

In Highland, G.A. & Force,
R.W. et al. (1967). Polynesian
Cultural History: Essays in
Honor of Kenneth P. Emory.
Honolulu, Bernice P. Bishop
Museum special Publication
56:565-589.

AN ISLAND CHANGES ITS RELIGION

SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY
ON BELLONA ISLAND¹

TORBEN MONBERG

University of Copenhagen

ONLY A FEW POLYNESIAN societies provide us with an opportunity to study religious innovation in detail. Rarely are we given a chance to gain a deeper insight in, for example, the processes of conversion from one religion to another. The majority of the islands were converted to Christianity a century or more ago, and in most cases we have only the accounts of the successful missionaries to study if we want to know what has actually taken place during the transition from one faith to another.

However, if we view a non-Christian society's conversion to Christianity as a set of complex external innovations, it may be of particular interest to consider the process involved from the point of view of the recipient society and to analyze the social and cultural elements² and

¹The data for this study were collected during field work on Rennell and Bellona and among Rennellese and Bellonese in other parts of the Solomon Islands in 1958-1959, 1962, 1963, and 1966. The expeditions were sponsored by Statens Almindelige Videnskabsfond and Styrelsen for Teknisk Samarbejde med Udviklingslandene, to which institutions I convey my warmest thanks.

I also wish to thank Samuel H. Elbert, of the University of Hawaii, and Leif Christensen and Sofus Christiansen, of the University of Copenhagen, not only for their companionship in the field, but also for many helpful suggestions in connection with problems of method and analysis of the data. Samuel H. Elbert, Vernet Goldschmidt, and Leif Christensen have also read this paper and offered valuable suggestions.

The field method used and the problems of collecting retrospective data in a nonliterate society have been discussed in Monberg, 1966. This discussion also applies to the present study.

²In the use of the words "social" and "cultural" I follow the suggestions for a distinction between these two analytical aspects made by Geertz (1957, p. 33) and by Parsons and Shils (1951): culture is an ordered system of meanings and symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place, whereas a social system is the pattern of social interaction itself.

Rennell and Bellona two Polynesian Outliers in the Solomon Islands, provide us with some material for an analysis of this kind. They were among the last of the Polynesian islands to accept Christianity. The conversion took place in 1938. Fairly detailed accounts by some Rennellese and Bellonese of the dramatic events on Rennell which led to the abandonment of the old beliefs and rituals have been published elsewhere (Elbert and Monberg, 1965), and some aspects of these events have been analyzed briefly (Monberg, 1962).

This paper is only indirectly concerned with the actual process of conversion; it is rather an attempt to present and analyze some of the social configurations which took place on the smaller of the two islands, Bellona, after the new faith had been accepted.

It has been shown previously (Monberg, 1966) that religious change itself is nothing new in Bellonese society. The pre-Christian religion seems to have undergone a number of rather important transformations even before contact with Europeans or other outsiders. These were the introduction of new ritual formulas or new rites, the institution of new deities and also the abandonment of certain old rites and ritual formulas (Monberg, 1966, pp. 72-74). Compared to the religious change which took place in 1938 with the introduction of Christianity, these changes were, however, slight. In the old religion the worship of new gods was introduced occasionally but the old gods were not discarded. Christianity, however, brought entirely new gods, the god-in-the-sky (*te 'atua i te ngangī*) and his son (*te 'aitu*), and the old deities were dismissed from the island. New rites and new sets of values were introduced and some major social changes took place.

The actual chain of events from 1938 onward can be analytically divided into three periods or phases, which I have chosen to label the phases of acceptance, of adjustment, and of readjustment. In these three phases different processes were at work.

PHASE I: ACCEPTANCE (1938)

Rennell and Bellona have a common language and culture; of the two, Rennell, the larger island, had had most contact with the outside world before the advent of Christianity. Accounts of these contacts are given elsewhere (Birket-Smith, 1956; Brock d'Obrenan, 1939; Deck, 1945; Elbert and Monberg, 1965; Hogbin, 1931; Lambert, 1941; Macgregor, 1943; Monberg, 1962; Stanley, 1929; Young, no date).

several Rennellese were taken to mission stations on other Solomons where they received from six weeks to twelve months before they were returned to Rennell. This paved the way for conversion to Christianity in 1938. During a harvest ritual in the District the Rennellese attempted to establish a joint worship of old deities and the Christian God. The first rite of this kind developed into mass hysteria and complete ritual anaesthesia. Dramatic events have been related in Elbert and Monberg (1965). The Rennellese interpreted this chaos and violence as a struggle between the Christian God and the old gods in which the latter were overthrown from the island by the new power, and as a result, mass conversion to Christianity took place.

In comparison with Rennell, the smaller island of Bellona led a very isolated life until 1938. Bellona had been visited by anthropologists and government officers in the 1930's, and an Adventist mission ship had called there in 1934 or 1935. No one from Batuna, the mission station in the Western Solomons, had ever loaded a load of Rennellese. No Bellonese wanted to go, however, because they were afraid at that time of contact with the outside world. The Bellonese assert that the reason they wanted to be left on their island was that they had heard that contact with the outside world resulted in the introduction of new and hitherto unknown diseases. Earlier, sporadic contact had, they believed, introduced malaria and other diseases to the island.

In spite of their comparative isolation, the Christian religion was not totally unknown to them. Rennellese visitors to Bellona and Bellonese going to see their kinsmen on Rennell had naturally brought news, and the Bellonese had learned about the two gods, the Christian God and "Sisas," but, according to the Bellonese themselves, they had no reason why they should give up the worship of the old gods in return to the new god, especially because they knew very little about the powers and also because they feared that the old gods might be angry. The deities of Bellona had already expressed their displeasure through their human mediums; it was taboo to mention the names of the Christian deities because they were bad gods.

In November, 1938, Christianity was introduced on Bellona through the back door, so to speak. When the madness on Ren-

anity had been generally accepted. Moa, a powerful lineage of the Lake District, decided to go to Bellona to tell about the Elbert and Monberg, 1965, pp. 394-419). When he arrived Bellona was engaged in an extensive interlineage fight, partitioning the lineages of the eastern district, Matangi, and the district, Ghongau. For fear of surprise attacks people had built their homesteads in the interior of the island to small caves or in the bush which covers the entire outer rim of the

island. The following little incident may, however, give an impression of the atmosphere in which the conversion took place. One of the men whom Moa met when he arrived on Bellona was the influential elder, Takiika, of Nuku'angoha lineage (Monberg, 1966, p. 405). Takiika recently told me of their first conversation when they met at his homestead, Hanakaba. The two men greeted each other in the usual rate and stylized formulas, indicating mutual respect, but in Moa's speech Moa deviated from the traditional pattern by saying "I am only worthy of saluting your entrails and those of your classificatory brother in the sky." The usual formula is: "I am only worthy of saluting your entrails and those of your older classificatory brother (or your father)." Takiika tells how astonished he was when he wondered who his older classificatory brother in the sky was. It was Jesus. God being everyone's Father, it was obvious to the Bellonese that His Son must be everyone's Older Brother.

Moa now told why he had arrived. According to Takiika he said the following: "I have come to enlighten you and your people because we (the people of the Lake District on Rennell) have been punished. We had received knowledge of Father (God) and of His Older Brother (Jesus) and we mixed (the rites). We worshiped our Father in Heaven, and we worshiped the gods of this world. And time and time again our Father sent a punishment; we were punished in Niupani; we were killed people, set fire to one another's hair and pulled down the roof of our house in Mangama'ubea; I set fire to the hair of my older brother, Taupongi; women made dances to the sounding of the gong and ended the brother-sister avoidance and brother and sister avoidance between one another. Then everything became well and we made a new house for our Father, which still worships

ing a large feast in one of the homesteads, the gods answered back through their mediums. The result was a verbal fight between Moa and the old gods, and it was so fierce that the audience was said to have fled in horror (Elbert and Monberg, 1965, p. 417). But the outcome was that the mediums were silenced. The gods left them and mediumship was then given up.

The arriving missionary had other victories. He broke the two stones, the "bodies" of the two most powerful and sacred gods of the Rennellese and Bellonese, and he was not killed by them because of this. Only a splinter of one of the stones hit Moa when he crushed it with his ax. This was interpreted as a sign of the gods' comparative weakness. Moa also mediated between the fighting parties on the island, and peace was restored on Bellona. His prayers were even claimed to have had healing powers. A number of sick Bellonese were restored to health when he prayed for them. He describes these achievements, very modestly, in Elbert and Monberg (1965, p. 405).

Moa's message had obviously been very simple. He had had very little training in the teachings of Christianity. During his meetings in 1938 he told the Bellonese the outlines of Genesis, the story of Noah, and about the birth, life, and death of Christ. We have no detailed data on what went on in the minds of the Bellonese when they heard these strange stories. Such things are difficult to remember after twenty-five years. Several informants have told how surprised they were to hear about a god who was powerful enough to flood the whole world but save only one family in a canoe. The story about the Deluge must have appealed to the Bellonese who knew that a man in danger at sea who appealed to the gods would be saved from disaster (Elbert and Monberg, 1965, pp. 298-299). They knew of the sinking of all but two of the canoes of the immigrants from Ubea going to Rennell and Bellona, and the drowning of a hundred people. This resemblance has never been expressed by the Rennellese or Bellonese themselves, but it is obvious that the story of Noah has elements which they could conceive.

The teachings of Moa were almost devoid of specific dogma. He stressed the power of God and of His Son; that His wrath would fall upon those who did not worship Him; that it was taboo to kill each

months after Moa's arrival another party of missionaries was a group of Rennellese, led by two men, Puka and , who represented another Christian sect, the South Seas Mission (SSEM). Their teachings were on the same level as those of Moa and his group, who represented the Day Adventists (SDA).

At the beginning the two groups of missionaries stressed that they represented different schools. One of the differences was that at the day of worship was Saturday, whereas the members of the SDA held their services on Sundays. Obviously this difference was not meant much to the Bellonese, who at that time had no concept of the days of the week, but it was at least an indication that their customs were different.

A few weeks after Moa's arrival in the island the old temples were torn down, the ritual paraphernalia and the sacred stones were destroyed, and the rituals abandoned.

An overwhelming majority of the Bellonese now accepted the new religion. There are records of only five men who, with their wives and children, still objected to the introduction of the new god and who were performing the minor household rituals (*hainga 'atua*) to the old gods. These five families gave up their resistance after one or two months and joined one of the two missions. Their reason for objecting to the introduction of Christianity was in all cases that they thought the old gods were stronger and that they could take revenge on all those who deserted them.

They now pose the one question which seems of most interest in connection with this first phase of the process of religious innovation on Bellona: Why did the 430 inhabitants on the island so readily accept a new religion about which they had received such scanty information?

As the anthropologist has pointed out, "culture traits or inventions which are already in operation (using the same principle) and on the other hand, which are intended to be a substitute (an 'improvement') for the old trait which is also already in operation but using a different principle" (1942, p. 16), we may be close to an answer. In the Bellona case the old device already in operation was, naturally, the old religion. The natives, like Christians, believed in supernatural beings and performed rites in these temples. We shall return

to the question of how the new religion will survive and spread within a society, whether introduced from the outside or not, unless the members of the society believe that they will profit from accepting the new, or, as a minimum, that the innovation is considered of equal value to the trait for which it is to substitute. It may be argued that new traits (taxation, legal or political institutions) are sometimes forced upon a society from the outside under threats of sanctions if these traits are not accepted. Such forcefully introduced traits, however, only offer an extreme example of what has been said above. They are accepted because the receiving society realizes that it will gain from accepting them, the gain being that the sanctions are not put into force.

From available data it is obvious that the Bellonese accepted Christianity because they believed that they would profit from it in various ways. It would be misinterpretation to state that the Bellonese began to worship the new god because they suddenly realized that what Moa told them was the universal and final truth and that the Christian God was the only existing god. The Bellonese have never been inclined to discuss or believe in ultimate truths. They seem to share a general Polynesian concept that there are many kinds of worlds with many kinds of gods, and that people worship different gods who are all true and existing, for otherwise it would be sheer foolishness to worship them. An example of this attitude may be that the Bellonese until this day believe that their old deities exist. To them the Christian God is merely powerful enough to keep them away.

There are probably at least two reasons why the Bellonese so readily accepted Christianity without knowing much about it. The Christian God had proved that he was more powerful than the old gods of Bellona. The people had seen Moa destroy the sacred objects without being punished, and exercise extraordinary powers in curing sickness and restoring peace; they had also heard his words that the Christian God would punish those who did not follow Him, and they had heard about the madness in the Lake District on Rennell, a result of God's punishment.

This is not just the anthropologist's speculation. The Bellonese themselves assert that these were the reasons they accepted the new faith. They considered it an improvement, and they thought that they had, so far, made a good trade.

To this we may add another reason. Although Moa's message was

ly shared these concepts. His message was coded to the Bellonese concepts, his words were understood, and his acts showed that what he said was true.

The Christian God was now accepted as the supernatural power on Bellona. The worship of Him was to be a substitute for the old religion. In addition to it. How could people adjust themselves to the new religion and how could He be integrated into Bellonese life?

PHASE II: ADJUSTMENT (1938-1949)

It should not be emphasized that the abandonment of an entire religion and its beliefs and rituals which are interdependent with a number of other social institutions, and with the behavior of the individual in his daily life, is a complex affair. Numerous examples in the literature have been shown this. We are here concerned with how the people of Bellona attempted to solve the problems which arose from their religious revolution in 1938.

During his first stay on Bellona, Moa held his meetings when people gathered in a homestead to perform the ceremonial distribution of food or a fish catch. Before the actual acceptance of Christianity, Moa and his followers prayed and sang during the rites performed to the old gods. When Christianity had been generally accepted and the old temples destroyed, Moa helped to build churches. Bellonese churches at that time close resemblance to ordinary dwelling houses, which were made of wooden frameworks thatched with pandanus leaves. Their size varied from three to eight fathoms (*ngoha*) in length. "Chapels" might be a more appropriate term for these rather unimpressive edifices. However, we have chosen to use the word "church" because the Bellonese refer to them as *tiosí*, church.

The first church was built in 1939 at Ngongona, which was the residence of the important lineage elder, Takliika, mentioned above. When Moa left Bellona, he appointed Takliika "teacher," although the latter had never attended a school and at that time knew just as little about Christianity as the rest of the Bellonese. Even the adherents of the first mission built churches. By approximately the end of 1940 there were nine churches on the island, six belonging to SDA, and three

We will later discuss the question of church building from a political point of view. Let us first consider some examples of how the Bellonese

rituals and substitute the names God and Jesus for those of the old gods. For one thing, the Christian God spoke a different language. When Moa prayed and sang hymns it was mostly in Pidgin English. His teachings were in Rennellese, but only a few hymns had been translated into this language. Also the temples and all ritual paraphernalia had been destroyed, and the worship of the Christian God required churches.

None of the Rennellese missionaries were apparently of much help in telling the Bellonese what kind of rites they were to perform. When they returned to Rennell, the Bellonese were left with very little knowledge of Christian rituals. One informant expressed it by saying that, "When Moa and the others left us the only thing we really knew about the new faith was that Christ would come soon, and that the worship of God was different from our rituals to the old gods."

Garden work, fishing, and other economic activities went on, however, in spite of the fact that the Bellonese were ignorant of how to worship the new God. In their attempt to create a pattern for their religious behavior they tried to imitate the little they had learned from the Rennellese about the ways of the European and Melanesian followers of the new God.

Before Christianity came to Bellona, offerings and ceremonial distributions of food were a part of any major garden activity. If a man was to plant a large garden he summoned his kinsmen to help him. Some time during the work day a ceremonial distribution, *'oso hekau*, of food would take place. The food was dedicated to the deities and then given to the people working in the garden. The dedication of the food to the gods was accompanied by the recitation of certain ritual formulas, and customarily the person of highest social status received the first share. Obviously the *'oso hekau* could not be given up entirely because a new god had arrived. It was part of the system of economic compensation. The Bellonese told how they, in an attempt to do everything in a new way, adopted a new procedure for the reward to workers. When the food was to be distributed by the owner of the garden, he lined up those who had helped him, and he and his wife then went down along the line of people and shook hands repeatedly with every man, woman, and child. Thereupon the food was distributed in the reverse order: the first share was given to the youngest child present, and the last to the most important man. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell exactly how common this procedure was, but a number of informants have told

vey of some deviations from these general rules may provide further insight as to how the mission groups became organized. The recorded cases of wives joining a mission other than that of their husbands, the husbands belonged to the SDA and the wives left to join the SSEM. In two cases with kinsmen of their own patrilineal descent and in one case with a *tu'aatina*, a mother's classificatory brother who was a man of considerable social prestige and who had founded an important SSEM church. In one case the husband later joined the SSEM and lived for a time with her agnatic kinsmen. In the other two cases the wives later rejoined their husbands and became members of the SDA mission. In two cases the reason for the split between the spouses seems to have been temporary personal disputes over purely secular matters. In the third case the reason was given that the wife "preferred SSEM to SDA." More data on this subject have not been available; both persons are dead.

The eighteen major patrilineal descent groups on the island (Monberg, 1966, Fig. 3) all individuals inhabiting the land owned by the SDA. Five of the lineages belonged to the SDA mission, and the members of the remaining eleven patrilineal descent groups were members of the SSEM. The remaining eleven patrilineal descent groups were members of the SSEM. We shall consider the reason for some of these rifts.

In one lineage, all belonged to the SDA with the exception of one unmarried landholder (*matu'a*) who was on bad terms with his kinsmen and therefore chose to join the SSEM. In three lineages, young people whose fathers had died lived with kinsmen of other lineages and joined their missions rather than those chosen by the fathers of their own lineages. In six lineages, long-standing disagreements over land or other matters had split the members into two groups and each chose to join a different mission. The reasons for the split in the other five lineages have not been recorded.

This data does not permit a detailed exposition of these data, but from a general view it is obvious that social and political determinants for the mission affiliation were very strong indeed. In fact I have found (with the possible exception of the one mentioned above) of individuals claiming that they chose to become members of a certain mission because they thought that its teachings were more true than those of the other. The Bellonese knew that members of SDA and SSEM were different, but that they worshipped in different

similar attitude toward the differences of two missions on a Polynesian island has been shown by Emory (1965, p. 103) for Kapingamarangi.

It is, however, evident that factors other than lineage affiliation have acted as determinants of membership in a certain mission. Common residence before the arrival of Mōa was important. People chose to join the same mission as those with whom they had most social interaction in daily life. These were usually people of their own lineage, but where individuals resided with others than their agnatic kinsmen, this affected their choice.

As time went on and new cleavages arose between groups and individuals, this principle acted in reverse: co-residence of people of different missions became impossible. If one changed from one mission to the other, one had to move.

Even though the Bellonese seem to have had difficulties with the conceptual adjustment to Christianity because of their ignorance of the teachings of the two missions, it seems clear that the new religion quickly became an important social and political instrument on the island.³ The history of church building on Bellona offers examples of this. As mentioned previously, the first SDA church was built in Ngongona, a homestead belonging to one of the important lineage elders, Takiika. Each lineage had a number of male landholders—women as a rule did not own land—and some had higher prestige and authority than others. This was to a great extent due to their outstanding abilities as gardeners, fishermen, warriors, or performers of rituals (Monberg, 1966, pp. 29-30). Bellona had no chiefs in the Tikopia sense of the word. The first churches were built by those lineage elders (*hakahua*) who at that time had the highest prestige on the island. Takiika of Nuku'ango lineage (SDA), Taungenga of Ghongau lineage (SSEM), Pongi of Ngikobaka lineage (SDA), Sa'engeika of Ngikobaka lineage (SSEM), Ngibauika of Pangangiu lineage (SDA), Sa'omoana Taupongi of Sauhakaipo lineage (SSEM), and Taaika of Matubaingei lineage (SDA). This was in 1939-1940. The Bellonese say that during these first years, on each Saturday or Sunday, depending on the mission, they prayed in the churches which had been made by the important lineage elders. The traditional homesteads of the Bellonese lay scattered along the main trail which runs through Bellona and as it was often a long walk during which one had to pass homesteads of the people of the opposite mis-

to whom one's relations were strained, a gradual change in the pattern began to emerge. Some individuals set up their residence in the near vicinity of the church to which they went to pray and which belonged to the lineage elder to whom they were closely related. This tendency was, however, slow in the beginning and was counteracted by another development. In the years 1941 to 1949 more and more new churches were built. By approximately 1943 there were twenty-three SDA churches and ten SSEM churches, one for every thirteen of the island's people.

Three major factors which supported this development were the freedom involved in having one's own church, the traditional pre-Christian system of frequently founding new temples, and the fights between members of the original churches which made them split up.

Considering the specific cases in which new churches were founded, it is often analytically impossible to determine which of these factors has weighed most heavily when a landholder established his own church. There are, however, at least three clear cases of people worshipping at the same church who came to disagreement and separated accordingly. The majority of churches were, however, founded because the founder "wished to have a church of his own." This is not a surprising statement when seen in the light of the history of Christian social and religious organization on the island. The lineage elders of landholders on the island then had their own little temples (*temple*) in which minor rituals to certain gods were carried out. According to the Bellonese traditions they were offshoots of a number of larger temples on the island in which the more important rituals took place. Before 1939 Bellonese lineage elders established new temples and were generally considered themselves powerful enough to make larger ritual decisions. Sometimes they would, however, merely take over the duties of a deceased kinsman. A Bellonese in danger at sea or elsewhere might promise the deities to found a new temple if he were spared from disaster. The foundation of new temples was thus on the one hand a means of acquiring or confirming one's social prestige, and on the other, the individual's means of establishing good relations with the gods.

During the first phase of Christianity, the Bellonese contented themselves with having only a few churches, but gradually they reverted to

groups which were opposed to each other, chiefly because of long-standing disagreements over land rights.

The Bellonese themselves saw the gradual emerging of more and more churches as a reversion to the pre-Christian system of founding new temples. One informant made this particularly explicit: "The landholders wanted to have their own churches because they were like temples. We did not know how to make churches then, so we just did as before"—that is, before Christianity.

Another example of this tendency to organize the new religion according to the forms and principles of the old was the invention of certain official positions at the many churches built in the years 1939 through 1949.

The Bellonese created three ritual roles at each SDA or SSEM church, that of *hetimane*, headman, that of *bosi*, boss, and that of *tisa*, teacher. These English words had been taught them by the Rennellese missionaries. At the minor churches whose congregations consisted of only a few people, sometimes only the members of one household, the church owner held all three posts; but at a few major churches owned by lineage elders of higher social status, and with larger congregations consisting of several households, the posts were each filled by a different person. It was, however, more common that the same man would be *tisa* and *hetimane*, whereas another kinsman would act as *bosi*. This system of positions corresponds rather closely to the pre-Christian religious system. The role of *hetimane* resembles that of the *tunihenua*, priest-chief, in the old religion. The role of *bosi* corresponds to that of the *haihenua*, second priest-chief. The *tisa*, who was supposed to be the actual religious authority, reflects the old *ta'otu'a* institution in which a man might ritually assume the role of a deity or an ancestor, thus securing closeness to the sacred sphere. To the Bellonese, the *tisa* was the person in closest contact with the new God. During the old religion the role as *ta'otu'a* was most commonly assumed by the priest-chief, just as it was common under the new religion that the owner of the church was both *hetimane* and *tisa* at the same time.

Between 1939 and 1949 the Bellonese distinguished between two types of worship: the distribution of food in the ritual grounds of the homestead with accompanying prayers, and the actual church services held on Saturdays (SDA) or Sundays (SSEM). This duality also reflected the old religious practices in which important distributions of

ese churches were built in close proximity to the living houses on the homestead, often next to the old ritual grounds. Services on Wednesdays and Sundays were held in the churches with no distribution of food. Whereas the feasts involving the distribution of the harvest or of other food took place in the ritual grounds. On these latter occasions the *tisa*, who was usually also the *tisa*, conducted the short prayer (see above) and the food was then distributed by the *bosi*. The first shares were given to any other *hetimane* of Bellona present. The next shares were given to the affinal kinsmen of the *hetimane* who conducted the prayer. The following shares were given to other *tisa* and *bosi* who were present as guests. Finally other persons present received their share. The procedure is similar to that followed during pre-Christian rites: first the lineage elders and the affinal kinsmen of the host received their shares, and younger persons or those of lower social status received their food baskets later. The similarity even went further in that the important lineage elders who filled the roles as headmen under the old religion, the same persons who would have acted as priest-chiefs at the old temples. Younger people or those of lower social status who would have held posts as minor religious officials had similar posts under the new faith.

One feature of the old religion was carried over into the new era with little alteration. When the food had been distributed in the pre-Christian times, dancing and singing took place in the ritual grounds. This also happened after Christianity had been introduced. Even some of the names of the old deities were sung, but the more important rituals were abandoned. In the pre-Christian rites it was customary for a group of men from the same district as that of the host began the ceremony to the accompaniment of the sounding board. Then members of the other two of the island's three districts took over. There was an element of competition in that which district had produced the best dancing and the best songs was a subject of discussion. The rivalry of the districts on Bellona has been attested in many of the pre-Christian traditions (Elbert and Monberg, 1965).

After the arrival of Christianity new groups were formed across the island of the districts, namely the SDA and the SSEM. Post-Christian times came to be a competition between members of the two missions

The decade following conversion was, as mentioned, full of tension between members of the two groups. Open violence broke out frequently. Several groups of teachers (who had little or no training as such) who came from Rennell made matters worse by inciting fights between the two sects. They were supposed to help the Bellonese in their struggles to adjust themselves to the new life, but they had apparently little to offer. The relations between the adherents of SDA and SSEM worsened. Traditionally the Bellonese were of a rather belligerent disposition. One reason for this was that the various lineage elders constantly strived to gain higher social prestige than others. This often resulted in feuds, but also found other manifestations.

The years after the introduction of Christianity saw another development. The Bellonese tell how the traditional competitions among landholders to make the largest gardens and the most elaborate feasts with distribution of their garden produce reached a climax at that time. Landholders planted enormous prestige gardens, some of which were said to have yielded more than 10,000 yams. Rival landholders then attempted to plant gardens which were even larger. The garden produce was distributed at enormous feasts which included Christian prayers and dancing. The prestige in making a large garden lay chiefly in enabling the maker not only to display his wealth and generosity, but also his ability to make many people assist him in cultivation.

There may be several explanations for this curious outbreak of planting activities on Bellona after the old religion had been abandoned: as actual fights, with elaborate displays of physical skill and intelligence in planning attacks, had been abandoned entirely, the Bellonese lineage elders may have sought other ways of manifesting their abilities and superiority. The old religion, which was so closely linked with social prestige, had been given up, and the individual lineage elder may have felt the need for a reconfirmation of his status within the new system and on a new basis. An obvious way was to stress another value highly praised, namely one's skill as a gardener and one's generosity as a host, both qualities which might give a man status as a *hakahua*, important lineage elder.

Another reason may be that, whereas the pre-Christian rituals took up considerable time, the worship of the Christian God was a far less time-consuming affair. When Christianity was introduced, people simply

the restoration of peace after 1939 also gave them more time to food production.

The introduction of Christianity is, under most circumstances, a complex cluster of innovations in a non-Christian society. On Bellona, however, Christianity was introduced in a fairly simple form, and was not to any considerable degree accompanied by the introduction of material innovations. What the Bellonese received was a message about the existence of a new supernatural power, and a message on how the distant European and Melanesian adherents of the new religion behaved. Lack of knowledge of the rituals to some extent bewildered and frustrated, but the general ignorance of the doctrines and ethics of this new religion enabled them to integrate it with their own political and economic system, and, especially as the new religion arrived in two different versions, to utilize it as a political tool. During the first decade of Christianity, to a large extent, the Bellonese religion became adjusted to Bellonese culture and society rather than the opposite. The island was relatively isolated during this period. Since Christianity had been accepted, there was very little pressure from the outside forcing new changes and people were comparatively free to manipulate the new religion as suited them best. It is obvious that in such a situation is likely to result in an attempt to adjust the new religion to the already existing concepts and social structure. When the new religion is utilized to enforce changes in the social organization it tends to be in those institutions which members of the society considered advantageous to reorganize or eliminate, but whose previous existence has been strongly sanctioned by certain values in the old

religion. What has been said above it will, however, be obvious, that the process of adjustment was full of social and political tension. This was a very natural, not only because the introduction of the new religion brought conflicting interests of various members of the society, but because the tension was inherent in the old religious system, in which the taboos and rites often acted as religious sanctions for strife and conflict within the society.

In the period which followed, the situation on Bellona was the opposite of that in the first decade. With the arrival of trained teachers

PHASE III: READJUSTMENT (1949-)

Until 1949 contact with the outer world was very slight, but the island was not completely isolated. In 1941 four Bellonese were taken to the mission stations in the Solomons. One man went to Onepusu, the SSEM school, and three went to Batuna, the school of the SDA. They returned to Bellona after six months, but, according to the Bellonese, without having learned much. Their presence on the island in their new roles as scholars did not do much to enlighten the Bellonese on the intricacies of Christian beliefs and rituals.

In 1942 the first larger influx of Euro-American goods took place on the island. An American warship anchored at the north coast and its crew traded tobacco, trousers, calico, soap, pencils, and paper for local goods. It has been impossible to determine the exact amount of goods; the Bellonese just remember that the crew gave them "very many things."

During World War II no Bellonese went abroad. Their only contact was with the crews of the few ships and seaplanes which called at the island. No missionary vessels arrived at Bellona before 1946, and then only to hold a few meetings and services before the visiting missionaries left for Rennell. The Bellonese tell how after accepting Christianity they waited anxiously for proper missionaries to arrive to instruct them in the new faith: "We waited, waited in vain; no one came. Our worship was bad and we fought. Fought all the time because there was no one who could teach us about God and Jesus." In 1946 the Bellonese felt that they had been isolated long enough and three groups of men set out in canoes. They had decided to undertake the hazardous 100-mile voyage to Guadalcanal to ask the government and the missions to send them proper teachers. All the men stayed at the mission stations in the Solomons to receive training, and some of them returned after six months; others stayed longer. Those who returned tried to establish actual schools on the island but had to give up because their knowledge was inadequate.

In 1949 a radical change took place. The SDA mission ship brought two Melanesian teachers to the island to stay over a longer period. They were immediately accepted by the Bellonese as authorities on religious matters and their advice was followed to a considerable degree.

A few samples will give a picture of the forces which were at work

, and also induced other changes which, at least socially, may have had an even greater influence. They made the Bellonese give up their scattered churches and centralize their worship in certain key places. These were in Matahenua in Ngango district, in Angaiho and Ngongona in Ngau district, and in Pangangu in Matangi district (maps in Monberg, 1965, and in Monberg, 1966) became the centers of the religious activities of the SDA mission. The missionaries' reason for taking this step was allegedly that they considered it impossible to have a proper church organization when deacons, teachers, and church members were scattered throughout the island in more than twenty churches. The organizational pressure from the outside not only resulted in the centralization of the churches, but also in a change in the island's residential pattern. Until 1949 people had still to a great extent lived in small homesteads along the main trail. Now larger villages grew up around the churches. The majority of the members of the SDA mission live in close proximity to the church at which they worshiped. Members of the SSEM mission also had a tendency to move to larger villages, and the fact that such a development took place among the adherents of the SDA, seems to have accelerated the centralization also of the members of the SSEM.

Years after 1949 a number of other important innovations were introduced: a proper school was started in Ngongona; the Melanesian custom of dancing was banned on the island, deeming it sinful. They also banned polygyny. (Nine of the eleven existing polygynous marriages were dissolved as a result of the new taboo.) Smoking of tobacco was forbidden and so were those types of food which are traditionally forbidden to members of the Seventh Day Adventist sect. As a result, the members of the SDA could not eat such important and highly prized foods as sharks, flying foxes, coconut crabs, lobsters, or shellfish. The missionaries also tried to discourage the members of the two missions from fighting each other, and they stressed the white man's ways of life and ways of thinking.

The Bellonese responded eagerly to these teachings and followed the missionaries obediently. They assert that they knew so very little about the world then that they had no reason to doubt that what the missionaries said was true, or that the white man was actually better than intelligent than themselves. In fact they still to a great extent

The Bellonese had hoped that contact with the external world and the teachings of Christianity would restore peace completely on the island. This was not the case; tension was there as it had been before. The two missions still constituted opponent groups and people still used them as political instruments. If two individuals of the same mission and village came to disagreement, one of them would leave the village, either to join other members of his mission in another village or to join another mission. Changes in mission affiliation induced in this way seem to have been more common in the earlier stages of the process of acculturation than later when the individual became better acquainted with the teachings of his mission and thus might be more reluctant to convert to a new school, preferring instead to move to another village belonging to his mission. It should perhaps be noted that we have no records of cases in which persons changed from one mission to the other because of preference for its ideas. We cannot claim that no such conversions took place, but it seems obvious that the majority of people who left one to join the other did so for political reasons. The situation on Bellona is very similar to the one observed in Pangai village in Tonga by Beaglehole and Beaglehole (1941, pp. 129-130): "... changing church affiliation provides a means of solving on the social plane interpersonal conflicts that might otherwise become strong enough to result in social disorganization and disintegration."

The new church order introduced with the arrival of the Melanesian missionaries in 1949 also affected the social status system on Bellona. Between 1939 and 1949 the lineage elders could retain some of their earlier status by making elaborate feasts of distribution in the homesteads. When the residential pattern changed, the old homesteads lost their importance as centers of social activities. A number of lineage elders moved to the villages and this influenced the system of economic distribution. Large feasts became increasingly rare. The lineage elders still had their wealth in land, and it was vested in their sons according to the traditional pattern. But along with the wealthy young men, a new class of people grew up: the bright young men who received more extensive training as mission teachers abroad and who returned to the island with a wealth of equal value to that of land, knowledge of reading and writing and of the world of the white man. In the villages it was their activities as conductors of the rituals and as school teachers which

schools and who returned to acquire high prestige in the present. One of them, the head teacher of the SDA mission on the island, was even a man born out of wedlock, which would have meant a low status in pre-Christian Bellona.

Another way the external selection as to who should receive further education has been a strong factor in the remodeling of the status system on the island. In a more authoritarian society with a strong centralized political power, the island chief or chiefs might have reacted against the missionaries. Such powerful men could have allowed only persons of high status to go abroad for mission training. On Bellona this was impossible. Everybody was free to go to the mission stations, for who could forbid them to do so?

SUMMARY AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

The new culture trait, the belief in the Christian god as the great supernatural power, had certain elements which could easily be identified with the Bellonese as operating on the same principle as their old religion. Both religions involved supernatural beings with power to reward and to punish humans. They also both involved rituals and sacred formulas and temples in which the supernaturals were invoked. These similarities, and also the fact that the Bellonese could visualize that acceptance of the Christian God also involved acceptance of a number of dogmas which were entirely alien to Bellonese culture and society (for example, monogamy and certain food or taboos) made it possible for the Bellonese to accept the new

possibility at hand, it became a question of advantages and disadvantages whether the new trait should be accepted or not. The advantages seemed overwhelming and the incentives for acceptance were strong. The new God had shown His power by punishing people on the island and also by giving Moa strength to annihilate the sacred objects and to the old deities. Also the fact that the island was engaged in a long and exhausting interlineage fight at the time when Moa arrived may have made the Bellonese more susceptible to change. Several people have said that before 1938 people were fed up (*hiu*) with the constant fights on the island, but could see no way out of them.

The missionaries provided the Bellonese with a supernatural sanction which ended further fights.

on the same basic principles as their old religion. It seems obvious that there must have been a need for knowledge of how to perform the new rites, for how else could the new religion become an adequate substitute for the old?

They did not get this knowledge at first, and as it was the Bellonese who substituted those few culture traits of Melanesian and European Christians known to them for some of their old, and otherwise adapted what they knew of Christianity to the existing pattern of behavior. The social organization of the island remained chiefly as it was before 1939. Certain configurations took place, new alliances were created, and others split up, but this had also happened in the years prior to Moa's arrival.

In the next phase of the development the external influences became stronger. The Melanesian missionaries and other visiting strangers introduced a considerable number of entirely new traits. Among these was the introduction of the principles of European church organization which induced some of the most important changes. The innovation process took a new turn. Whereas in the first phase of adjustment only relatively few and insignificant traits were brought to Bellona together with the simple message about the Christian God, and whereas the majority of the island's basic institutions changed little, the situation was the opposite in the second phase: the political and religious organization became more and more susceptible to change, and where this created conflicts with the existing Bellonese organization, the latter became more and more suppressed.

This may sound somewhat simpler than it is. In actual fact a number of conflicts were not solved in this way, but the general tendency for the Bellonese was to let themselves be led by their foreign political and religious supervisors.

This is perhaps the most surprising part of the whole story. Why have the Bellonese until recently been so willing to accept what the Europeans have taught them to do? (Mark that I do not say that they have always succeeded in letting themselves become acculturated. Below the level of political and religious organizations there is a stratum of social interaction, ripe with conflicts, which, interesting though it is, cannot be dealt with here.)

On the basis of available data it is not possible to give an exhaustive answer to this question, but only to suggest some possible explanations.

believed that they gained more than they lost. We have discussed this above. In the second phase the Bellonese realized that they had to face certain losses—the old rites in their original form and the social prestige involved in being religious officials—but that these were small in comparison with what was gained—protection from a powerful deity and peace on the island. Moreover some of the losses could be compensated for by carrying on with the feasts involving distributions, thus not breaking up the economic system, and also by holding overly large feasts, thus compensating for the loss of such prestige-stimulating acts as fights and rites. In the third phase of closer contact with people of other parts of the Solomons, particularly with missionaries, the Bellonese have to a great extent gone along with the suggestions for innovations made by strangers because these innovations have so far mostly been evaluated as a gain. These included medical assistance, teachers, a local council, and a native court. The value lost has been considered much smaller than the profit obtained. In a few cases where the Bellonese considered that they had made a bad bargain with the Europeans, the introduction of the culture trait in question was rejected. A case of this kind was the attempt to introduce a cooperative society on Bellona. It failed because it conflicted with the economic and political system and brought the Bellonese what they believe was a considerable financial loss.

This analysis of the situation is very similar to the one which the Bellonese make themselves. When asked whether they preferred life in the "heathen days" to life as it is today, they unanimously say no. They regret that the old rites and the dancing had to be abandoned, but they prefer life as it is today because "we can learn from the white man and the white man helps us with medicine and councils and courts."

So far the extremely high evaluation of contact with the white man and his ideas has made the Bellonese willing to pay what to us may seem a rather high price for its continuation. This is of course an ethnocentric point of view. The Bellonese do not consider the costs too high. It seems, however, likely that the increasing interaction with the outside world will result in a drop in the market price on Bellona of the white man's ideas. How this will affect Bellonese religion is difficult to say; but it would not be surprising if the Bellonese will in the future become increasingly reluctant to sacrifice their own ideas and institutions in order to please the Christian God and His white followers.

- BEAGLEHOLE, ERNEST, and PEARL BEAGLEHOLE
1941. *Pangai: A Village in Tonga*. Polynesian Soc. Mem.
- BIRKET-SMITH, KAJ
1956. *An Ethnological Sketch of Rennell Island, A Part of Melanesia*. Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes filologiske Meddelelser Bind 35 Nr. 3.
- BROEK D'OBRENAN, CHARLES VAN DEN
1939. *Le Voyage de la Korrigane*. Paris.
- DECK, NORTHCOTE
1945. *South from Guadalcanal. The Romance of Rennell*.
- ELBERT, SAMUEL H., and TORBEN MONBERG
1965. *From the Two Canoes. Oral Traditions of Rennell Island*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii and Danish Institute for Linguistic and Ethnological Studies.
- EMORY, KENNETH P.
1965. *Kapingamarangi. Social and Religious Life of a Polynesian Island*. Bishop Mus. Bull. 228. Honolulu.
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD
1957. "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example." *Journal of American Ethnologist* 59:32-54.
- HOGGIN, H. IAN
1931. "A Note on Rennell Island." *Oceania* 2:174-178.
- LAMBERT, S. M.
1941. *A Yankee Doctor in Paradise*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- MACGREGOR, GORDON
1943. "The Gods of Rennell Island." *Peabody Mus. Am. Ethnology Pap.* 20:32-37.
- MONBERG, TORBEN
1962. "Crisis and Mass Conversion on Rennell Island." *Polynesian Soc.* 71:145-150.
1966. *The Religion of Bellona Island. A Study of the Pre-Christian Rites in the Social Life of Pre-Christian Bellona. Aspects of Supernaturals, Language and Culture of the Solomon Islands* Vol. 2(1). Copenhagen: Danish Nat. Mus.
- PARSONS, TALCOTT, and EDWARD A. SHILS
1951. *Toward a General Theory of Action*. Cambridge.
- STANLEY, G. A. V.
1929. "Report on the Geological Reconnaissance of Rennell Island, Solomon Islands Protectorate." *British Solomon Islands Report* 1927, Appendix A. Annual Colonial Report No. 1.
- YOUNG, FLORENCE S. H.
[n.d.] *Pearls from the Pacific*. London.