ways, Solomon Islands provides a best-case scenario for church and state cooperation.

The strength of the churches as part of civil society became obvious during the civil conflict of 1998-2003. The crisis involved hostilities between the indigenous people of Guadalcanal and settlers from the neighbouring, densely-populated island of Malaita, who began migrating to Guadalcanal after the Second World War because of economic opportunities around the newly-founded capital city of Honiara on the island’s northern plains. Following a series of perceived offences by Malaitans, and a longstanding perception that Guadalcanal people were not benefiting from commercial development on their island, in 1998 a Guadalcanal militia began attacking Malaitan settlements. This campaign resulted in the displacement of up to 20,000 Malaitans who returned to their home island. Then in late 1999 to early 2000, a Malaitan counter-militia regained control of Honiara town and, in conjunction with a faction of the Royal Solomon Islands Police, took Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu hostage and forced his resignation in June 2000. Despite the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000, unrest and violence continued, crippling the state and bringing the formal economy to a standstill.

In 2003, Australia reversed a policy of non-intervention and responded to the Solomon Islands Prime Minister’s request for external assistance. The Australian-led intervention mission, RAMSI, was welcomed by Solomon Islanders in July 2003 and quickly restored law and order, though it has yet to address many of the underlying problems that led to the unrest (see Dinnen 2002; Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004; Moore 2007).

During the crisis years, many of the most courageous peacemaking efforts were orchestrated by Christian organizations. In the weeks after the coups, women’s groups made prayer visits to militants on opposite sides of the battlefields, encouraging them to lay down their arms and forgive one another. They also facilitated exchanges of food between Guadalcanal and Malaitan women (Paina 2000; Pollard 2000). Moore reports that, during the crisis, churches on Malaita “cooperated better than they ever had before” (2004, p. 153). Throughout the conflict, the Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood mediated between enemy sides. In April 2003, months before RAMSI’s intervention, seven Brothers were martyred by one of the Guadalcanal rebel leaders following attempts to negotiate with him (Carter 2006). SICA held an important peace conference in 2000; it also facilitated the formation of the Civil Society Network in Honiara, which steadfastly advocated for peace and responsible government in subsequent years (Scales et al. 2002).<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to Fiji, where religious affiliation overlaid and exacerbated ethnic divisions in the 2000 coups, religious affiliation in the Solomons crosscuts the most salient ethnic divisions (Weir 2000). The crisis years did more than pit Malaitans against Guadalcanal people—it also re-ignited separatist sentiments among residents of provinces not directly involved in the fighting but who suffered the effects of state collapse. Even though many hoped that they could opt out of the failing state, they nevertheless identified with their fellow citizens as fellow Christians. On Ranongga Island, for example, far from the violence, ordinary islanders frequently prayed for peace and asked for God’s blessing on ‘our Solomon Islands’ (McDougall 2003). Given the importance of Christian affiliation in fostering a sense of local, regional, and national identity and in mitigating some of the most fraught divisions of ethnicity and class

in the country, I briefly discuss patterns of affiliation in the Solomons as a whole before turning to the Western Province, which is the primary focus of the remainder of this essay.

Table 1: Major Denominations in Solomons

	% National Pop'n (1999 census)
Anglican Church (Church of Melanesia)	33%
Catholic Church	19%
South Seas Evangelical Church	17%
Seventh-day Adventist Church	11%
United Church	10%
Other	10%

According to the 1999 census, 98% of Solomon Islanders identify themselves as members of a Christian church. Ninety percent are members of one of the five historic churches that were established by the early twentieth century in what was then the British Solomon Islands Protectorate: the Anglican Church of Melanesia (with 33% of the country's population), Roman Catholic Church (19%), South Seas Evangelical Church (17%), Seventh-day Adventist Church (11%), and the United Church (formerly Methodist Mission) (10%) (De Bruijn 2000; Ernst 2006, p. 172). Aside from the Christian Fellowship Church and Jehovah's Witnesses (whose members count for approximately 2% of the population each), other religions named on the census (including 'customary beliefs' as well as several Pentecostal churches) each claim as members less than one percent of the population. Although the five major churches still account for the majority of the population, all of them except the Adventists have lost adherents in recent years to these smaller groups.

The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), briefly described above, is the primary ecumenical body in the Solomons. According to SICA General Secretary Rev. Philemon Riti, prominent Solomon Islander clergy and laymen founded SICA in 1967 to overcome the artificial divisions introduced to the country by rival overseas missions and to facilitate interaction with government on

social issues.<sup>3</sup> The Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Melanesia, and Methodist Church were the founding full members of SICA, with the South Seas Evangelical and Seventh-day Adventist churches as associate members. In the late 1990s, the South Seas Evangelical Church became a full member, while the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains an associate member, as do several other parachurch organizations. SICA does not include the small, mostly Pentecostal-charismatic churches that have arrived since the 1970s (such as the Assembly of God, Rhema Family Church, Living Word, Christian Outreach Center, Christian Revival Crusade, and many others), some of which have formed an alternative organization, Solomon Island Full Gospel Association (SIFGA).

The five major denominations are not evenly distributed around the Solomons. With the notable exception of Seventh-day Adventists, the early missions avoided evangelizing on territory already covered by another mission through informal 'gentleman's agreements.' Some missions were concentrated in particular regions; the Methodist Mission, for instance, limited its activities to areas now part of Western and Choiseul Provinces. Aside from the almost exclusively Anglican island of Isabel, denominational adherence in most provinces is mixed. The two provinces at the heart of the recent civil conflict, Malaita and Guadalcanal, for example, both have large populations of Anglicans, Catholics, South Seas Evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists, as well as followers of traditional religions and newer denominations. Ordinary villagers have extensive experience in inter-church cooperation because their extended families or clan groups are likely to include members of different Christian denominations.

The Western Province is dominated by three denominations: United Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Christian Fellowship Church. Western Province today is comprised of the New Georgia Group and Shortland and Mono Islands near the border of Bougainville; prior to 1991, it also included Choiseul, which is now a separate Province (see Map 1). As discussed in more detail below, the New Georgia Group was first evangelized by the Methodist mission in 1902. The successor churches to the

Methodist Mission are the United Church and the Christian Fellowship Church, with 40% and 14% of the Province’s population respectively. Seventh-day Adventism was the second major mission in Western Province and currently claims 28% of the population as adherents (De Bruijn 2000). All three dominant churches of Western Province have high proportions of their total membership in this region. The Christian Fellowship has little presence outside of Western Province. Ninety-three percent of United Church members live in Western and Choiseul Provinces, while 46% of Adventists live in Western Province, although it also has significant numbers of adherents in other provinces as well (Bird 2007, p. 23). Nationally, between 1986 and 1999 the membership of the United Church increased 9% less than the overall population, while Seventh-day Adventist membership increased 18% more than the overall population - making it the only one of the five major churches of the Solomons to grow significantly relative to the population (Ernst 2006, p. 173). Aside from the dominant three denominations, the other historical Solomons denominations (Catholic, Anglican, and South Seas Evangelical) are present in Western Province around the town centers, where migrants from other provinces have settled.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a large number of smaller denominations have been established in the Province over the last several decades.

across a territory held by a kin or clan group. Converting to Christianity usually meant moving to the coast and forming a large village that had its social, geographic, and spiritual center in a single church (McDougall 2004). Today, this unity is being challenged as converts to new denominations set up a separate church within the main village or found hamlets that are distant from the main village. Even if only one family in a village of several hundred converts to a different form of Christianity, the effects are felt by everyone. Not only is that family removed from the center of social life, but community work (such as repairing village school buildings) becomes much more difficult to coordinate. In absolute numbers, only a small percentage of the total population of Western Province has embraced new denominations. Yet, religious change is increasingly affecting rural people as their once-unified villages are becoming fragmented among different churches.

### MAINLINE CHURCH: THE UNITED CHURCH

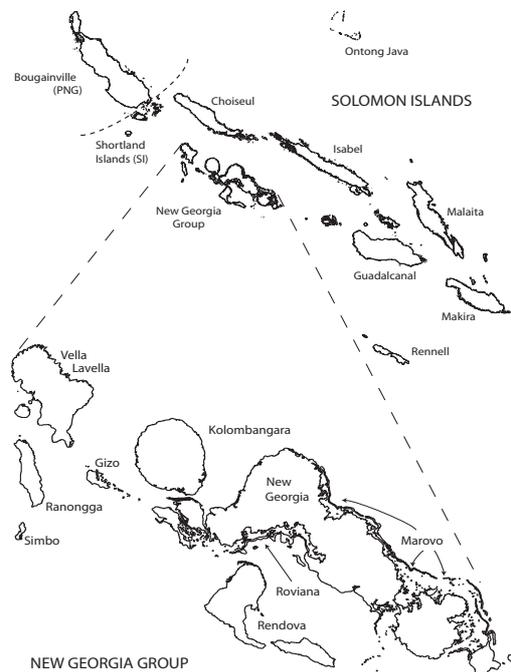
The United Church exemplifies both the strengths and weaknesses of mainline, post-mission Christianity in Melanesia. It emerged out of the Methodist mission, which fostered among its adherents a sense of trans-local identity that overlaid and extended pre-Christian exchange networks and alliances (Dureau 1998). Throughout the colonial period, the mission provided much of the Western District’s infrastructure including schools, clinics, a hospital, and commercial networks, and Methodist mission-trained men were also employed in government administration. Since the 1960s, however, the organization of the church has been in flux. In the midst of its unstable late colonial and independent history, the United Church has lost members to schisms and a number of new religious movements.

Reverend John Frances Goldie established the Methodist Mission in Roviana lagoon in 1902. He directed and dominated the mission for half of a century. Goldie earned the loyalty of his flock but failed to devolve authority onto his subordinates and was notoriously slow to ordain local ministers. The government officers responsible for the Western District both required and resented

Table 2: Major Denominations (Western Province)

	% Western Province Population (1999 census)
United Church (UC)	40%
Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)	28%
Christian Fellowship Church (CFC)	14%
Other	18%

Until recently, the diversity of Solomon Islands Christianity ended at the level of villages. In most regions of the country, villages did not exist until missionization. Instead, small family hamlets were scattered



Map 1. Solomon Islands (above) and New Georgia Group (inset)

the authority of this unofficial 'king' of the Western Solomons, as did many in the New Zealand Mission Board, which took over administrative responsibility for the area from Australia in 1922. George Carter, who was Chairman of Methodist mission in the turbulent period of the 1960s, blamed his predecessor for being antagonistic to the Government, and argued that this "prevented the partnership of church and state which could have given effective and stable social conditions, not only in the short term but for the future" (Carter 1973, p. 90).

The Methodist Mission faced a number of challenges in the years after Goldie's retirement in 1951 and in its transition from colonial mission to independent church. In the late 1950s, a break-away movement emerged under the leadership of a local prophet and formed the Christian Fellowship Church in 1960 (discussed below). By the 1960s, Goldie's successors had begun to devolve responsibility for church administration to islanders and also to work toward union with Methodist missions in Papua New Guinea (Carter 1973, p. 231-5). In 1968, the Methodist churches in Papua New Guinea and the Solomons joined with PNG's Papua Ekelesia (formerly London Missionary Society) and

two PNG United Church congregations to form the United Church of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (Williams 1972). This union with PNG lasted until 1996, when the United Church of Solomon Islands separated from Papua New Guinea to form a separate assembly with headquarters in Roviana instead of Port Moresby. This restructuring provided the occasion for a second schism when some former United Church leaders in Roviana formed a Wesleyan Methodist church supported by conservative Methodist Churches in Australia.

Today's United Church has been significantly affected by evangelical movements that swept through Melanesia in the 1970s and 1980s. After outreach missions by members of the South Seas Evangelical Church, United Church services adopted "united prayer", in which all congregants pray simultaneously, each offering his or her own prayer on the themes outlined by the preacher. This can crescendo in a loud clamour and, during late-night prayer sessions or youth group meetings, occasionally leads into Pentecostal-style speaking in tongues. In addition to the nineteenth-century Methodist hymns that had been translated into Roviana language, contemporary United Church services include 'choruses,' simply-structured songs in English, Solomons Pijin, Tok Pisin, and sometimes vernacular languages that are sung with guitar accompaniment and dance motions. Those who have embraced Wesleyan Methodism complain bitterly about the shouting, dancing, and guitar-playing of contemporary United Church services and aim to return to the more orderly, contemplative worship style they remember from mission days.

The United Church is decentralized and democratic in its organizational structure. Village churches belong to sections, which in turn are part of circuits, regions, synods, and the country-wide assembly. Church members are constantly preparing for or participating in meetings, which are always held in rural areas rather than towns. Laypeople are intensely involved in church organizations, including Women's Fellowship, Girl's Brigade, Youth, and Men's Fellowship, each of which has weekly meetings, a schedule of service activities, and a fundraising agenda. Each group elects leaders (president, vice-

president, secretary, and treasurer) who represent the local group at section, circuit, or regional meetings. Village pastors usually lead Sunday worship services, but responsibility for daily morning devotion services is devolved onto laypeople. The messages delivered during services thus often reflect local issues and local interpretations of Biblical texts and Christian doctrines.

In light of increasing economic inequality within the Solomons, a striking feature of the United Church is the disarticulation of social status and economic class. Church pastors enjoy status and moral authority, but their pay is very low and they survive, like other villagers, by subsistence gardening. Ministers have even higher status, but while they receive larger salaries than village pastors, they are still modestly paid and, in contrast to other important 'big men' in the modern Solomons like elected representatives, they do not have access to other sources of cash for consumption and distribution. Ministers usually live in rural areas, not in town, and are constantly travelling to church services, rallies, and celebrations hosted by ordinary villagers. Most of the material benefits they do enjoy (houses made of permanent materials, gifts of food, woven mats, and other items) come from the generosity of the people they serve. Social status is mediated through the host-guest relationship - the hosts gain status by taking good care of their guests, who are then in their debt. This kind of host-guest relationship is much more satisfying than the patron-client relationships that are coming to dominate modern Solomons political and economic life (Cox forthcoming).

While the Methodist Mission in the colonial era was the main provider of education, health care services, and commercial infrastructure in the Western District, the independent United Church of the Solomons is struggling administratively and financially.<sup>5</sup> The importance of supporting an independent home-grown church has been a common recent theme in church-wide Bible studies. In 1999, as the Wesleyan schism was gaining ground, the theme for the New Year was "spiritual maturity". In 2007, the New Year's Bible study focused on "stewardship", which involved practical advice for managing money and exhorted members to give richly to the church in order to be rewarded by God.

Although members take considerable pride in the money they raise, church fundraising represents a major burden on people who are often struggling to meet other expenses like school fees. Leaders of women's groups in the late 1990s told me, for example, that they wanted to stop worrying about fundraising so that they could focus more on the spiritual aspects of fellowship. As I discuss below, the financial pressure involved in supporting the bureaucracy of a large independent church appears to be one reason why some adherents are joining smaller churches with more direct connections overseas.

### **GLOBAL APPEAL: SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM**

Sociologists of religion have, for the last decade or so, been trying to explain why "strict churches" are strong (e.g., Iannaccone 1994). While liberal Protestant churches that appear to have accommodated themselves to dominant popular culture are losing members, fundamentalist churches that demand adherence to strict rules of behaviour are growing. The Seventh-day Adventist church is one such strict denomination. Founded in the United States during the Second Great Awakening, an evangelical revival of the mid-nineteenth century, the church is focused on signs of the return of Christ and observes a Saturday Sabbath. Adventism spread to Australia in the late 1800s and then on to the Solomons in the early 1900s. The Solomons now has the highest percentage of Seventh-day Adventists of any country in the world.

The Solomon Islands mission was established by George F. Jones in Marovo lagoon in 1914, twelve years after Goldie founded the Methodist mission in nearby Roviana lagoon. Competition between the two missions seems to have played into pre-existing rivalries. Some chiefs would not convert to Methodism because their rivals had, but were eager to tap into the spiritual and material benefits of the overseas mission and eagerly embraced Adventism as an alternative. The Adventist mission was uncompromising in its rejection of 'custom'. Converts to Methodism also abandoned many aspects of the pre-Christian past, notably ancestor worship, but usually without destroying shrines or doubting the lingering

power of ancestral spirits. Newly-converted Adventists, in contrast, destroyed shrines and threw ritual objects into the ocean. Today, they tend to treat belief in the power of local spirits as a sign of lack of Christian faith. The Seventh-day Adventist mission never had a domineering director like Goldie. Local pastors were quickly ordained and many men of the Western Solomons became missionaries to Malaita in the 1920s and 1930s, and then to Papua New Guinea after World War II.

Over the course of the twentieth century, adherents of the two denominations have developed remarkably different ways of living. Adventists worship on Saturday and do no work between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday, whereas United Church adherents worship and do no work on Sunday. Adventist avoid pork and shellfish (thus following some Levitical taboos), as well as foods deemed to be unhealthy, including betel nut, alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee, whereas United Church adherents observe no such taboos. Consistent with a thorough-going rejection of 'custom,' Adventists do not strictly observe often-unspoken rules about how certain kinspeople are supposed to interact. Sisters and brothers, for example, converse and joke in Seventh-day Adventist villages, but they observe respectful distance in United Church villages. Young Seventh-day Adventist women may wear trousers, which is considered to be "against custom" in United Church villages. Adherents of the two churches even speak differently. In Ranongga, for example, United Church adherents speak the local Kubokota language with many words borrowed from Roviana, which was the *lingua franca* of the Methodist mission. Kubokota-speaking Adventists sometimes use words from Marovo language, which was the unofficial *lingua franca* of the mission, but are more likely to mix Kubokota with Pijin or English. English has been the official language of the mission from its founding. Adventist households in Ranongga are often full of English-language books, whereas United Church households usually contain only a tattered Bible or two.

The ethnic and age composition of Adventist villages is also subtly different than those of the United Church on Ranongga. Since the period of missionization, marriage ties have followed denominational lines.

While Methodists (later United Church adherents) have tended to marry within the Western Province where the church is based, Adventists have married a higher proportion of people from the eastern Solomons, especially Malaita, where many Western Province men were posted as missionaries. Because of an Adventist emphasis on education, a high proportion of students are often away at regional or national secondary schools. Adventists tend to be more involved in the formal economy of the Solomons and many work in Gizo or Honiara, returning home only during holidays or in retirement. Large Adventist villages may be half empty for most of the year. Even at home in their parents' villages, many young Adventists speak Pijin rather than vernacular languages, not only because their parents may be from different islands, but also because they have spent much of their lives away from home.

Despite considerable devolution of authority onto local leaders, the Adventist church in the Solomons has never been decolonized in the way the United Church was - it remains part of a global church with headquarters overseas. In fact, until a recent reorganization, none of the administrative units of the church mapped onto the boundaries of the nation.<sup>6</sup> This global organization arguably benefits Solomon Islanders; as Ernst notes, "This is a system in which churches in the developing countries benefit from the support given to poorer members by the richer ones" (2006, p. 184). Solomons Seventh-day Adventists are diligent in tithing and making offerings; in turn, they benefit from the proportion of the global income that is returned to the Solomon Islands.

The Adventist church relies heavily on print and other forms of media and arguably embodies Benedict Anderson's notion of an "imagined community" better than most nations do. Anderson famously suggested that print capitalism was crucial in the development of modern nationalism because it allowed people without face-to-face relations to simultaneously read the same newspapers, journals, and magazines and thus feel themselves to be a single community (Anderson 1991). According to the Seventh-day Adventist website, the use of print media was key in its expansion into Australia and New Zealand in the 1880s

and appears to have been important in the Solomons as well.<sup>7</sup> Adventist families buy booklets that contain a schedule for Sabbath School lessons and divine worship topics. My Ranongga Adventist interlocutors occasionally talked enthusiastically about the way that everyone around the world was sharing the same Sabbath lessons. In addition to enjoying the process of learning (Keller 2004), they derived satisfaction from the sense of being linked to people far away and being part of a global organization.

Synchronized with a global schedule and driven by global agendas, Solomon Island Adventist congregations and organizations often seem less oriented to local, regional, or national concerns than the United Church. Sermon topics and lesson themes are not locally-determined. The first service I attended in Ranongga, for example, focused on “big city evangelism” and problems of urban crime in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. This disarticulation with local and national concerns was also obvious the week of the coup in June 2000. While the United Church Women’s Fellowship, which was meeting in the town of Gizo when the coup occurred, adjusted its focus to include marches against the violence, an Adventist Youth march scheduled for the same week went ahead without adjustment— “We need a drug-free nation,” proclaimed one placard at a moment when drugs seemed the least pressing of national problems. Adventist pastors do discuss the problems of the postcolonial nation, but mainly as signs (like global wars, famines, or economic crises) of the imminent return of Christ. The Seventh-day Adventist church of the Solomons holds to a stricter separation of church and state than those mainline churches whose more holistic sense of mission has prompted them to more vocal engagement in political issues (Bird 2007, p. 7). This would seem to support those who suggest that many of the fundamentalist and evangelical denominations that are growing in Melanesia today are focused on spiritual rather than social and political solutions to their adherents’ problems (Ernst 2006; Gibbs 2005).

Yet, it would not be accurate to say that ordinary villagers are uninvolved in the running of the church or that they focus

exclusively on spiritual solutions to problems. As in the United Church, Adventists participate in a women’s group (the Dorcas Society) and a youth group (Adventist Youth) and travel widely to attend meetings and rallies. Although Adventist preaching and teaching is more concentrated in the hands of ordained pastors than it is in the United Church, ordinary women and men lead Sabbath school classes and contribute to services through songs and testimony. Men, women, and children lead family devotion services, a practice that seems to help develop literacy and public speaking skills from a young age. Despite the global orientation of the church, moreover, Adventist villages on Ranongga appear more unified than their United Church counterparts. In October 2007, Inia Barry, Silas Pioh, and I observed major differences in the ways that Adventist and United Church villages on Ranongga organized themselves after the April 2007 earthquake. Adventist villages had generally better organized and more effective disaster committees. The villages were cohesive, lacking the denominational division now challenging United Church villages. They also had representatives working in town, who could help village leaders connect with overseas aid workers and obtain relief supplies (McDougall, Barry, and Pioh 2008).

While church sermons and discussions during Bible school may focus on eschatological interpretations of political events or natural disasters, most Adventists are thoroughly involved in this-worldly attempts to improve life in their communities and in the nation as a whole. When the 2007 earthquake lifted Ranongga meters out of the ocean, residents of both Adventist and United Church villages feared that the world was about to end. Few, however, seem to have dwelt on prophetic matters long and quickly turned to the practical work of recovery. Six months later, Adventists explained that they realized the earthquake was just one of the many signs of end times that we may continue experiencing for a long time to come. Although Adventist pastors have not entered politics in the way that some United Church, Anglican, and Catholic clergy have, Adventist laypeople are prominent politicians and civil servants, heavily involved in the running of the government.

For a multitude of reasons, Adventists appear to be disproportionately represented among elites and a fledgling urban middle class. In addition to holding important positions in the capital, in Western Province, Adventists comprise a high proportion of nurses and teachers in government institutions. Some non-Adventists complain that intra-denominational favouritism has given Adventists an advantage in obtaining positions of power. This success in the formal economy, however, may be due to the emphasis on education within the Adventist church. When most other missions' schools were taken over by the government at Independence, Adventists retained control of their schools, which are widely viewed as being better-run than the government schools. Given the instability of the Solomons state and economy, however, all middle class Solomon Islanders are in precarious positions. Rights to land in the Solomons depend not only on descent and knowledge of genealogy, but also require ongoing work on and connections to territory. Those who are most successful in a modern town-based economy may be least successful in retaining their claims to territory. There are, in short, costs to the orientation toward the formal economy and a trans-local world that predominates among Solomon Islands Adventists.

### **DEIFICATION OF THE LOCAL: CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH**

The Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) may be the church that contributed most to rural development during the five-year period of crisis in Solomon Islands, a contribution that was recognized most dramatically by the 2005 knighting of the Reverend Ikan Rove, the Spiritual Authority of the Christian Fellowship Church, "for services to religion and the community" (Scott & Hviding 2006).<sup>8</sup> A reforestation and oil palm plantation project conducted in the CFC community has been lauded as a "locally-derived and locally-based approach to community and resource development" (Makim 2002, p. 1) with the potential for "redefining the terms of Australia's engagement with the Pacific" (Makim & Dart 2002). Far from neatly demonstrating how churches may be a vehicle for donor support,

however, the case of the CFC highlights the paradoxes of such an endeavour.

Fifty years ago, few would have predicted that the CFC would become a major economic and political force in the Solomons. Its founder, Silas Eto, was a Methodist pastor-teacher trained by Goldie who became known for his innovative spiritualist style of worship and the new form of collective village life he introduced among his congregations in remote North New Georgia. Considered backwards by many of his contemporaries, Eto became known among his followers as "Holy Mama," which translates to "Holy Papa" ("*mama*" is an affectionate term for "father" in Roviana language.) The movement gained momentum in the late 1950s when a large-scale revival broke out across the Roviana lagoon, apparently inspired in part by radio broadcasts of Billy Graham's 1959 Melbourne and Sydney crusades. As expatriate Methodist mission directors attempted to suppress the more radical manifestations of this revival, many Roviana Methodists sought out Eto to help them control the Holy Spirit. In 1960, the Christian Fellowship Church seceded from the Methodist Mission. The movement's numbers peaked in the late 1960s when nearly one-third of villages in traditionally Methodist areas had joined the CFC; in the following years, however, many villages away from New Georgia Island reverted to Methodism. (On the early movement, see Harwood 1971; Tuza 1975). Today, the CFC is concentrated in Eto's home area of North New Georgia and around the Roviana lagoon.

Several important developments have occurred within the church since the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> First, the church survived the death of the Holy Mama in 1983. Rather than becoming routinized, however, Eto's charisma was reincarnated in the person of his younger son Ikan Rove, who took the title of "Spiritual Authority" in the early 1990s. At the same time, Eto's elder son, Job Dudley Tausinga, became a powerful politician - he was Premier of Western Province from 1983 to 1987 and has been Member of Parliament for North New Georgia since 1984.<sup>10</sup> The second important development since its founding has been the development of theological understandings that diverge from standard evangelical Christianity. The Holy Mama

and the Spiritual Authority (who is known among followers as *Tamasa Toana*, 'the living god') are considered to be not just *conduits* of the Holy Spirit (as are many charismatic pastors and prophets within the Christian tradition) but *incarnations* of the Holy Spirit. Adherents thus add two persons to the Christian Trinity, praying to the "Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Holy Mama, and Spiritual Authority." Finally, the communal unity within and across CFC villages that was manifest from the 1950s through 1970s in communal coconut plantations has continued through an era of large-scale logging by multi-national corporations that began in the 1980s.

Members of the United Church who have spent time in CFC villages admire the unity of these communities, especially the communal work that has been the hallmark of the denomination since its founding. Through an elaborate schedule of communal work, CFC villages around Western Province send work teams to the sites of major projects, like teak or oil palm plantations, where they will labour for a week or two. Community labour in many United Church villages is a rather lackadaisical affair and a pastor may ring the bell several times before anyone turns up to work. When the bell is sounded in a CFC village, in contrast, labourers arrive almost immediately and then depart en masse for the work of the day. Large-scale communal work projects are possible in part because the church takes care of many of the expenses faced by non-CFC rural villagers, especially school fees. There are, moreover, no separate organizations like women's fellowship or youth groups with distinct agendas. The biggest reason for the success of communal work, however, is the charisma and power of the Spiritual Authority himself. This is why non-CFC Solomon Islanders often mix their praise of the church's communalism with consternation about a perceived lack of individual freedom and speculations about whether it is really a church or a cult of personality. Like his father before him, the Spiritual Authority is adored by his followers, but also feared for his spiritual powers. Moreover, again like his father, he inspires villagers to value the hard labour of agricultural work by doing it himself - he wears shabby clothing except during church ceremonies, makes a point of his lack of formal education, and symbolically puts

himself on the level of the ordinary villagers who revere him.

The case of the Christian Fellowship Church illustrates the power of non-state organizations in the Solomons in an age of what Hviding calls "compressed globalization" that followed on the rise of the logging industry (2003). Logging on customary land has allowed local leaders to interact directly with agents of transnational capitalism and conservationism without much interference (or protection) from the national, provincial, or local government (Hviding 2003; Hviding 2006). At the beginning of the logging boom in the 1980s, the CFC opposed Lever's Pacific Timber, which refused to negotiate with local landowners. Soon after, however, the CFC allowed the Malaysian company Golden Springs International to commence logging on its territory. Because the church controlled such a large swath of territory, its leaders were able to negotiate a favourable contract with the company. According to Hviding, logging in CFC areas was better-managed and resulted in less environmental damage than in other areas of Western Province. Instead of distributing logging revenue to individuals and families, the church has reinvested money in diversifying the rural economy (Hviding 2005, p. xxxii). Thus, in CFC areas, there are neither the signs of rural affluence, such as iron houses, generators, video players, outboard motors, and fibreglass canoes, nor the acrimonious land disputes that usually result from logging on customary land. Some adherents profess to be satisfied with their lack of consumer goods. As one pastor explained to me, "When the Spiritual Authority says that the time has come, we will all have iron houses and video players - but not yet."

In the process of becoming a major economic player in the rural Western Solomons, the CFC has only engaged with those outside individuals and agencies who have proven willing to follow a locally-determined agenda. It refuses engagement with AusAID or large international non-government conservation organizations whose agendas are often driven from metropolitan centers. When it does engage with outsiders, it takes the role of a contractor rather than a supplicant. This was the case when the church contracted technical expertise from an Australian

university and provided its own seed money for a reforestation project (Makim 2002; Makim & Dart 2002). No other community organization in the Solomons would be able to do that.

Far from being a typical community organization, the CFC is unique in the Solomons. The combination of local political and spiritual power embodied by the Spiritual Authority, as well as the long-term Member for North New Georgia and other CFC leaders, allows large-scale coordination of a labour force on a significant tract of territory. Although many Solomon Islanders do engage regularly with transnational actors, the CFC is unique in its ability to define the terms of its engagement. The story of the CFC has probably just begun. Once dismissed as a “cult” for its reverence of first the Holy Mama and now the Spiritual Authority, it is now respected by adherents of the United Church. Government leaders, especially within Western Province, have shown interest in emulating the successful development ventures of the CFC. Failing to recognize the *sui generis* nature of the CFC, some outsiders take it as a typical community organization, describe Rev. Ikan Rove as a community leader, and speculate that the conservation or reforestation projects undertaken under the auspices of the CFC could be replicated in other areas of the country. Solomon Islanders who are not members of this unusual church tend to see the situation much more clearly. They grapple with the fact that its economic success is tied up with features of its organization and theology they are not comfortable embracing, notably the absolute authority of the church’s spiritual leader.

## GLOBAL CONNECTIONS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The religious movements that have arisen in the Solomon Islands over the last few decades are theologically diverse. They include not only the charismatic and Pentecostal groups whose growth worldwide has been well-documented (e.g., Cox 1995), but also conservative Wesleyan Methodists and orthodox Anglicans, heterodox Christian groups like Jehovah’s Witnesses and the World Wide Church of God, and even

non-Christian religions including Bahá’í, Sunni Islam, Ahmadiyya Islam, and the Unification Church.<sup>11</sup> All of these new groups are attracting people who are already Christian. This raises the question of why a significant number of Solomon Islanders are abandoning the religious traditions adopted by their grandparents, particularly since those traditions have now been thoroughly indigenized and are central to senses of local identity.

Amongst former adherents of the United Church in Ranongga, the decision to join a new religious group seems to involve apparently contradictory motives. Many converts desire independence from burdensome responsibilities like fundraising or from church disciplinary rules. The independence of the church as a self-governing and self-sustaining national organization - something of which United Church leaders are rightly proud - may not be of central importance for ordinary adherents, many of whom are nostalgic about the good old days of the Methodist Mission (and, indeed, the British Protectorate government, often lauded as functioning better than the independent Solomons state). Some of the new churches resemble old-style missionary endeavours, with expatriate missionaries in the country and direct financial assistance from first-world branches of the denominations. Unlike the older missions, however, they do not attempt to cover contiguous geographical areas; instead, they follow more individualized networks. In various ways, the new movements link local actors into global institutions in ways that may seem to be more efficacious than established churches.

As mentioned above, the Wesley Methodist Church emerged after 1996 as a reaction to what was perceived as the overly enthusiastic worship style and muddled theology of the United Church. Adherents in the Western Solomons say they ‘returned’ to Methodism for theological reasons; critics of the new group suggest that many of the leaders of the movement left the United Church because they were angry about being sacked from church positions (usually for mishandling church finances or for sexual misconduct) or because they were involved in land disputes that poisoned their relationships with their neighbours. Whatever the local reasons,

however, the movement got momentum and support through association with Australian Wesleyan Methodists, including the late Reverend Allen Hall, who was a teacher at the Methodist College in Roviana in the 1950s. Since the late 1990s, Hall and other Wesleyans from Australia have travelled to the Solomons to lead Bible studies, ordain ministers, and otherwise assist the fledgling church.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the smaller religious groups on the island of Ranongga also have direct ties to overseas churches. For example, residents of the hamlet of Qiloe, near the large United Church village of Obobulu, belong to the Worldwide Church of God, a church founded in the 1930s by American radio evangelist Herbert Armstrong, whose teachings included Biblical prophecy and adherence to Mosaic laws that resembled, to some degree, Adventism (the current Worldwide Church has moved toward more orthodox Christian doctrines). In the 1960s and 1970s, the late Alekera Jiru of Ranongga was working in Gizo town and learned of the Worldwide Church from European and part-European traders. Alekera wrote to the church to request its magazine, *The Plain Truth*, and he gradually came to accept Armstrong's idiosyncratic Biblical interpretations. Alekera is remembered as one of the brightest young men of the generation first schooled by the Methodist mission; in a situation where books and magazines were scarce, part of the appeal of the Worldwide Church (like the Adventist church and Jehovah's Witnesses) appears to have been the availability of instructional materials. By the early 1980s, Alekera and a number of his close relatives had been baptized by Australian Worldwide missionaries who visited them in Gizo and Ranongga. Pastors in Australia (whom Worldwide Church adherents in Ranongga today sometimes refer to as 'our white men') are in close communication with a local church elder, an ambitious middle-aged man whose association with these overseas pastors has enhanced his local standing. Worldwide Church pastors regularly visit and support this tiny congregation with everything from donated books to generous funds for building projects and, most recently, funds for recovery after the April 2007 earthquake.<sup>13</sup> This overseas connection is much more direct than that enjoyed by neighbouring

United Church villagers. The Uniting Church of Australia, for example, raised a large amount of money following the earthquake and tsunami, but this is administered by the Solomon Islands United Church, which has an understandably larger and more unwieldy bureaucracy than the tiny Worldwide Church in Qiloe hamlet.

Adherents of new groups stridently deny that they left their old churches for material benefit. A Ranonggan Jehovah's Witness acknowledged that new congregations in the Solomons get assistance from more established Jehovah's Witness churches overseas. In his case, the overseas organization pays the salaries and living expenses of a Solomon Islander couple from another province who work as missionaries in his little family hamlet. Like other converts to new groups, he emphasized the spiritual reasons for conversion. After a service, he and another elder Witness on Ranongga explained that when they were part of the United Church they would go to church but then as soon as church was over they would go back to sinful ways. They also complained about the behaviour of other church-goers - holy in church but back to gossiping and lying as soon as the service was finished.<sup>14</sup> Such complaints are common among converts to other groups as well. A young Ranonggan member of the Pentecostal Christian Outreach Center in Gizo town explained to me that he was sinful as a member of the United Church but that since he had experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit and has been mentored by his new Christian Outreach Center pastor, he is full of joy and able to act in a righteous way.<sup>15</sup>

With the exception of the Wesleyan Methodist group, which had its origins in Western Province and initially attracted followers among older men, many of the new religious denominations came to rural areas from Honiara via younger men who had been working or living there. One Ranonggan man, for example, joined a Pentecostal church while he was in prison as a youth in the 1980s and founded the church when he returned home. In most cases, young men alone do not have the status or access to land to build a new church or hamlet and they often require the support of a father or uncle. Senior men seem to be attracted to

new churches if they feel excluded from the lay leadership of the main village church or if they are embroiled in land disputes; founding a new church is a way of opting out of the problems of the larger community. Wives often follow their husbands reluctantly - one older woman said that she hated to leave her friends in the United Church Women's Fellowship, but did not want to split the family so she followed her husband when he joined the Wesleyan Methodists.

A distinguishing feature of these new shifts in affiliation is their individualism. With the earlier Methodist and Christian Fellowship Church schism, whole villages either went to the CFC or stayed with the Methodists; where there was a split within a village, dissenters left and founded a new village. This pattern is not replicated in the more recent Wesleyan Methodist / United Church schism or other moves to new churches, perhaps because of increasing scarcity of land. Modern villages are centered on the church but are comprised of several named family hamlets. In medium-sized villages, individuals who leave the village church have often already established a hamlet on the periphery of the village and simply begin worshipping there, no longer participating in the activities of the main village church. The situation is most contentious in large or crowded villages, where several churches may coexist with the historically-dominant church. Because much village work that involves groups larger than extended families is coordinated through the church, such multi-denominational villages are often disorganized in other ways as well.

Shifts in religious affiliation are not new, but they appear to have accelerated with the restoration of law and order in 2003. In the preceding years, the civil conflict forced people back to villages and drove nearly all expatriates out of the country. Aside from considerable movement between Malaita and Honiara, residents of most other provinces avoided travel to the capital. RAMSI's success in re-establishing order on Guadalcanal has allowed rural people to flock back to Honiara and has allowed expatriates, including foreign evangelists, back into the town. Over just a few weeks of research in Honiara in January 2007, I encountered a dizzying range of transnational religiosity. I interviewed an Australian pastor who was

posted to lead Potter's House, a branch of a global charismatic-Pentecostal church; I spoke to a Ghanaian ex-Jehovah's Witness who is now the missionary for the Solomon Islands Ahmadiyya Muslim community; I met several men of Middle Eastern descent based in Melbourne who are using their holidays to teach in a small Honiara Sunni Muslim center. Back in Gizo, I watched DVDs with Ranonggan friends that featured the teaching of Jonathon David, an evangelist of South Asian descent now based in Malaysia whose "Kingdom gospel" has become central in the current ministries of the Pentecostal Christian Outreach Center.

Opportunity opened up by increased mobility of both islanders and expatriates may not, however, be the only reason for the apparent increase in interest in non-traditional denominations. The nation's crisis seems to have broken at least some Solomon Islanders' faith in establishment Christianity, particularly those most deeply involved in and affected by the violence of 1998-2003. A number of young Malaitan men who had become Sunni Muslims articulated this dissatisfaction to me most pointedly and angrily, although adherents of newly introduced charismatic-Pentecostal churches expressed similar emotions. They spoke, obliquely, of their own personal transgressions that caused them to be ostracized or ignored by the established church community. They spoke angrily about the general sinfulness in society - epidemics of adultery, lying, cheating, and stealing. If the nation is Christian, is not Christianity to blame for its failures? A few new converts to non-Christian religions feel that it is time to leave Christianity entirely. Seventh-day Adventists and some Pentecostal Christians accept the nation's troubles as signs of the end times. Following a long Protestant tradition, however, many adherents of new Christian churches call for national revival - a return to original Christian principles and practices that have become corrupted as Christianity has become 'culture' rather than faith.

Many Solomon Islander Christians are rightly proud of the role played by the historical churches in bringing about peace and limiting the violence during the crisis of 1998-2003. Still, members and leaders

of mainline churches are deeply concerned about the religious fragmentation that seems to be increasing. This fragmentation overlays the political fragmentation that many lament as one of the key problems for Solomons democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Among the churches examined here, the mainline United Church of the Solomon Islands has structures and ideologies that seem most congruent with the development or governance agendas of Australia and other donors. It has a democratic congregational structure that allows women and youth to participate in decision-making processes, albeit not necessarily in the ways that donors might expect (McDougall 2003). It has forged strong ecumenical ties to the other churches of the country and is committed to the socio-economic as well as spiritual well-being of its members. Yet the United Church has struggled financially and administratively in the postcolonial era.

The church that has been most successful in fostering large-scale economic development and providing 'alternative structures' in the absence of a functioning state has been the Christian Fellowship Church, an indigenous church with a hierarchical structure, heterodox theology, and a marked disinclination to become a 'vehicle' for any outside agenda. The Seventh-day Adventist church is less oriented toward local matters and more oriented to a global community of believers and a millennial future than either the United Church or the Christian Fellowship Church. Yet it seems to foster individualism, consumerism, an orientation toward nuclear families, and a work ethic that have made Adventists relatively successful in the modern economy of the Solomons. In diametrically opposed ways, the Christian Fellowship Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church both offer their followers spiritually and materially powerful connections to a world beyond the Solomons in a way that the United Church no longer appears to do. Like members of other mainline churches throughout the world, some adherents of the United Church are seeking such connections through the many new Christian (and a few non-Christian) denominations that have been

introduced to the Solomons since the 1970s and are growing rapidly in the post-conflict period.

In examining the complex religious landscape of just one province in the Solomons, I have aimed to demonstrate that churches have their own diverse structures, agendas, and relationships. They are not ersatz states and cannot be easily harnessed for secular agendas. Moreover, renewed interest in churches as alternative structures of governance in the Pacific resonates uncomfortably with neo-liberal reforms around the world that attempt to devolve responsibilities usually associated with the modern state onto private corporations, secular non-governmental organizations, or religious organizations. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, one reason why churches seem like the only trans-local bureaucratic institutions that have local roots in the Solomons is the systematic weakening of the levels of government that ought to have direct contact with rural villagers. Cox and Morrison (2004) have shown that the Solomon Islands Provincial Government system has been in decline for the last decade and, as of 2004, had the capacity to do little more than pay direct employees. They argue that since 2000, "as National Government has centralised management and donors have sought to work directly with communities, Provinces have been increasingly marginalized from service delivery activities" (2004, p. 4). Area councils, which were once a third tier of government under the Provincial level, were abolished in 1996/7 reforms. Without a local level of government, it is no wonder that the state has little reach into rural communities.

Rather than imagining the state as something to bypass, a better goal might be to help foster productive relationships between church organizations and state institutions. In this regard, outsiders might take their lead from Solomon Islanders working on behalf of the government who are well aware of the necessity of involving churches in projects that are aimed at rural communities. For example, Permanent Secretary Joy Kere has described how the state has worked with churches in fostering post-conflict reconciliation in Guadalcanal and Malaita:

*The Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace understands that the churches have the structure that makes reconciliation possible. Over and over, we've heard from people in communities that the language of reconciliation comes from the Bible and that the church must play a leading role in reconciliation (McDougall and Kere, nd., p. 6).*

The worth of such cooperation is equally obvious to government employees working in local communities. Only one month after the devastating earthquake in April 2007 that lifted Ranongga island meters out of the sea, Principal Norma Ivupitu had reopened Pienuna Community Junior Secondary School for informal classes. By the end of the year, all Form 3 students in Pienuna sat the national exam and an unprecedented number of them passed to Form 4, despite the absence of several trained teachers who left the island after the disaster. When I asked Mrs. Ivupitu about her success as a principal, she explained that church pastors are her "secret weapon" as recognized authorities in the villages. People may or may not follow the directions of the chairman of the school committee, but they will not ignore the pastor. Ivupitu herself prays everyday for the strength and wisdom necessary to lead the teachers and students through the many challenges they face - she considers the school to be part of the larger work of God in the village and her strategies reflect this.<sup>16</sup>

Joy Kere and Norma Ivupitu are unusual insofar as they are women in positions usually held by men and may have different perspectives on churches and their own leadership roles than their male counterparts. Yet they are just two among the many Solomon Islander civil servants who are struggling in the context of inadequate resources and inefficient structures to positively influence the lives of rural islanders. Solomon Islanders who grow up in churches know how important they are and are also well aware of the kinds of complications that I have detailed in this paper.

Christian churches are the only modern bureaucratic organizations in the Solomons today that have deep and broad roots in rural areas. For all the complexity and

conundrums, if any governance initiative is to move beyond Honiara or provincial centers, it must in some way engage with churches. Ideally, however, this would not be part of an effort to circumvent the state, but an effort to strengthen the state by making it more accountable to and engaged with the most important civil society institutions in the country. Such an effort, moreover, can be best led not by expatriate advisors on good governance, but by Solomon Islanders themselves.

## AUTHOR NOTES

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## ENDNOTES

1. The Solomons contrasts with neighboring Papua New Guinea, which is, according to Philip Gibbs, sharply divided into four major blocks: the PNG Council of Churches comprised of mainline churches including Lutheran, Catholic, United, and Anglican; the Evangelical Alliance comprised of Apostolic, Baptist, Nazarene Churches, and Salvation Army; a number of new Pentecostal and charismatic groups that are not organized; and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which Gibbs sees as its own faction (Gibbs 2004; Gibbs 2006: p. 146-148).
2. Since the RAMSI intervention, SICA has continued to speak out on issues of police re-armament, transparency and good leadership; during the 2006-07 diplomatic stand-off between Australia and the Solomons, SICA called for both sides to enter dialogue. See 'Christian association opposes re-armament plan,' Solomon Islands Broadcasting Association (SIBC), 31 Jan 2007; 'Leadership workshop this week,' SIBC, 29 October 2006; 'Call for people to respect leaders,' SIBC, 13 April 2006; 'Christian association appeals to governments,' SIBC, 27 October 2006.
3. Interview with Rev. Philemon Riti, SICA offices, Honiara, 29 Nov 2006.
4. The exception here is the Catholic Church, which had an historic mission in the Shortland Islands. Aside from the Shortlands, however, Catholics, Anglicans, and South Seas Evangelicals are present in large numbers only near town centers, especially Noro and Gizo wards ("Table P01-3. Relationship, Ethnicity, and Religion by Ward of Enumeration, Western Province: 1999" in Solomon Islands 1999 Population Survey).
5. According to Ernst, the United Church does not have adequate administrative infrastructure to support the struggling Bible training college at Sege (2006, p. 181). This lack of administrative capacity has hampered efforts by the independent United Church to cater to the economic needs of its adherents - a sustainable timber venture failed in part because the church lacked the capacity to deal with the complex regulations required for sustainability certification (Rev. Cliff Bird, personal communication, 7 Nov 2007).
6. Formerly, the Malaita Mission, Western Mission, and Eastern Mission were part of the Western Pacific Union which had its headquarters in Honiara. Now the three unions were amalgamated into a Solomon Islands Mission that is part of a Transpacific Union with headquarters in Suva, Fiji (all are part of the South Pacific Division of the General Conference of the Adventist Church). According to a radio interview, the communication director said that "the church in Solomon Islands felt isolated and the government was unable to deal effectively with the church under the three tier system" ('SDA Church starts "the session" meeting,' SIBC, 20 September 2006). The current President of the Solomon Islands Mission is an Australian although Solomon Islanders hold high positions in the Transpacific Union.
7. <http://adventist.org.au/media/publications>
8. 'Queen's Birthday Honours,' 11 June 2005, available from BBC at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/birthhons\\_solomon\\_11\\_06\\_05.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/birthhons_solomon_11_06_05.pdf). The CFC Spiritual Authority was also recognized by the Western Province Premier for leading 'agro-forest development, planting small-scale reforestation plantation, planting oil-palms and agriculture commodities such as coconut plantations' ('Church Leaders Awarded Recognition,' SIBC, 9 December 2006.)
9. The details of these developments are not well documented and the CFC is not open to outsiders. Little about the Christian Fellowship Church is publicized through the national media; for example, even the succession to the headship of the church remained an internal affair. Edvard Hviding, who has been conducting anthropological research in Marovo for two decades, has a detailed knowledge of these developments and is writing a book-length study of the movement.
10. It is the safest seat in Parliament (Tausinga ran unopposed in 2006) and Tausinga has held four ministerial appointments, served as Deputy Prime Minister, and been a candidate for Prime Minister.
11. The Church of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is important elsewhere in the Pacific, but church teachings about the inferiority of dark-skinned peoples, which were overturned only in 1978, delayed expansion into Melanesia. An LDS church has been built in Honiara, but the 1999 census counted only 74 adherents in the country (Ernst 2006, p. 172). Among non-Christian religions, only Bahá'í is listed in the census and comprise 0.6% of the population. Sunni Islam appears to have grown significantly in the wake of the crisis.
12. These Wesleyan Methodists resisted joining the mainline Australian Methodist church when it amalgamated with other liberal Protestant denominations into the Australian Uniting Church in the 1970s. See "History," Wesleyan Methodist Church website, <http://www.wesleyan.org.au/>.

13. The Worldwide Church of God website has a description of ongoing projects: ([http://www.wcg.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Care-Pac/Solomon\\_Islands/default.htm](http://www.wcg.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Care-Pac/Solomon_Islands/default.htm) [accessed 20 January 2008]).
14. Interview, Pienuna village, 12 December 2006.
15. Interview, Gizo, 20 February 2006.
16. Mrs. Norma Ivupitu, Interview, 16 October 2007.

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